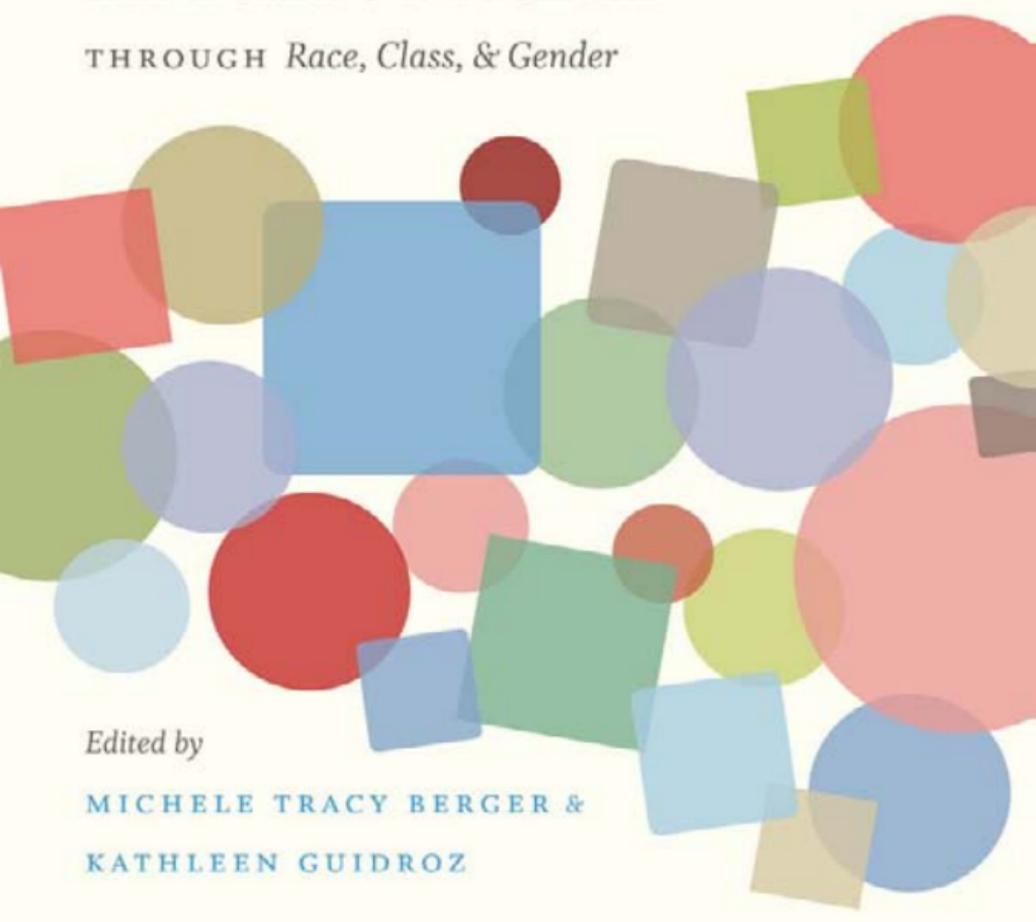


THE  
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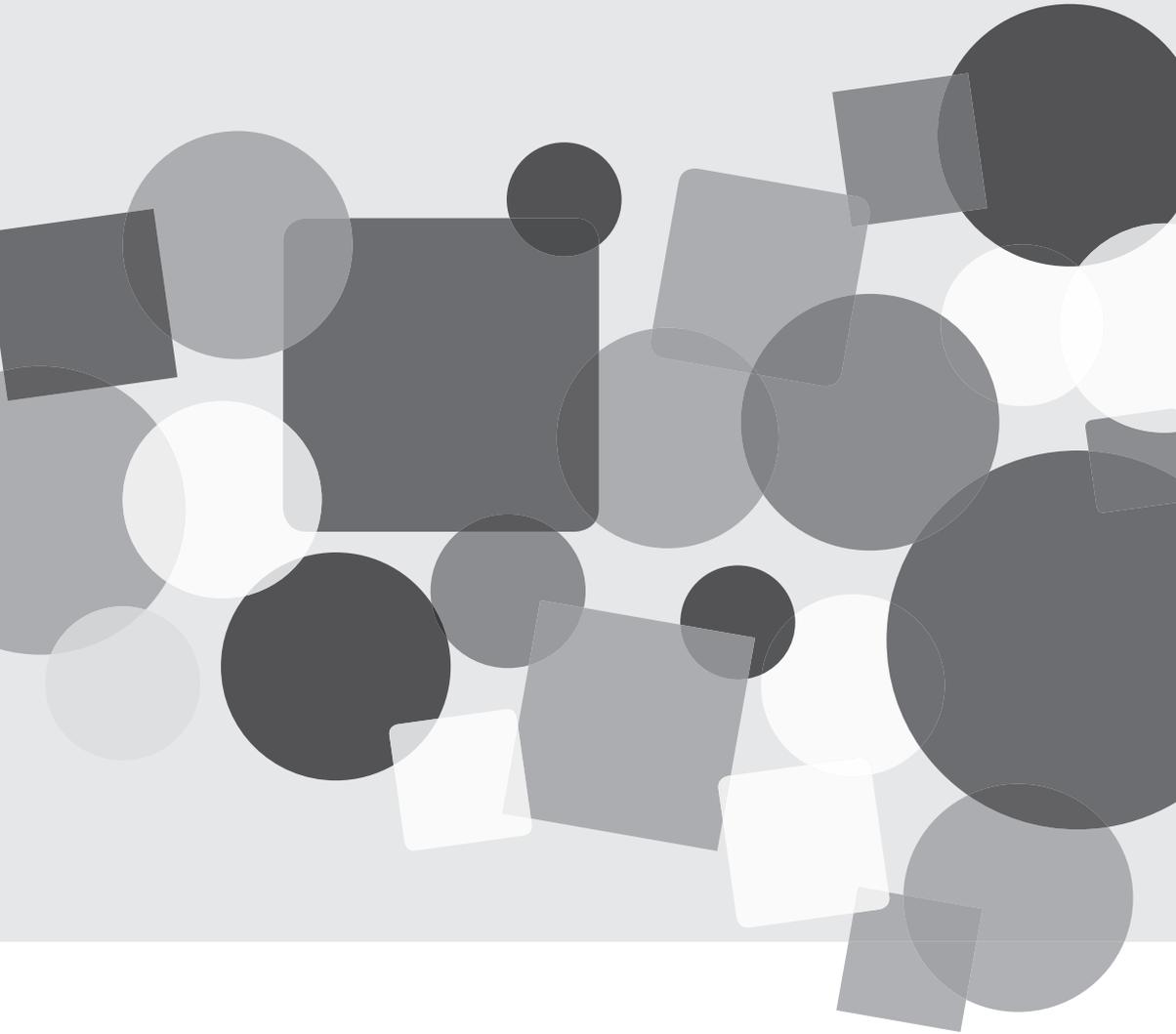
TRANSFORMING THE ACADEMY  
THROUGH *Race, Class, & Gender*

*Edited by*

MICHELE TRACY BERGER &  
KATHLEEN GUIDROZ

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# The Intersectional Approach



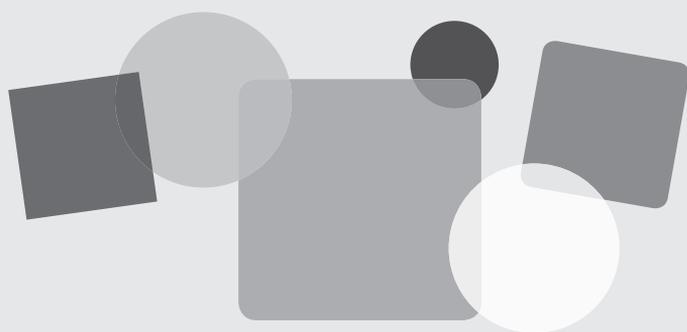
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# The Intersectional Approach

TRANSFORMING THE ACADEMY THROUGH

*Race, Class, and Gender*

.....



*Edited by*

MICHELE TRACY BERGER &

KATHLEEN GUIDROZ

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# The Intersectional Approach

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## Introduction

.....

*One could even say that intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far.*

—LESLIE MCCALL

Race, class, and gender were once seen as separate issues for members of both dominant and subordinate groups. Now, scholars generally agree that these issues (as well as ethnicity, nation, age, and sexuality)—and how they intersect—are integral to individuals' positions in the social world (Andersen and Collins 2006; Arrighi 2001; Collins 1993; Cyrus 1999; Ore 2000; Rothman 2005; Weber 2004). These intersections are referred to as the race-class-gender matrix, the intersectional paradigm, interlocking systems of oppression, multiple axes of inequality, the intersection, and intersectionality; like most authors, we use the term “intersectional approach” to refer to the research application of these concepts. Scholars using the intersectional approach will *socially locate* individuals in the context of their “real lives” (Weber 2004, 123). They also examine how both formal and informal systems of power are deployed, maintained, and reinforced through axes of race, class, and gender (Collins 1998; Weber 2006). Research using the intersectional approach broadly extends across the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences. In fact, it is not an exaggeration to suggest that wherever one looks in women's and gender studies and across much of the academy, intersectionality is being theorized, applied, or debated (see Anthias 2002; Avtar and Phoenix 2004; Dill and Zambrana 2009; Fine et al. 2004; Hancock 2007; Landry 2007; Mann and Grimes 2001; McCall 2005; Schultz and Mullings 2004; Simien 2006; Weber 2004; Yuval-Davis 2006).

We are feminist scholars whose teaching and research within women's and gender studies has been significantly influenced by the last two decades of scholarship on race, class, gender, and sexuality. Our interest in exploring

the complexity of women's lives spurred each of us to pursue intersectionality through our respective disciplines (Michele in political science and Kathleen in sociology) and through our interdisciplinary training in women's studies. Once we reached the dissertation stage of graduate school, we each sought to develop intersectional approaches in our work.

During the early 1990s, political science as a discipline was just beginning to acknowledge the importance of gender and race as separate categories (or important variables) to include in understanding political life. Few studies attended to the political experiences of women of color in the United States; there were even fewer that attempted intersectional analyses on any level. I (Michele) built on the insights of intersectionality to look at how stigmatized women of color (former sex workers and substance users) empowered themselves as political agents after contracting HIV (Berger 2004). In this applied work, I analyzed the various ways the women demonstrate intersectionality by focusing on how they acquired the disease, why and how their political participation was different than other stigmatized groups with HIV/AIDS, and the nature of their participation. Acknowledging and working through the complex social locations that these women experienced helped me build a richer conceptual picture of them as political actors in *Workable Sisterhood*.

My (Kathleen's) interest in intersectionality blossomed in graduate courses in both sociology and women's studies. I was particularly struck by the insights of Deborah King's article on double consciousness (King 1988) and Patricia Hill Collins's pivotal *Black Feminist Thought* (1990). As I developed my research interests most centrally in gender and work, I utilized the work of Teresa L. Amott and Julie A. Matthaei's *Race, Gender, and Work* (1991) to examine pay inequities and comparable-worth initiatives in light of intersectionality. Their early conceptual framework on intersectionality as "interconnected historical processes" (11) later informed my dissertation field research, which focused on the nexus of gender, sexuality, and labor in the sex industry. My qualitative study examined the "everyday (work) experiences" (D. Smith 1989) of women engaging in escort and telephone sex work. I also explore these issues in "Commercial Telephone Sex: Fantasy and Reality" (with Grant Rich), a chapter in Ronald Weitzer's *Sex for Sale: Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry* (second edition forthcoming, 2009).

Intersectionality and the intersectional approach are strong components of our research endeavors, and they play prominent roles in our teaching, as they do with many of our peers. In fact, the teaching of intersectionality and an intersectional approach dominates the undergraduate curricula of the

majority of women's studies units. Despite this, we have struggled to find materials for our classes that both help students comprehend intersectionality and also deepen their understanding of its applied uses. Although the field has benefited from the proliferation of several important anthologies over the last two decades, these have not investigated the role of intersectionality in shaping women's studies (and, to a lesser extent, gender studies; see Andersen and Collins 2006; Chow, Wilkerson, and Zinn 1996; Kesselman, McNair, and Schniedewind 2008; Kirk and Okazawa-Rey 2007; Rosenblum and Travis 1996; Rothenberg 2007; Segal and Martinez 2007).

Our book takes stock of, celebrates, and documents the "coming of age" of this transformative paradigm. *The Intersectional Approach* guides both new and established researchers to a critical reflection about the broad adoption of intersectionality in women's studies and the academy more broadly. We offer this book in hopes of deepening the discussion among professors and students about what intersectionality and the intersectional approach offer us in scholarship, teaching, and activism. This is an opportune time for reflection on the intersectional approach as we believe that it increasingly constitutes a new "social literacy" for scholars in women's and gender studies for both teaching and knowledge production (Berger 2002). Pausing to take the time to reflect on how one deploys intersectional research is useful and necessary, as Lynn Weber (2004) suggests when she laments that researchers "are given little guidance about what constitutes a race, class, gender, and sexuality analysis of social reality" (122). Scholars must continually grapple with the research implications of intersectionality and the intersectional approach (see Howard and Allen 2000; McCall 2005; Weber 2004, 2006). We hope this book begins to answer the questions raised by Weber (2004) and Leslie McCall (2005) about the *how* of intersectional research and facilitates the next generation of scholarly work on and conversations about this innovative site of inquiry.

#### EVOLUTION OF THE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH IN WOMEN'S AND GENDER STUDIES

Women's studies is an interdisciplinary site of inquiry that has become well institutionalized in academe over the past thirty years, challenging traditional disciplines' understanding of women from a critical perspective. Gender studies takes up the project of looking at sex, gender, and sexuality as its overarching concerns (Auslander 1997). In just two decades, intersectionality has widely transformed notions of both theory and research (McCall 2005; Schultz and Mullings 2004; Weber 2000, 2004; Yuval-Davis 2006).

As previously noted, in women's studies, intersectionality is a defining theoretical rubric, as evidenced through scholarship production and curriculum development at both the undergraduate and graduate levels (Howard and Allen 2000; McCall 2005; Weber 2004). As Weber (2004) notes, it is women's studies that has made a persuasive argument about the significance of race, class, gender, and (more recently) sexuality to the academy. Women's studies was one of the primary disciplines that encouraged thinking through the salience of these issues, as reflected in the publication of anthologies and journals from the 1970s to the 1990s (Weber 2004). Indeed, for the past thirty years, women's studies has been in a uniquely strategic position to utilize the importance of intersectionality. Because of its "critical stance toward knowledge in the traditional disciplines, its interdisciplinary approach, and its orientation toward social change and social betterment, women's studies has been most open to self-critique for its exclusion of multiply oppressed groups, such as women of color, working-class women, and lesbians" (Weber 2004, 121).

Intersectionality of experience in society has been a driving theoretical focus, beginning specifically with women-of-color-theorists trying to create relevant theory about the concept of multiple oppressions (see Davis 1981, 1989; Dill 1979, 1983; Giddings 1984; hooks 1981, 1984, 1989; King 1988; Lorde 1984; Mohanty 1988; B. Smith 1983). We can trace the salience of looking at more than gender as an organizing principle for understanding the social world by the explosion of writing and activism that placed black women and women of color at the center of feminist theory and research inquiry clustered in anthologies and some single-authored texts (Weber 2004, 2006).

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a legal theorist, wrote two groundbreaking articles that sought to provide a place to theorize about the law's inability to make visible black women's experience of discrimination, which was intersectional (1989, 1991). Although Crenshaw is most often identified as the person who coined the term "intersectionality," there are other scholars who, along with Crenshaw, contributed to and advocated for thinking critically about race, class, and gender.

Feminist philosopher Elizabeth Spelman's pivotal book *Inessential Woman* (1988) provides another nuanced and important voice to the debates about mainstream feminist theory's inability (and often unwillingness) to grapple with the complexity of multiple identity categories. Taking on prominent feminist thinkers by carefully examining the tendency to parcel out race and class in order to talk about a "universal woman," Spelman exposes the

sophisticated contortions that had come to define much of contemporary feminist theory and activism:

Thus the phrase “as a woman” is the Trojan horse of feminist ethnocentrism. Whatever else one does, or tries to do, when one is thinking of a woman “as a woman,” one is performing a feat of abstraction as sophisticated as the one Plato asks us to perform in thinking of a person not as her body but as her soul. What is it to think of a woman “as a woman”? Is it really possible for us to think of a woman’s “womanness” in abstraction from the fact that she is a particular woman, whether she is a middle-class black woman living in North America in the twentieth century or a poor white woman living in France in the seventeenth century? (13)

She also highlights the limitations of additive analyses of situating racism and sexism. She argues,

If sexism and racism must be seen as interlocking, and not as piled upon each other, serious problems arise for the claim that one of them is more fundamental than the other. . . . One meaning of the claim that sexism is more fundamental than racism is that sexism causes racism: racism would not exist if sexism did not, while sexism could and would continue to exist in the absence of racism. In this connection, racism is sometimes seen as something that is both derivative from sexism and in the service of it: racism keeps women from uniting in alliance against sexism. (123)

According to Spelman,

In an additive analysis of sexism and racism, all women are oppressed by sexism; some women are further oppressed by racism. Such an analysis distorts black women’s experiences of oppression by failing to note important differences between the contexts in which black women and white women experience sexism. The additive analysis also suggests that a woman’s racial identity can be “subtracted” from her combined sexual and racial identity: “We are all women.” But this does not leave room for the fact that different women may look to different forms of liberation just because they are white or black women, rich or poor women, Catholic or Jewish women. (125)

Dispelling the mantra of “unified womanhood” or “sexism” as the primary

explanatory force and arguing against additive analyses of race and class, Spelman enlarged the scope of interdisciplinary feminist inquiry.

We hope that those new to the field also consider the rich insights of Glenn (1985, 1992), Chow (1987), Boris (1994), and others who helped advance nuanced arguments throughout the terrain of feminist theorizing. The newly coined term “intersectionality” proliferated widely in women’s studies and merged with the work on “race, class, and gender” in women’s studies and increasingly in other disciplines. Thus, scholars who are interested in these issues will often find two strands of work that overlap and use similar terms.

Throughout the 1990s, researchers began to build on the idea that race, class, gender, and sexuality were dominant factors that shape people’s experiences and complex social relations (Zinn and Dill 1994, 1996). Scholars suggested that these intersections are hierarchical, mutually reinforcing, and simultaneous (Collins 2000). The “outsider” experience as a place to theorize and make meaning as a scholar and subject became highly valued (Weber 2004).

Through the prism of intersectional analyses, scholars over the past two decades have reexamined central tenets in feminist theory, including experiences of HIV/AIDS (Berger 2004), labor (Glenn 2002; Higginbotham and Romero 1997), class identity (Bettie 2000), rape (V. Smith 1997), adolescent female identity (Bettie 2002), race, age, and education (Weis and Fine 2000), domestic violence (Richie 1996; Yoshihama 1999), work and organizations (Acker 2006), colonialism (McClintock 1995), and community organizing (Naples 1998). Accordingly, a fledgling theory of intersectionality has developed and continues to influence feminist thinking in particular (see Andersen 2008; McCall 2005; Weber 2004). Feminist and critical gender scholars are utilizing intersectionality to foster new forms of inquiry that challenge disciplinary boundaries (for philosophy, see Zack, Shrage, and Sartwell 1998; for political science, see Bedolla 2007; Cohen 1999, 2001; Hancock 2007a, 2007b; Jordan-Zachery 2007; Simien 2006, 2007; Smooth 2006; Weldon 2006; and White 2007; for psychology, see Bowleg 2008 and Cole 2008; for sociology, see Brewer 1994 and McCall 2001; for public health, see Weber 2006; for sociolegal studies, see Grabham et al. 2008; for geography, see Valentine 2007). We assert that feminist intersectional theories that have steadily evolved are *applied* (and operationalized) through an intersectional approach. The breadth of this continued interest suggests robust inquiry and research, and guarantees at least another decade of intersectional research in both feminist and critical gender scholarship in traditional disciplines and

in women's studies. We hope that *The Intersectional Approach* will encourage and support more work in several disciplines and fields not well represented in this volume.

#### SOCIAL LITERACY

Women's studies occupies a paradoxical position as a discipline. It is increasingly a highly institutionalized enterprise while simultaneously sustaining an intensely critical period, being evaluated by insiders for its efforts, achievements, and failures as a critical sphere of knowledge production, and even with some critics calling for its demise (see Brown 1997; Scott 2008; Weigman 2002). While the intersectional approach does not encompass all areas of research or teaching in women's studies, it is an important and recognizable conceptual apparatus that bonds together many different endeavors in the field. We suggest that the diverse theories (and methodological approaches) that contribute to the intersectional approach represent a new social literacy for scholars in women's and gender studies (Berger 2002). Thus, to be an informed social theorist or methodologist in many fields of scholarly inquiry, but most especially in women's studies, one must grapple with the implications of intersectionality. Intersectionality as social literacy is evident through many aspects of the field: its rigorous emphasis in curriculum formation (undergraduate and graduate), the growing numbers of journals that pursue special topics devoted to intersectionality or some disciplinary manifestation of it (e.g., *Gender and Society* 2008; *Sex Roles* 2008), and specialized conferences (see McCall 2005).

Allen and Kitch (1998) identified the need for an interdisciplinary research mission in women's studies that would provide collaborative opportunities for scholars and move the field from a multidisciplinary perspective (where several disciplines overlap) to the synthesis of work of interdisciplinary ideas (that translate into new epistemologies). They note several examples of "scholarly breakthroughs" that have traveled from scholarship in women's studies and from feminist scholars working in traditional disciplines to many disciplinary fields, including Gayle Rubin's "traffic in women," Carole Pateman's "sexual contract," and Patricia Hill Collins's "outsider within" (Allen and Kitch 1998, 285). We argue that the intersectional approach (as evolving from intersectionality) is a disciplinary "border-crossing" concept produced through feminist theorizing and activism about the social relations of power. Conceptualizing the intersectional approach as a border-crossing concept suggests an interdisciplinary rigor that helps challenge traditional ways of framing research inquiries, questions, and methods.

The saliency of intersectionality as social literacy is nowhere clearer than in what women's and gender studies professors teach to undergraduate students. The importance of the concept of linking oppressions was highlighted as a unique facet of learning among the first women's studies undergraduates ever surveyed (see Luebke and Reilly 1995). One of the characteristics defining that early group of pioneers was their attention to understanding women and gender issues through multiple lenses. By examining the over 650 programs in women's, feminist, and gender studies units, departments, curricula, and centers in the United States, it becomes obvious that there is consistency in course work that incorporates intersectionality in some fashion (Levin 2007). This is also becoming more salient for how we train graduate students in the profession (see O. Smith 2006). For example, many graduate programs require work on intersectionality, refer to their study as intersectional, or note that race, class, and gender is integrated throughout all course work (O. Smith 2006). Moreover, we posit that the outpouring of intellectual work related to intersectionality constitutes a possible paradigm shift akin to the methodological debates involving quantitative and qualitative methods that have coalesced over the past two decades.

#### ORGANIZATION OF *THE INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH*

This book is divided into four main parts and an epilogue dealing with different aspects of the wide influence of intersectionality on women's and gender studies. This book serves multiple purposes by providing a critical overview of the intersectional approach, highlighting new theoretical and methodological advances, and making a strong case for the continued use of the intersectional approach both within the borders of women's and gender studies and beyond. It serves as a place of reflection (and acknowledgment) for scholars who have been working in this research tradition for many years.

This first part, "Foundations of Intersectionality," showcases the history, debates, and evolution of intersectionality in women's and gender studies, thus serving as a foray for readers who may be new to this topic. We provide a reprint of an early, and now classic, article by Bonnie Thornton Dill (sociology and women's studies), who more than two decades ago called for greater acknowledgment of women's race and class differences as well as specific concerns in the women's movement. Such an admission, Dill argues, would enable "an all-inclusive sisterhood." Drawing on the work of Angela Davis, emerging feminist scholar bell hooks, and others, Dill asks questions that scholars would continue to pursue. Using precision and acumen, she notes that the literature on "gender-class" misses and erases the contributions of

African American women and that the literature on “race-class” misses significant gender dynamics. Throughout the essay, Dill encourages scholars to take up a “pluralistic approach” and examine the lives of black women (and other women of color) through a more comprehensive theoretical framework: “Black women experience class, race, and sex exploitation simultaneously, yet these structures must be separated analytically so that we may better understand the ways in which they shape and differentiate women’s lives.”

A second reprint is a more contemporary examination of intersectionality by Nira Yuval-Davis to show, in part, the growth, longevity, and widespread influences of intersectionality *as well as its global application*. Yuval-Davis is a scholar who has been writing on the tensions of intersectionality in a global context; her essay includes a practical application of the intersectional approach to the public discourse on human rights policy.

There is a tradition in feminist activist and scholarly circles to bring diverse women together to discuss contemporary issues. One example in the popular press is second-wave feminist magazine *Ms.*’s popular multigenerational and multiethnic conversation among feminists (Steinem et al. 1993). In the third essay, we feature a conversation among three notable scholars of intersectionality, Kimberlé Crenshaw (law), Michelle Fine (psychology and education), and Nira Yuval-Davis (sociology, sexualities, and ethnic studies). Other scholarly examples of such a conversation include an extended dialogue found in *Homegrown: Engaged Cultural Criticism* (hooks and Mesa-Bains 2006) and Barbara and Beverly Smith’s essay, “Across the Kitchen Table” (Smith and Smith 1981).<sup>1</sup> Such interactions represent a tradition of important coalition building among feminists (see Abdulhad, Rogers, Smith, and Waheed 1983; Cenen and Smith 1983; Davis and Martinez 1998; Gray and Bryant 1995). Some of the key issues that emerged from our conversation included having to deal with an early backlash against the intersectional approach from other activists and academics, in part based on the belief that using an intersectional approach would make gender “wash” out; the subsequent cooptation of intersectionality that has led to a “flattening” of categories; and the lack of visibility of intersectionality in mainstream discussions of politics. In response to these issues, Nira, Michelle, and Kimberlé discussed the theoretical, empirical, and political reasons for continued use of intersectionality as a main analytical tool. Their conversation reminds the reader of the fertile activist soil from which intersectionality grew, as well as its academic roots.

The next three parts of the book contain contributions by seventeen

scholars (fifteen essays) from the social sciences and humanities. Other than the two reprints, all of the essays have been written specifically for this volume. Our book features research on timely topics of significant interest to both women's and gender studies students and researchers. The authors analyze various topics from a feminist perspective; they look specifically at gender inequalities related to globalization, health, motherhood, sexuality, body image, and age. The authors also address issues of social identity and sexuality.

A variety of settings and contexts—ranging from micro- to macrolevel contexts—are represented in these examinations. For example, the authors examine antiracism workshops, a women's prison, developing countries, healthcare policies, a novel set in Puerto Rico, women's studies units in the academy, and the interdisciplinary journal *Race, Gender and Class*. Further, our contributors discuss many different populations, including African American pregnant women, black Brazilian women, white and black country club members, South African domestic workers, Nepalese girls, women in prison, white working-class British lesbians, and diasporic Puerto Rican writers.

As with any emerging research paradigm, there are competing definitional claims and disagreements in the use and application of intersectionality, although there is a relative lack of competing theories about intersectionality (Weber 2004, 123). We offer, therefore, not only theoretical examinations of intersectionality but also a variety and range of methodologies from scholars with backgrounds in diverse fields, including women's studies, gender studies, African and Afro-American studies, anthropology, sociology, psychology, musicology, romance languages, and English. Their essays take an interdisciplinary focus, offer sophisticated insights, and thread global and cultural realities throughout all parts of this book.

The varieties of these contributors' research approaches provide insights into how and why the intersectional approach allows us to make comparisons across different communities. As a result, readers will gain a greater understanding of applications of the intersectional approach through a variety of methodologies including interviewing, ethnography, survey research, literary analysis, and first-person narratives. These three parts of the book address the major trajectories of the intersectional approach simultaneously as a conceptual framework, as a methodological approach, and as a lived experience or where individuals "reside" and navigate social relationships.<sup>2</sup>

The second part, "Theoretical Explorations," contains essays that challenge as well as expand the explanatory capabilities of the intersectional ap-

proach as a theoretical paradigm. We agree with Weber (2004) that intersectionality can be conceptualized in many ways (for example, from context to activism) because “people’s real life experiences have never fit into the boundaries created by academic disciplines” (121). For example, many of the theoretical essays focus on how individual experiences are linked to structural phenomena and emphasize that meaning should be derived from both levels (Weber 2004). The contributing scholars writing on *theoretical insights* of the intersectional approach include AnaLouise Keating, Rachel E. Luft, Kia Lilly Caldwell, and Jessica Holden Sherwood. These authors address how research traditions in specific disciplines challenge their abilities to undertake intersectional research.

Weber (2004) identifies six themes from contemporary intersectional scholarship that she hopes will guide scholars’ analyses of race, class, gender, and sexuality (122). Primarily conceptualizing race, class, gender, and sexuality as “systems of oppression,” Weber argues that each of these four systems, as reflected thus far in our scholarship, is (1) contextual, (2) socially constructed, (3) reflective of power relationships, (4) both social structural and social psychological, and (5) simultaneously expressed. Her sixth theme identifies the intersectional approach as the interdependence of knowledge and activism, which we address in our third part. In the same vein, our authors demonstrate *theoretically* how the intersectional approach helps us see that these categories “operate in every social situation” (Weber 2004, 131). They do not, however, analyze all categories equally in simultaneity. Rather, using intersectionality as an explanatory model, the authors’ essays show how the categories’ meanings are contextual (Weber 2004, 124).

AnaLouise Keating starts off with a theoretical extension of *This Bridge Called My Back: Radical Writings by Women of Color* (Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981, 1983), a multigenre book by feminists of color challenging “white-identified” feminists to deal with racism and other biases. Keating rehistoricizes the book’s searing insights while at the same time encouraging us to reexamine the book’s original challenges for feminist academics. She offers ways for us to get past what she calls “status-quo stories” that prevent both microlevel and macrolevel social change as well as alliances among members of seemingly disparate groups. In order to accomplish social justice effectively, we must push past our social identity (or identities) and relate to others in previously unexplored ways, what she calls “radical interconnectivity” as human beings.

Rachel E. Luft’s deft contribution presents the tension between theory in the academy and theory as applied to activism. She notes that the concep-

tual theory of intersectionality does not work in all contexts. She reflects on various strategies she employs for teaching intersectional approaches in very different “sites of intervention.” Specifically, she argues that attention must be paid to not operationalizing intersectionality “across the board” in our approaches to antisexist and antiracist activities. Her approach is a contextual one, at the “micro level of intervention” using the post–Civil Rights antiracism workshop movement as an example. In other words, in order to deal with racism, there are times when race should be the only category under consideration.

Kia Lilly Caldwell provides a rich essay exploring the relationship between theory and public policy. Her policy case uses the experiences of black Brazilian women, official omissions in health-related data collection, and women’s health activism. She argues the intersectional approach is one of the most useful ways to comprehend the multiple ways that race, class, sexuality, and regional location shape Afro-Brazilian women’s experiences of health and health care. She not only opens up arenas of health policy activism generally, but also she documents different populations’ experiences with bureaucratic limitations as well as how these populations deal with racism in a supposedly race-neutral country.

Jessica Holden Sherwood’s analysis of exclusive country clubs, a site of the “concentration of privilege,” strives to make connections and see what is both visible and invisible in terms of class, race, and gender. Her empirical analysis of “studying up” implores us to examine additional theoretical implications of intersectionality. She accomplishes this by demonstrating that the concept of privilege—often invisible for “superordinate” groups—helps explain continued inequalities in this social setting. She adroitly expands the concept “matrix of domination” to include the “matrix of privilege.” Sherwood’s interviews confirm a white masculine discourse that both justifies and explains away exclusions based on race and gender; hence, the discourse confirms the categories existing as distinct “power relationships” (Weber 2004, 127).

The third part, “Methodological Innovations,” shows the breadth of the intersectional approach and its applicability to a wide variety of populations, topics, and research methods. As such, the intersectional approach requires a degree of researcher reflexivity and insight into the shape, design, and analysis of a project. We find this point to be particularly salient for researchers in the social sciences. The contributing scholars writing on *methodologies applicable to intersectionality* include Catherine E. Harnois, Elizabeth R. Cole and Natalie J. Sabik, Yvette Taylor, Kaaren Haldeman, and Gary K. Perry. This

part's strength is the collection of cutting-edge approaches using the race-class-gender intersection in empirical research. Mann and Grimes (2001) note the influence of intersectional work broadly dispersed in the academy. In women's and gender studies, however, intersectional-based methodologies have been slowly and unevenly adopted (McCall 2005). The contributors demonstrate a dialectal relationship between empirical examinations for women's and gender studies and their respective academic training. In addition, they highlight the challenges for doing intersectional research from this angle. These contributions, therefore, are both transdisciplinary as well as discipline-specific.

This part contains five essays that address both qualitative and quantitative applications of the intersectional approach. The authors consider the specific challenges and empirical possibilities of the intersectional approach in cross-disciplinary applications. Their focus on a range of populations is in keeping with the emphasis of intersectionality on nondominant groups' experiences. Intersectional work, therefore, has the potential to continue highlighting the importance of making marginalized and excluded groups more visible (Yuval-Davis 2006).

Some social scientists dismiss intersectional research as being unfeasible for quantitative work. Catherine E. Harnois demonstrates that this criticism is false by expanding multiracial feminism through an empirical examination of the race-class-gender matrix. By analyzing the results of a national telephone survey, specifically "multiple indicators of feminism," she shows quantitatively that women's commitment to feminism may be shaped by racial and ethnic differences. Without an intersectional framework, researchers might miss such nuanced differences among groups of women. Her research is applicable to social scientists using quantitative methodologies—either alone or complementing qualitative research—to study issues within women's and gender studies.

Most women's studies professors include in their foundation or survey courses sections on beauty ideals and appearance norms, body image, and eating disorders, as well as other issues related to the body. Elizabeth R. Cole and Natalie J. Sabik take this well-known territory and turn what we know about it upside down. By pointedly examining the lack of consideration of race and ethnicity in research that includes women of color, they challenge longstanding ideas about how researchers study these issues. In their examination of the measurement tools used by researchers to measure body satisfaction generally (and for women of color specifically), they argue that more psychological research should take an intersectional approach.

Yvette Taylor's essay locates class and sexual identity in intersectional research in thoughtful ways. Her sociological examination of white British lesbians helps to interrogate notions of field work and research as it pertains to researcher stance and issues of sexuality. She explores why sexuality has been undertheorized in the intersectional framework and how this lack of theorizing affects marginalized communities. Further, she focuses on some of the methodological dilemmas researchers face when trying to access populations that are marginalized, stigmatized, hidden, or simply difficult to access; therefore, she addresses the viability of studying and making sense of such populations.

Next, Kaaren Haldeman uses her training in anthropology to examine the intersectional paradigm with a sample of pregnant African American women; specifically, she takes a phenomenological approach to examine their "lived and felt experiences" with pregnancy. She also addresses the pregnant women's relationships with men. Through her research, she also demonstrates how anthropology as a discipline can be perfect terrain for additional intersectional scholarship.

Gary K. Perry takes on occupational stereotyping using an intersectional focus and the emerging field of mixed methods research. A backdrop to his contribution is Perry's criticism of the field of social stratification, which previously has been "largely devoid of a substantive intersectional framework." He shows how intersectionality and mixed methods are complementary and synthesizes the two to examine occupational (sex) stereotyping because they "are equally committed to assessing the interplay between human agency and systemic structures." In addition, both intersectionality and mixed methods research enable researchers to design an appropriate protocol for complex social topics.

These essays highlight the subjective complexity of both the researcher and the researched in the examination of lived experiences as well as the range of identities of various communities. As we assess the impact of intersectional work on methodological processes, we suggest that researchers reflect on how using the intersectional approach has affected whom they select as research populations. Additionally, how do researchers justify selecting certain populations vis-à-vis this intersection? It is currently difficult to draw clear-cut conclusions about how intersectional approaches have affected the ways in which people choose their research populations (see McCall 2005).

Weber (2004) describes a feature of intersectional scholarship as the interdependence of knowledge and activism with the eventual goal of social

change and social justice (132). The final part, “Bridging Theory and Praxis,” represents a fundamental element in the history of feminism and women’s studies; that is, it documents the importance of making linkages between theorizing about the “matrix of domination” and engaging in practical efforts to ameliorate such inequalities. Women’s studies has a long and rich commitment to self-reflexivity within academic life and feminist academics’ roles in society. Unlike many other fields, there exists a core commitment in women’s studies to *link theory and praxis*; that is, to develop applied analyses that stem from civic engagement and personal reflection. These shorter essays, many of which continue the tradition of self-reflection through first-person narratives, provide a contemporary rubric for experiences both inside and outside of the academy. The contributing scholars writing on theory-praxis linkages include Mako Fitts, Naomi André, Jennifer Fish and Jennifer Rothchild, Ivette Guzmán-Zavala, Lidia Anchisi, and Jean Ait Belkhir.

Our contributors also demonstrate living through intersectionality in their everyday experiences as feminists, scholars, and teachers of intersectionality. Our teaching—specifically the pedagogical choices we make—also represents a site for an intersectionality-informed praxis. Many of us teaching in women’s and gender studies do so with activism in mind. The contributors’ essays can serve as a useful lens for how one teaches intersectionality as well as providing a place to theorize.

Mako Fitts examines women’s studies departments and how they embody intersectionality. Specifically, she compares whether the structure of women’s studies programs and dedicated faculty lines can have an effect on how intersectionality gets put into practice, both in the classroom and in research. Her goal is to show how “institutionalizing intersectionality” can be utilized to examine the governance of women’s studies units and the representation of diverse feminist standpoints.

Naomi André, a historical musicologist and opera specialist, describes her experience as a women’s studies professor teaching opera in a women’s prison. She uses intersectionality to look at preconceived ideas about identity related to population and culture, particularly the women’s reactions to her as a woman of color and their identification with the opera character Carmen. André’s perspective is that of “standing at the intersection” as a black woman who is an opera scholar. She contrasts her “credibility” in prison versus in other professional and academic settings.

Jennifer Fish and Jennifer Rothchild apply intersectionality to a macrolevel analysis of the challenges of researching Nepalese and South African

women. Their essay concludes with a description of post-field research activism with regard to labor activism (in South Africa) and girls' education (in Nepal). Fish and Rothchild challenge feminist-methods literature, which can be hegemonic about the "best methods for field research." They do this by applying intersectionality to themselves as researchers as well as scholar-activists.

Next, Ivette Guzmán-Zavala uses intersectionality to look at the writing of novelist Rosaria Ferré, whose book *Eccentric Neighborhoods* reflects nationalized definitions of race, social class, motherhood, and wet nursing in Puerto Rico (a U.S. possession). She focuses her analysis specifically on Ferré's treatment of the terrains of women's bodies—namely the "overlooked" (Andersen and Collins 2006, 3) wet nurse (in Spanish, *nodriza*)—within her Puerto Rican homeland. Guzmán-Zavala's linking of the history and practice of wet nursing and its racialized expression within families equates to a "Puerto Rican imaginary" within cultural productions.

Lidia Anchisi discusses her experiences as a transnational adoptee. Her personal narrative employs the intersectional approach by challenging the dominant—and often stereotypical—views of European, American, and Asian identities. Further, she discusses the journey of her coming into consciousness as an Asian American woman who embodies sometimes contradictory identities. Her essay reflects that race and gender along with nationality are not "discrete variables" (Weber 2004, 125).

Finally, also writing in an autobiographical style, Jean Ait Belkhir reflects on the myriad ways that his life was shaped by his ethnicity, gender, and class, and how his particular experiences led him to establish the successful interdisciplinary journal *Race, Gender and Class*. Describing himself as a "white French Algerian Berber (Kabyle male) from the working class" with a "double-consciousness mindset," Belkhir demonstrates how he has used intersectionality at key moments in his life, bridging theory and praxis in his teaching, activism, and, most importantly, in founding the journal.

The book concludes with an epilogue by Ann Russo, who reflects on the content and scope of the essays in the book in addition to bringing a contemporary focus on feminist activism. She points out the relationship between not only race, class, and gender but also other categories of identity and activism for nonviolence. Given the resurgence of some feminists' claims of the priority of gender over race during the 2008 presidential campaign, she calls on all feminists, and white women in particular, to recommit to an intersectional coalition-based analysis and politics.

## NOTES

1. Two additional examples of such feminist dialogues can be found in *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology* (B. Smith 1983). The first is a conversation between Cenen and Barbara Smith about Cenen's interracial family "blood line" in Puerto Rico. Barbara Smith's second conversation is with Tania Abdulhad, Gwendolyn Rogers, and Jameelah Waheed in which they discuss their experiences as black lesbian feminist activists and organizers. A third dialogue is between black and white colleagues, social workers Shirley Bryant and Cathleen Gray, in *Skin Deep* (1995).

2. The authors are indebted to this rubric of intersectionality that Celeste Watkins-Hayes offered in her remarks, "Intersectionality in Practice and Analysis: Critical Differences, Theoretical Concerns, and Activist Possibilities," presented at the annual meeting of the National Women's Studies Association in 2007.

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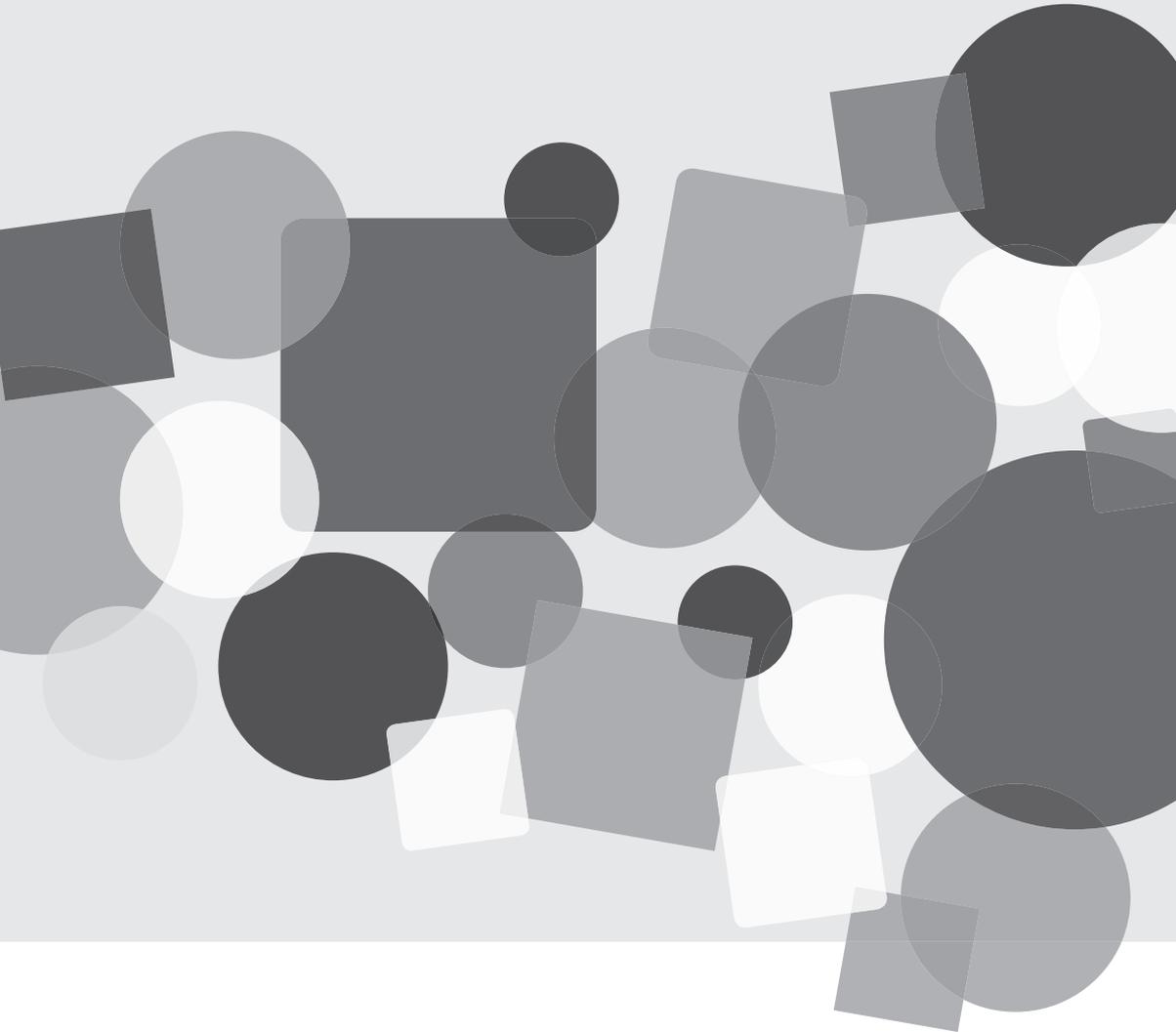
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FOUNDATIONS OF INTERSECTIONALITY



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## Race, Class, and Gender

### *Prospects for an All-Inclusive Sisterhood*

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BONNIE THORNTON DILL

The concept of sisterhood has been an important unifying force in the contemporary women's movement. By stressing the similarities of women's secondary social and economic positions in all societies and in the family, this concept has been a binding force in the struggle against male chauvinism and patriarchy. However, as we review the past decade, it becomes apparent that the cry "Sisterhood is powerful!" has engaged only a few segments of the female population in the United States. Black, Hispanic, Native American, and Asian American women of all classes, as well as many working-class women, have not readily identified themselves as sisters of the white middle-class women who have been in the forefront of the movement.

This article examines the applications of the concept of sisterhood and some of the reasons for the limited participation of racially and ethnically distinct women in the women's movement, with particular reference to the experience and consciousness of Afro-American women. The first section presents a critique of sisterhood as a binding force for all women and examines the limitations of the concept for both theory and practice when applied to women who are neither white nor middle class. In the second section, the importance of women's perception of themselves and their place in society is explored as a way of understanding the differences and similarities between black and white women. Data from two studies, one of college-educated

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black women and the other of black female household workers, are presented to illuminate both the ways in which the structures of race, gender, and class intersect in the lives of black women and the women's perceptions of the impact of these structures on their lives. This article concludes with a discussion of the prospects for sisterhood and suggests political strategies that may provide a first step toward a more inclusive women's movement.

#### THE LIMITATIONS OF SISTERHOOD

In a recent article, historian Elizabeth Fox-Genovese provided a political critique of the concept of sisterhood.<sup>1</sup> Her analysis identifies some of the current limitations of this concept as a rallying point for women across the boundaries of race and class. Sisterhood is generally understood as a nurturant, supportive feeling of attachment and loyalty to other women which grows out of a shared experience of oppression. A term reminiscent of familial relationships, it tends to focus upon the particular nurturant and reproductive roles of women and, more recently, upon commonalities of personal experience. Fox-Genovese suggests that sisterhood has taken two different political directions. In one, women have been treated as unique, and sisterhood was used as a basis for seeking to maintain a separation between the competitive values of the world of men (the public-political sphere) and the nurturant values of the world of women (the private domestic sphere). A second, more recent and progressive expression of the concept views sisterhood as an element of the feminist movement which serves as a means for political and economic action based upon the shared needs and experiences of women. Both conceptualizations of sisterhood have limitations in encompassing the racial and class differences among women. These limitations have important implications for the prospects of an all-inclusive sisterhood.

Fox-Genovese argues that the former conceptualization, which she labels bourgeois individualism, resulted in "the passage of a few middle class women into the public sphere," but sharpened the class and racial divisions between them and lower-class minority women.<sup>2</sup> In the latter conceptualization, called the politics of personal experience, sisterhood is restricted by the experiential differences that result from the racial and class divisions of society.

Sisterhood has helped us, as it helped so many of our predecessors, to forge ourselves as political beings. Sisterhood has mobilized our loyalty to each other and hence to ourselves. It has given form to a dream of genuine equality for women. But without a broader politics

directed toward the kind of social transformation that will provide social justice for all human beings, it will, in a poignant irony, result in our dropping each other by the wayside as we compete with rising desperation for crumbs.<sup>3</sup>

These two notions of sisterhood, as expressed in the current women's movement, offer some insights into the alienation many black women have expressed about the movement itself.

The bourgeois individualistic theme present in the contemporary women's movement led many black women to express the belief that the movement existed merely to satisfy needs for personal self-fulfillment on the part of white middle-class women.<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on participation in the paid labor force and escape from the confines of the home seemed foreign to many black women. After all, as a group they had had higher rates of paid labor force participation than their white counterparts for centuries, and many would have readily accepted what they saw as the "luxury" of being a housewife. At the same time, they expressed concern that white women's gains would be made at the expense of blacks and/or that having achieved their personal goals, these so-called sisters would ignore or abandon the cause of racial discrimination. Finally, and perhaps most important, the experiences of racial oppression made black women strongly aware of their group identity and consequently more suspicious of women who, initially at least, defined much of their feminism in personal and individualistic terms.

Angela Davis, in "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," stresses the importance of group identity for black women. "Under the impact of racism the black woman has been continually constrained to inject herself into the desperate struggle for existence. . . . As a result, black women have made significant contributions to struggles against racism and the dehumanizing exploitation of a wrongly organized society. In fact, it would appear that the intense levels of resistance historically maintained by black people and thus the historical function of the Black liberation struggle as harbinger of change throughout the society are due in part to the greater objective equality between the black man and the black woman."<sup>5</sup> The sense of being part of a collective movement toward liberation has been a continuing theme in the autobiographies of contemporary black women.

Ideas and experiences vary, but Shirley Chisholm, Gwendolyn Brooks, Angela Davis and other Black women who wrote autobiographies during the seventies offer similar . . . visions of the black woman's role in the struggle for Black liberation. The idea of collective liberation . . .

says that society is not a protective arena in which an individual black can work out her own destiny and gain a share of America's benefits by her own efforts. . . . Accordingly, survival, not to mention freedom, is dependent on the values and actions of the groups as a whole, and if indeed one succeeds or triumphs it is due less to individual talent than to the group's belief in and adherence to the idea that freedom from oppression must be acted out and shared by all.<sup>6</sup>

Sisterhood is not new to black women. It has been institutionalized in churches. In many black churches, for example, membership in the church entitles one to address the women as "sisters" and the men as "brothers." Becoming a sister is an important rite of passage which permits young women full participation in certain church rituals and women's clubs where these nurturant relationships among women are reinforced.<sup>7</sup> Sisterhood was also a basis for organization in the club movements that began in the late 1800s.<sup>8</sup> Finally, it is clearly exemplified in black extended family groupings that frequently place great importance on female kinship ties. Research on kinship patterns among urban blacks identifies the nurturant and supportive feelings existing among female kin as a key element in family stability and survival.<sup>9</sup>

While black women have fostered and encouraged sisterhood, we have not used it as the anvil to forge our political identities. This contrasts sharply with the experiences of many middle-class white women who have participated in the current women's movement. The political identities of Afro-American women have largely been formed around issues of race. National organizations of black women, many of which were first organized on the heels of the nineteenth-century movement for women's rights, "were (and still are) decidedly feminist in the values expressed in their literature and in many of the concerns which they addressed, yet they also always focused upon issues which resulted from the racial oppression affecting *all* black people."<sup>10</sup> This commitment to the improvement of the race has often led black women to see feminist issues quite differently from their white sisters. And, racial animosity and mistrust have too often undermined the potential for coalition between black and white women since the women's suffrage campaigns.

Many contemporary white feminists would like to believe that relations between black and white women in the early stages of the women's movement were characterized by the beliefs and actions of Susan B. Anthony, Angelina Grimké, and some others. The historical record suggests, however, that these women were more exceptional than normative. Rosalyn Terborg-

Penn argues that “discrimination against Afro-American women reformers was the rule rather than the exception within the woman’s rights movement from the 1830’s to 1920.”<sup>11</sup> Although it is beyond the scope of this article to provide a detailed discussion of the incidents that created mistrust and ill-feeling between black and white women, the historical record provides an important legacy that still haunts us.

The movement’s early emphasis upon the oppression of women within the institution of marriage and the family, and upon educational and professional discrimination, reflected the concerns of middle-class white women. During that period, black women were engaged in a struggle for survival and a fight for freedom. Among their immediate concerns were lynching and economic viability. Working-class white women were concerned about labor conditions, the length of the working day, wages, and so forth. The statements of early women’s rights groups do not reflect these concerns, and “as a rigorous consummation of the consciousness of white middle-class women’s dilemma, the (Seneca Falls) Declaration all but ignored the predicament of white working-class women, as it ignored the condition of Black women in the South and North alike.”<sup>12</sup>

Political expediency drove white feminists to accept principles that were directly opposed to the survival and well-being of blacks in order to seek to achieve more limited advances for women. “Besides the color bar which existed in many white women’s organizations, black women were infuriated by white women’s accommodation to the principle of lynch law in order to gain support in the South (Walker 1973) and the attacks of well-known feminists against anti-lynching crusader, Ida Wells Barnett.”<sup>13</sup>

The failure of the suffrage movement to sustain its commitment to the democratic ideal of enfranchisement for all citizens is one of the most frequently cited instances of white women’s fragile commitment to racial equality. “After the Civil War, the suffrage movement was deeply impaired by the split over the issue of whether black males should receive the vote before white and black women . . . in the heated pressures over whether black men or white and black women should be enfranchised first, a classist, racist, and even xenophobic rhetoric crept in.”<sup>14</sup> The historical and continued abandonment of universalistic principles in order to benefit a privileged few on the part of white women is, I think, one of the reasons why black women today have been reluctant to see themselves as part of a sisterhood that does not extend beyond racial boundaries. Even for those black women who are unaware of the specific history, there is the recognition that, under pressure from the white men with whom they live and upon whom they are

economically dependent, many white women will abandon their “sisters of color” in favor of self-preservation. The feeling that the movement would benefit white women and abandon blacks, or benefit whites at the expense of blacks, is a recurrent theme. Terborg-Penn concludes, “The black feminist movement in the United States during the mid 1970’s is a continuation of a trend that began over 150 years ago. Institutionalized discrimination against black women by white women has traditionally led to the development of racially separate groups that address themselves to race determined problems as well as the common plight of women in America.”<sup>15</sup>

Historically, as well as currently, black women have felt called upon to choose between their commitments to feminism and to the struggle against racial injustice. Clearly they are victims of both forms of oppression and are most in need of encouragement and support in waging battles on both fronts. However, insistence on such a choice continues largely as a result of the tendency of groups of blacks and groups of women to battle over the dubious distinction of being the “most” oppressed. The insistence of radical feminists upon the historical priority, universality, and overriding importance of patriarchy in effect necessitates acceptance of a concept of sisterhood that places one’s womanhood over and above one’s race. At the same time, blacks are accustomed to labeling discriminatory treatment as racism and therefore may tend to view sexism only within the bounds of the black community rather than see it as a systemic pattern.<sup>16</sup> On the one hand, the choice between identifying as black or female is a product of the “patriarchal strategy of divide-and-conquer”<sup>17</sup> and, therefore, a false choice. Yet, the historical success of this strategy and the continued importance of class, patriarchal, and racial divisions perpetuate such choices both within our consciousness and within the concrete realities of our daily lives.

Race, of course, is only one of the factors that differentiate women. It is the most salient in discussions of black and white women, but it is perhaps no more important, even in discussions of race and gender, than is the factor of class. Inclusion of the concept of class permits a broader perspective on the similarities and differences between black and white women than does a purely racial analysis. Marxist feminism has focused primarily upon the relationship between class exploitation and patriarchy. While this literature has yielded several useful frameworks for beginning to examine the dialectics of gender and class, the role of race, though acknowledged, is not explicated.

Just as the gender-class literature tends to omit race, the race-class literature gives little attention to women. Recently, this area of inquiry has

been dominated by a debate over the relative importance of race or class in explaining the historical and contemporary status of blacks in this country. A number of scholars writing on this issue have argued that the racial division of labor in the United States began as a form of class exploitation which was shrouded in an ideology of racial inferiority. Through the course of U.S. history, racial structures began to take on a life of their own and cannot now be considered merely reflections of class structure.<sup>18</sup> A theoretical understanding of the current conditions of blacks in this country must therefore take account of both race and class factors. It is not my intention to enter into this debate, but instead to point out that any serious study of black women must be informed by this growing theoretical discussion. Analysis of the interaction of race, gender, and class fall[s] squarely between these two developing bodies of theoretical literature.

Black women experience class, race, and sex exploitation simultaneously, yet these structures must be separated analytically so that we may better understand the ways in which they shape and differentiate women's lives. Davis, in her previously cited article, provides one of the best analyses to date of the intersection of gender, race, and class under a plantation economy.<sup>19</sup> One of the reasons this analysis is so important is because she presents a model that can be expanded to other historical periods. However, we must be careful not to take the particular historical reality which she illuminated and read it into the present as if the experiences of black women followed some sort of linear progression out of slavery. Instead, we must look carefully at the lives of black women throughout history in order to define the peculiar interactions of race, class, and gender at particular historical moments.

In answer to the question: Where do black women fit into the current analytical frameworks for race and class and gender and class? I would ask: How might these frameworks be revised if they took full account of black women's position in the home, family, and marketplace at various historical moments? In other words, the analysis of the interaction of race, gender, and class must not be stretched to fit the procrustean [*sic*] bed of any other burgeoning set of theories. It is my contention that it must begin with an analysis of the ways in which black people have been used in the process of capital accumulation in the United States. Within the contexts of class exploitation and racial oppression, women's lives and work are most clearly illuminated. Davis's article illustrates this. Increasingly, new research is being presented which grapples with the complex interconnectedness of these three issues in the lives of black women and other women of color.<sup>20</sup>

For black women and other women of color an examination of the ways in which racial oppression, class exploitation, and patriarchy intersect in their lives must be studied in relation to their perceptions of the impact these structures have upon them. Through studying the lives of particular women and searching for patterns in the ways in which they describe themselves and their relationship to society, we will gain important insights into the differences and similarities between black and white women.

The structures of race and class generate important economic, ideological, and experiential cleavages among women. These lead to differences in perception of self and their place in society. At the same time, commonalities of class or gender may cut across racial lines providing the conditions for shared understanding. Studying these interactions through an examination of women's self perceptions is complicated by the fact that most people view their lives as a whole and do not explain their daily experiences or world view in terms of the differential effects of their racial group, class position, or gender. Thus, we must examine on an analytical level the ways in which the structures of class, race, and gender intersect in any woman's or group of women's lives in order to grasp the concrete set of social relations that influence their behavior. At the same time, we must study individual and group perceptions, descriptions, and conceptualizations of their lives so that we may understand the ways in which different women perceive the same and different sets of social structural constraints.

Concretely, and from a research perspective, this suggests the importance of looking at both the structures which shape women's lives and their self-presentations. This would provide us, not only with a means of gaining insight into the ways in which racial, class, and gender oppression are viewed, but also with a means of generating conceptual categories that will aid us in extending our knowledge of their situation. At the same time, this new knowledge will broaden and even reform our conceptualization of women's situations.

For example, how would our notions of mothering, and particularly mother-daughter relationships, be revised if we considered the particular experiences and perceptions of black women on this topic? Gloria I. Joseph argues for and presents a distinctive approach to the study of black mother-daughter relationships, asserting that

to engage in a discussion of Black mothers and daughters which focused on specific psychological mechanisms operating between

the two, the dynamics of the crucial bond, and explanations for the explicit role of patriarchy, without also including the important relevancy of racial oppression . . . would necessitate forcing Black mother/daughter relationships into pigeonholes designed for understanding white models.

In discussing Black mothers and daughters, it is more realistic, useful, and intellectually astute to speak in terms of their roles, positions, and functions within the Black society and that society's relationship to the broader (White) society in America.<sup>21</sup>

Unfortunately, there have been very few attempts in the social sciences to systematically investigate the relationship between social structure and self-perceptions of black women. The profiles of black women that have been appearing in magazines like *Essence*, the historical studies of black women, fiction and poetry by and about black women, and some recent sociological and anthropological studies provide important data for beginning such an analysis. However, the question of how black women perceive themselves with regard to the structures of race, gender, and class is still open for systematic investigation.

Elizabeth Higginbotham, in a study of black women who graduated from college between 1968 and 1970, explored the impact of class origins upon strategies for educational attainment. She found that class differences within the black community led not only to different sets of educational experiences but also to different personal priorities and views of the black experience.<sup>22</sup> According to Higginbotham, the black women from middle-class backgrounds who participated in her study had access to better schools and more positive schooling experiences than did their working-class sisters. Because their parents did not have the economic resources to purchase the better educational opportunities offered in an integrated suburb or a private school, the working-class women credited their parents' willingness to struggle within the public school system as a key component in their own educational achievement. Social class also affected college selections and experience. Working-class women were primarily concerned with finances in selecting a college and spent most of their time adjusting to the work load and the new middle-class environment once they had arrived. Middle-class women, on the other hand, were freer to select a college that would meet their personal, as well as their academic, needs and abilities. Once there, they were better able to balance their work and social lives and to think about integrating future careers and family lives.

Among her sample, Higginbotham found that a larger proportion of women from working-class backgrounds were single. She explained this finding in terms of class differences in socialization and mobility strategies. She found that the parents of women from working-class backgrounds stressed educational achievement over and above other personal goals.<sup>23</sup> These women never viewed marriage as a means of mobility and focused primarily upon education, postponing interest in, and decisions about, marriage. In contrast, women from middle-class backgrounds were expected to marry and were encouraged to integrate family and educational goals throughout their schooling.

My own research on household workers demonstrates the ways in which class origins, racial discrimination, and social conceptions of women and women's work came together during the first half of the twentieth century to limit work options and affect family roles and the self perceptions of one group of Afro-American women born between 1896 and 1915.<sup>24</sup> Most of them were born in the South and migrated North between 1922 and 1955. Like the majority of black working women of this period, they worked as household workers in private homes. (During the first half of the twentieth century, labor force participation rates of black women ranged from about 37 percent to 50 percent. Approximately 60 percent of black women workers were employed in private household work up until 1960.)<sup>25</sup>

The women who participated in this study came from working-class families. Their fathers were laborers and farmers, their mothers were housewives or did paid domestic work of some kind (cooking, cleaning, taking in washing, and so forth). As a result, the women not only had limited opportunities for education but also often began working when they were quite young to help support their families. Jewell Prieleau (names are pseudonyms used to protect the identity of the subjects), one of eight children, described her entrance into work as follows: "When I was eight years old, I decided I wanted a job and I just got up early in the morning and I would go from house to house and ring doorbells and ask for jobs and I would get it. I think I really wanted to work because in a big family like that, they was able to feed you, but you had to earn your shoes. They couldn't buy shoes although shoes was very cheap at that time. I would rather my mother give it to the younger children and I would earn my way."

Queenie Watkins lived with her mother, aunt, and five cousins and began working in grammar school. She described her childhood jobs in detail.

When I went to grammar school, the white ladies used to come down and say "Do you have a girl who can wash dishes?" That was how I got

the job with the doctor and his wife. I would go up there at six o'clock in the morning and wash the breakfast dishes and bring in scuttles of coal to burn on the fireplace. I would go back in the afternoon and take the little girl down on the sidewalk and if there were any leaves to be raked on the yard, I'd rake the leaves up and burn them and sweep the sidewalk. I swept off the front porch and washed it off with the hose and washed dishes again—for one dollar a week.

While class position limited the economic resources and educational opportunities of most of these women, racial discrimination constricted work options for black women in such a way as to seriously undercut the benefits of education. The comments of the following women are reflective of the feelings expressed by many of those in this sample:

When I came out of school, the black man naturally had very few chances of doing certain things and even persons that I know myself who had finished four years of college were doing the same type of work because they couldn't get any other kind of work in New York.

In my home in Virginia, education, I don't think was stressed. The best you could do was be a school teacher. It wasn't something people impressed upon you you could get. I had an aunt and cousin who were trained nurses and the best they could do was nursing somebody at home or something. They couldn't get a job in a hospital. I didn't pay education any mind really until I came to New York. I'd gotten to a certain stage in domestic work in the country and I didn't see the need for it.

Years ago there was no such thing as a black typist. I remember girls who were taking typing when I was going to school. They were never able to get a job at it. In my day and time you could have been the greatest typist in the world but you would never have gotten a job. There was no such thing as getting a job as a bank teller. The blacks weren't even sweeping the banks.

For black women in the United States, their high concentration in household work was a result of racial discrimination and a direct carry-over from slavery. Black women were in essence “a permanent service caste in nineteenth and twentieth century America.”<sup>26</sup> Arnold Anderson and Mary Jean Bowman argue that the distinguishing feature of domestic service in the United States is that “the frequency of servants is correlated with the avail-

ability of Negroes in local populations.”<sup>27</sup> By the time most of the women in this sample entered the occupation a racial caste pattern was firmly established. The occupation was dominated by foreign-born white women in the North and black freedwomen in the South, a pattern which was modified somewhat as southern blacks migrated north. Nevertheless, most research indicates that black women fared far worse than their white immigrant sisters, even in the North. “It is commonly asserted that the immigrant woman has been the northern substitute for the Negro servant. In 1930, when one can separate white servants by nativity, about twice as large a percentage of foreign as of native women were domestics. . . . As against this 2:1 ratio between immigrants and natives, the ratio of Negro to white servants ranged upward from 10:1 to 50:1. The immigrant was not the northerner’s Negro.”<sup>28</sup>

Two major differences distinguished the experiences of black domestics from that of their immigrant sisters. First, black women had few other employment options. Second, black household workers were older and more likely to be married. Thus, while private household work cross-culturally, and for white women in the United States, was often used as a steppingstone to other working-class occupations, or as a way station before marriage, for black American women it was neither. This pattern did not begin to change substantially until World War II.

Table 1 indicates that between 1900 and 1940 the percentage of black women in domestic service actually increased, relative to the percentage of immigrant women, which decreased. The data support the contention that black women were even more confined to the occupation than their immigrant sisters. At the turn of the century, large numbers of immigrants entered domestic service. Their children, however, were much less likely to become household workers. Similarly, many black women entered domestic service at that time, but their children tended to remain in the occupation. It was the daughters and granddaughters of the women who participated in this study that were among the first generation of black women to benefit from the relaxation of racial restrictions which began to occur after World War II.

Finally, black women were household workers because they were women. Private household work is women’s work. It is a working-class occupation, has low social status, low pay, and few guaranteed fringe benefits. Like the housewife who employs her, the private household worker’s low social status and pay is tied to the work itself, to her class, gender, and the complex interaction of the three within the family. In other words, housework, both paid

TABLE 1. Percentage of Females of Each Nativity in U.S. Labor Force  
Who Were Servants, by Decades, 1900–1940

	1900	1910	1920	1930	1940
Native white	22.3	15.0	9.6	10.4	11.0
Foreign-born white	42.5	34.0	23.8	26.8	
Negro	41.9	39.5	44.4	54.9	54.4
Other	24.8	22.9	22.9	19.4	16.0
Total	30.5	24.0	17.9	19.8	17.2
(N, in thousands)	(1,439)	(1,761)	(1,386)	(1,906)	(1,931)
(Percent of all domestic servants)	(95.4)	(94.4)	(93.3)	(94.1)	(92.0)

Source: George J. Stigler, *Domestic Servants in the United States: 1900–1940*, Occasional Paper no. 24 (New York: National Bureau of Economic Research, 1946), 7.

and unpaid, is structured around the particular place of women in the family. It is considered unskilled labor because it requires no training, degrees, or licenses, and because it has traditionally been assumed that any woman could or should be able to do housework.

The women themselves had a very clear sense that the social inequities which relegated them and many of their peers to household service labor were based upon their race, class, and gender. Yet different women, depending upon their jobs, family situations, and overall outlooks on life, handled this knowledge in different ways. One woman described the relationship between her family and her employer's as follows: "Well for *their* children, I imagine they wanted them to become like they were, educators or something that-like [*sic*]. But what they had in for my children, they saw in me that I wasn't able to make all of that mark but raised my children in the best method I could. Because I wouldn't have the means to put *my* children through like they could for their children." When asked what she liked most about her work, she answered, "Well what I like most about it, the things that I weren't able to go to school to do for my children. I could kinda pattern from the families that I worked for, so that I could give my children the best of my abilities." A second woman expressed much more anger and bitterness about the social differences which distinguished her life from that of her female employer. "They don't know nothing about a hard life. The only hard life will come if they getting a divorce or going through a problem with their children. But their husband has to provide for them because they're not soft.

And if they leave and they separate for any reason or (are) divorced, they have to put the money down. But we have no luck like that. We have to leave our children; sometime leave the children alone. There's times when I have asked winos to look after my children. It was just a terrible life and I really thank God that the children grow up to be nice." Yet while she acknowledged her position as an oppressed person, she used her knowledge of the anomalies in her employers' lives—particularly the woman and her female friends—to aid her in maintaining her sense of self-respect and determination and to overcome feelings of despair and immobilization. When asked if she would like to switch places with her employers, she replied, "I don't think I would want to change, but I would like to live differently. I would like to have my own nice little apartment with my husband and have my grandchildren for dinner and my daughter and just live comfortable. But I would always want to work. . . . But, if I was to change life with them, I would like to have just a little bit of they money, that's all." While the women who participated in this study adopted different personal styles of coping with these inequities, they were all clearly aware that being black, poor, and female placed them at the bottom of the social structure, and they used the resources at their disposal to make the best of what they recognized as a bad situation.

Contemporary scholarship on women of color suggests that the barriers to an all-inclusive sisterhood are deeply rooted in the histories of oppression and exploitation that blacks and other groups encountered upon incorporation into the American political economy.<sup>29</sup> These histories affect the social positions of these groups today, and racial ethnic women<sup>30</sup> in every social class express anger and distress about the forms of discrimination and insensitivity which they encounter in their interactions with white feminists. Audre Lorde has argued that the inability of women to confront anger is one of the important forces dividing women of color from white women in the feminist movement. She cites several examples from her own experience which resonate loudly with the experiences of most women of color who have been engaged in the women's movement.<sup>31</sup>

After fifteen years of a women's movement which professes to address the life concerns and possible futures of all women, I still hear, on campus after campus, "How can we address the issues of racism? No women of color attended." Or, the other side of that statement, "We have no one in our department equipped to teach their work." In other words, racism is a Black women's problem, a problem of women of color, and only we can discuss it.

White women are beginning to examine their relationships to Black women, yet often I hear you wanting only to deal with the little colored children across the roads of childhood, the beloved nursemaid, the occasional second-grade classmate. . . . You avoid the childhood assumptions formed by the raucous laughter at Rastus and Oatmeal . . . the indelible and dehumanizing portraits of Amos and Andy and your daddy's humorous bedtime stories.

bell hooks points to both the racial and class myopia of white feminists as a major barrier to sisterhood.

When white women's liberationists emphasized work as a path to liberation, they did not concentrate their attention on those women who are most exploited in the American labor force. Had they emphasized the plight of working class women, attention would have shifted away from the college-educated suburban housewife who wanted entrance into the middle and upper class work force. Had attention been focused on women who were already working and who were exploited as cheap surplus labor in American society, it would have demystified the middle class white woman's quest for "meaningful" employment. While it does not in any way diminish the importance of women resisting sexist oppression by entering the labor force, work has not been a liberating force for masses of American women.<sup>32</sup>

As a beginning point for understanding the potential linkages and barriers to an all-inclusive sisterhood, Lorde concludes that "the strength of women lies in recognizing differences between us as creative, and in standing to those distortions which we inherited without blame but which are now ours to alter. The angers of women can transform differences through insight into power. For anger between peers births change, not destruction, and the discomfort and sense of loss it often causes is not fatal, but a sign of growth."<sup>33</sup>

#### PROSPECTS FOR AN ALL-INCLUSIVE SISTERHOOD

Given the differences in experiences among black women, the differences between black and white women, between working-class and middle-class women, between all of us, what then are the prospects for sisterhood? While this article has sought to emphasize the need to study and explicate these differences, it is based upon the assumption that the knowledge we gain in this process will also help enlighten us as to our similarities. Thus, I would argue for the abandonment of the concept of sisterhood as a global construct

based on unexamined assumptions about our similarities, and I would substitute a more pluralistic approach that recognizes and accepts the objective differences between women. Such an approach requires that we concentrate our political energies on building coalitions around particular issues of shared interest. Through joint work on specific issues, we may come to a better understanding of one another's needs and perceptions and begin to overcome some of the suspicions and mistrust that continue to haunt us. The limitations of a sisterhood based on bourgeois individualism or on the politics of personal experience presently pose a very real threat to combined political action.

For example, in the field of household employment, interest in the needs of a growing number of middle-class women to participate in the work force and thus find adequate assistance with their domestic duties (a form of bourgeois individualism) could all too easily become support for a proposal such as the one made by writer Anne Colamosca in a recent article in the *New Republic*.<sup>34</sup> She proposed solving the problems of a limited supply of household help with a government training program for unemployed alien women to help them become "good household workers." While this may help middle-class women pursue their careers, it will do so while continuing to maintain and exploit a poorly paid, unprotected, lower class and will leave the problem of domestic responsibility virtually unaddressed for the majority of mothers in the work force who cannot afford to hire personal household help. A socialist feminist perspective requires an examination of the exploitation inherent in household labor as it is currently organized for both the paid and unpaid worker. The question is, what can we do to upgrade the status of domestic labor for ALL women, to facilitate the adjustment and productivity of immigrant women, and to insure that those who choose to engage in paid private household work do so because it represents a potentially interesting, viable, and economically rewarding option for them?

At the same time, the women's movement may need to move beyond a limited focus on "women's issues" to ally with groups of women and men who are addressing other aspects of race and class oppression. One example is school desegregation, an issue which is engaging the time and energies of many urban black women today. The struggles over school desegregation are rapidly moving beyond the issues of busing and racial balance. In many large cities, where school districts are between 60 percent and 85 percent black, Hispanic, or Third World, racial balance is becoming less of a concern. Instead, questions are being raised about the overall quality of the educational experiences low-income children of all racial and ethnic groups are

receiving in the public schools. This is an issue of vital concern to many racially and ethnically distinct women because they see their children's future ability to survive in this society as largely dependent upon the current direction of public education. In what ways should feminists involve themselves in this issue? First, by recognizing that feminist questions are only one group of questions among many others that are being raised about public education. To the extent that blacks, Hispanics, Native Americans, and Asian Americans are miseducated, so are women. Feminist activists must work to expand their conceptualization of the problem beyond the narrow confines of sexism. For example, efforts to develop and include nonsexist literature in the school curriculum are important. Yet this work cannot exist in a vacuum, ignoring the fact that schoolchildren *observe* a gender-based division of labor in which authority and responsibility are held primarily by men while women are concentrated in nurturant roles; or that schools with middle-class students have more funds, better facilities, and better teachers than schools serving working-class populations. The problems of education must be addressed as structural ones. We must examine not only the kinds of discrimination that occur within institutions but also the ways in which discrimination becomes a fundamental part of the institution's organization and implementation of its overall purpose. Such an analysis would make the linkages between different forms of structural inequality, like sexism and racism, more readily apparent.

While analytically we must carefully examine the structures that differentiate us, politically we must fight the segmentation of oppression into categories such as "racial issues," "feminist issues," and "class issues." This is, of course, a task of almost overwhelming magnitude, and yet it seems to me the only viable way to avoid the errors of the past and to move forward to make sisterhood a meaningful feminist concept for all women, across the boundaries of race and class. For it is through first seeking to understand struggles that are not particularly shaped by one's own immediate personal priorities that we will begin to experience and understand the needs and priorities of our sisters—be they black, brown, white, poor, or rich. When we have reached a point where the differences between us *ENRICH* our political and social action rather than divide it, we will have gone beyond the personal and will, in fact, be "political enough."

#### NOTES

The author wishes to acknowledge the comments of Lynn Weber Cannon and Elizabeth Higginbotham on an earlier version of this article.

1. Elizabeth Fox-Genovese, "The Personal is Not Political Enough," *Marxist Perspectives* (Winter 1979–80): 94–113.
2. *Ibid.*, 97–98.
3. *Ibid.*, 112.
4. For discussions of black women's attitudes toward the women's movement see Linda LaRue, "The Black Movement and Women's Liberation," *Black Scholar* 1 (May 1970): 36–42; Renee Ferguson, "Women's Liberation Has a Different Meaning for Blacks," in *Black Women in White America: A Documentary History*, ed. Gerda Lerner (New York: Pantheon, 1972); Inez Smith Reid, "Together" *Black Women* (New York: Emerson-Hall, 1972); Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "Black Women's Work as Deviance: Social Sources of Racial Antagonism within Contemporary Feminism" (paper presented at the Seventy-fourth Annual Meeting of the American Sociological Association, Boston, August 1979).
5. Angela Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role in the Community of Slaves," *Black Scholar* 2 (December 1971): 15.
6. Mary Burgher, "Images of Self and Race," in *Sturdy Black Bridges*, ed. Roseann P. Bell, Bettye J. Parker, and Beverly Guy-Sheftall (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1979), 118.
7. For a related discussion of black women's roles in the church, see Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "Institutional Motherhood in Black Churches and Communities: Ambivalent Sexism or Fragmented Familyhood" (published paper).
8. For a discussion of the club movement among black women, see, in addition to Lerner's book, Ida B. Wells, *Crusade for Justice: The Autobiography of Ida B. Wells*, ed. Alfreda Duster (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970); Rackham Holt, *Mary McLeod Bethune: A Biography* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964); Jeanne L. Noble, *Beautiful, Also, Are the Souls of My Black Sisters: A History of the Black Woman in America* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1978); Mary Church Terrell, *A Colored Woman in a White World* (Washington, D.C.: Ransdell, 1940).
9. Carol Stack, *All Our Kin* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970); Elmer P. Martin and Joan Martin, *The Black Extended Family* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).
10. Gilkes, "Black Women's Work as Deviance," 21.
11. Rosalyn Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination against Afro-American Women in the Woman's Movement, 1830–1920," in *The Afro-American Woman: Struggles and Images*, ed. Sharon Harley and Rosalyn Terborg-Penn (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1978), 17.
12. Angela Davis, *Women, Race, and Class* (New York: Random House, 1981), 54.
13. Gilkes, "Black Women's Work as Deviance," 19. In this quotation Gilkes cites Jay S. Walker, "Frederick Douglass and Woman Suffrage," *Black Scholar* 4 (7 June 1973).
14. Adrienne Rich, "'Disloyal to Civilization': Feminism, Racism, and Gynophobia," *Chrysalis*, no. 7 (1978): 14.
15. Terborg-Penn, "Discrimination against Afro-American Women," 27.
16. Elizabeth Higginbotham, "Issues in Contemporary Sociological Work on Black Women," *Humanity and Society* 4 (November 1980): 226–42.
17. Rich, "'Disloyal to Civilization,'" 15.
18. This argument has been suggested by Robert Blauner in *Racial Oppression in Amer-*

ica (New York: Harper and Row, 1972); and William J. Wilson in *The Declining Significance of Race: Blacks and Changing American Institutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978).

19. Davis, "Reflections on the Black Woman's Role."

20. See Cheryl Townsend Gilkes, "Living and Working in a World of Trouble: The Emergent Career of the Black Woman Community Worker" (Ph.D. diss., Northeastern University, 1979); and Elizabeth Higginbotham, "Educated Black Women: An Exploration in Life Chances and Choices" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1980).

21. Gloria I. Joseph and Jill Lewis, *Common Differences: Conflicts in Black and White Feminist Perspectives* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1981), 75–76.

22. Higginbotham, "Educated Black Women."

23. Elizabeth Higginbotham, "Is Marriage a Priority? Class Differences in Marital Options of Educated Black Women," in *Single Life*, ed. Peter Stein (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 262.

24. Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Across the Boundaries of Race and Class: An Exploration of the Relationship between Work and Family among Black Female Domestic Servants" (Ph.D. diss., New York University, 1979).

25. For detailed data on the occupational distribution of black women during the twentieth century, see U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1970*, H. Doc. 83-78 (Washington, D.C.: GPO, 1973).

26. David Katman, *Seven Days a Week: Women and Domestic Service in Industrializing America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 85.

27. Arnold Anderson and Mary Jean Bowman, "The Vanishing Servant and the Contemporary Status System of the American South," *American Journal of Sociology* 59 (November 1953): 216.

28. *Ibid.*, 220.

29. Elizabeth Higginbotham, "Laid Bare by the System: Work and Survival for Black and Hispanic Women," in Amy Swerdlow and Hannah Lessinger, *Race, Class, and Gender: The Dynamics of Control* (Boston: G. K. Hall, [1983]); Bonnie Thornton Dill, "Survival as a Form of Resistance: Minority Women and the Maintenance of Families" (working paper no. 7, Inter University Group on Gender and Race, Memphis State University, 1982).

30. The term "racial ethnic women" is meant as an alternative to either "minority," which is disparaging; "Third World," which has an international connotation; or "women of color," which lacks any sense of cultural identity. In contrast to "ethnic," which usually refers to groups that are culturally distinct but members of the dominant white society, "racial ethnic" refers to groups that are both culturally and racially distinct, and in the United States have historically shared certain common conditions as oppressed and internally colonized peoples.

31. Audre Lorde, "The Uses of Anger," *Women's Studies Quarterly* 9 (Fall 1981): 7.

32. bell hooks, *Ain't I a Woman: Black Women and Feminism* (Boston: South End Press, 1981), 146.

33. Lorde, "Uses of Anger," 9.

34. Ann Colamosca, "Capitalism and Housework," *New Republic*, 29 March 1980, 18–20.



## Intersectionality and Feminist Politics

.....

NIRA YUVAL-DAVIS

In the introduction to her book *Ain't I a Woman*, bell hooks (1981) poured scorn on the then common analogue many feminists used between the situation of women and the situation of blacks. “This implies,” she argued, “that all women are White and all Blacks are men.” That was one of the starting points of an analytical and political move by black and other feminists and social scientists to deconstruct the categories of both “women” and “blacks” and to develop an analysis of the intersectionality of various social divisions, most often—but not exclusively—focusing on gender, race, and class (for a more detailed history see, for example, Brah and Phoenix 2004).

The term “intersectionality” itself was introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), when she discussed issues of black women’s employment in the United States. She was eventually invited to introduce the notion of intersectionality before a special session on the subject in Geneva during the preparatory session to the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in September 2001 in Durban, South Africa. In her introduction to the session of the Nongovernmental Organizations’ (NGO) Forum in the *European Journal of Women’s Studies* WCAR, in which the issue was discussed, Radhika Coomaraswamy, the special rapporteur of the UN Secretariat on violence against women, stated that the term intersectionality had become tremendously popular and was used in various UN and NGO forums. Indeed, on 23

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April 2002, at the 58th session of the UN Commission on Human Rights, the resolution on the human rights of women stated in its first paragraph that it

recognized the importance of examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including their root causes from a gender perspective. (Resolution E/CN.4/2002/L.59)

In this article, I examine some of the analytical issues involved in the interrelationships of gender, class, race and ethnicity, and other social divisions. The main body of the article examines some 1980s (particularly British) debates and considers how these issues have been represented in ideas about intersecting social divisions used for political, legal, and policy purposes, especially in forums discussing UN human rights' discourse. Towards the end of the article, I assess the attempt to develop a specific intersectional methodological approach for engaging in aid and human rights work in the South.

#### CONTEXTUALIZING FEMINISM: GENDER, ETHNIC, AND CLASS DIVISIONS

In a recent paper, Alison Woodward (2005) argues that discussions on issues of diversity and intersectionality have “arrived” in European equality policies as a result of the influence of consultants and thinkers from the United States. This is significant since these issues have been debated by European (especially—but not only—British) feminist scholars since the end of the 1970s but, apparently, without noticeable effect on policymakers. In 1983, Floya Anthias and I published an article in *Feminist Review*<sup>1</sup> arguing against the notion of “triple oppression” then prevalent among British black feminists (in organizations such as the Organization of Women of African and Asian Descent [OWAAD]; see Bryan et al. 1985). That article also laid the foundations of the analytical framework that we further developed in our book *Racialized Boundaries* (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1992) and in our separate work since (e.g., Anthias 1998, 2001, 2002; Yuval-Davis 1994, 1997, 2005, 2006).

As is shown later in this article, the issues raised by the 1983 paper are no longer limited to the preoccupations of black and other ethnic minority feminists but continue, in some ways, to be at the heart of feminist theory and practice. To the extent that the debate has not been lost in postmodernist discussions of “difference” and has retained its original political importance, the question of whether to interpret the intersectionality of social divisions

as an additive or as a constitutive process is still central. This debate can also be constructed as a debate between identity politics and transversal politics<sup>2</sup> (Cockburn and Hunter 1999; Yuval-Davis 1994, 1997) or between the recognition and recognition/distribution models of the politics of difference (Benhabib 2002; Fraser 1997). However, as demonstrated throughout the article, what is at the heart of the debate is conflation or separation of the different analytic levels in which intersectionality is located, rather than just a debate on the relationship of the divisions themselves.

Before turning to more recent developments, it is useful to sum up the original debate. When it was first presented, the “triple oppression” notion was basically a claim that black women suffer from three different oppressions/disadvantages/discriminations/exploitations (the analytical difference between these terms is not clear in the original OWAAD formulations). They suffer oppression as blacks, women, and members of the working class.

Our argument against the “triple oppression” approach was that there is no such thing as suffering from oppression “as black,” “as a woman,” “as a working-class person.” We argued that each social division has a different ontological basis, which is irreducible to other social divisions (as is elaborated later in the article). However, this does not make it less important to acknowledge that, in concrete experiences of oppression, being oppressed, for example, as “a black person” is always constructed and intermeshed in other social divisions (for example, gender, social class, disability status, sexuality, age, nationality, immigration status, geography, etc.). Any attempt to essentialize “blackness” or “womanhood” or “working classness” as specific forms of concrete oppression in additive ways inevitably conflates narratives of identity politics with descriptions of positionality as well as constructing identities within the terms of specific political projects. Such narratives often reflect hegemonic discourses of identity politics that render invisible experiences of the more marginal members of that specific social category and construct an homogenized “right way” to be its member. Ironically, this was exactly the reason black women and members of other marginalized groupings felt the need for what is known today as an intersectional analysis, except that, in such identity politics constructions, what takes place is actually fragmentation and multiplication of the wider categorical identities rather than more dynamic, shifting, and multiplex constructions of intersectionality. Sandra Harding (1991) recognized this. Following the critique by Baca Zinn and Stanley (1986) of the ways in which white feminists dealt with issues of race and ethnicity, she claimed:

The additive approaches to race issues could no more be contained within the terrains one might have envisioned for them at the start than could the “add women and stir” approaches to gender issues. (Harding 1991, 212)

However, 20 years later, while the picture is somewhat different, there is still great confusion about these issues.

INTERSECTIONALITY IN CONTEMPORARY  
PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL DISCOURSE

Although the use of the term intersectionality did not appear until later, several discussion documents on intersectionality (such as that of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights at the Center for Women’s Global Leadership in Rutgers University and of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom UK Section [[www.wilpf.org](http://www.wilpf.org)] in 2001) point to the UN Beijing Platform for Action (1995) as including the core elements of an intersectional approach. They call for governments

to intensify efforts to ensure equal enjoyment of all human rights and fundamental freedoms for all women and girls who face multiple barriers to their empowerment and advancement because of such factors as their race, age, language, ethnicity, culture, religion or disability or because they are indigenous people. (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 2001)

The UN CERD Committee (2000) adopted General Recommendation 25 on the gender-related dimensions of racial discrimination, which recognizes the need for sessional working methods to analyze the relationship between gender and racial discrimination.

However, it was in the Expert Meeting on Gender and Racial Discrimination that took place in Zagreb in November 2000 as part of the preparatory process to the UN WCAR conference that a more specific analysis and a proposal for a specific methodology for intersectionality were attempted.

The discussion on the methodological approach attempted in that forum is presented later. However, the analytic attempts to explain intersectionality in the reports that came out of this meeting are confusing. The imagery of crossroads and traffic as developed by Crenshaw (2001) occupies a central space:

Intersectionality is what occurs when a woman from a minority group . . . tries to navigate the main crossing in the city. . . . The main

highway is “racism road.” One cross street can be Colonialism, then Patriarchy Street. . . . She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms, those named as road signs, which link together to make a double, a triple, multiple, a many layered blanket of oppression.<sup>3</sup>

The additive nature of this image, however, is very different from the one that appears in the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission Issue Paper 2001 that states that

an intersectional approach asserts that aspects of identity are indivisible and that speaking of race and gender in isolation from each other results in concrete disadvantage. (Australian Human Rights and EOC 2001, 2)

The emphasis on identity in this analysis is also different from the structural emphasis in the report of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights of the Center for Women’s Global Leadership. According to them, the

intersectional approach to analysing the disempowerment of marginalized women attempts to capture the consequences of the interaction between two or more forms of subordination. It addresses the manner in which racism, patriarchy, class oppression, and other discriminatory systems create inequalities that structure the relative positions of women, races, ethnicities, classes, and the like. Moreover, intersectionality addresses the way the specific acts and policies operate together to create further empowerment. (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 2001, 1)

And yet in the next paragraph, all these different levels of analysis are conflated together and reduced to “identities”:

Racially subordinated women and other multiply burdened groups who are located at these intersections by virtue of their specific identities must negotiate the traffic that flows from these intersections in order to obtain the resources for the normal activities of life. (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 2001, 1)

Identities are individual and collective narratives that answer the question “Who am/are I/we?” In contemporary literature they are often required to “perform” analytical tasks beyond their abilities (Anthias 2002; Brubaker

and Cooper 2000; Yuval-Davis 1994, 1997). One of the problematics of the additive intersectionality model is that it often remains on one level of analysis, the experiential, and does not differentiate between different levels. The most sophisticated version of this mode has been that of Philomena Essed (1991, 2001). In introductory courses on intersectionality such as in the University of Washington Transformation Project, studies by Essed and Crenshaw are identified as major influences on the development of the intersectionality approach. Essed (1991) links intersectionality to what she calls “gendered racism.” She claims that

... racisms and genderisms are rooted in specific histories designating separate as well as mutually interwoven formations of race, ethnicity and gender. (Essed 2001, 1)

Unlike Essed, who focuses on incidents of “everyday racism,” Crenshaw (1993) differentiates between structural and political intersectionality and resists the conflation of the positional and the discursive. Structural intersectionality pertains to

the ways in which the location of women of colour at the intersection of race and gender makes our actual experience of domestic violence, rape and remedial reform qualitatively different from that of white women. (Crenshaw 1993, 3)

Political intersectionality relates to the manner in which

both feminist and antiracist politics have functioned in tandem to marginalize the issue of violence against women of colour. (Crenshaw 1993, 3)

Other feminists who have been using intersectional analysis in a constitutive way have generally been even more careful in separating different levels of analysis (e.g., Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983, 1992). Social divisions are about macro axes of social power but also involve actual, concrete people. Social divisions have organizational, intersubjective, experiential and representational forms, and this affects the ways we theorize them as well as the ways in which we theorize the connections between the different levels. In other words, they are expressed in specific institutions and organizations, such as state laws and state agencies, trade unions, voluntary organizations, and the family. In addition, they involve specific power and affective relationships between actual people, acting informally and/or in their roles as agents of specific social institutions and organizations.

Social divisions also exist in the ways people experience subjectively their daily lives in terms of inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, specific aspirations, and specific identities. Importantly, this includes not only what they think about themselves and their communities but also their attitudes and prejudices towards others. Finally, they also exist at the level of representation, being expressed in images and symbols, texts, and ideologies, including those to do with legislation. Avtar Brah (1996) presents a somewhat similar model of four different levels of analysis for the participation of Asian women in the British labour market.

Unlike Mary Maynard (1994), who suggests that the analytic differentiation of social divisions pivots on a distinction between the material and the representational, our earlier study (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983) had warned against such a differentiation, on the grounds that each level of analysis has both material and symbolic production and effects (for an elaboration of this point see Anthias 2001). Brah (1996) similarly warns against a binary divide between structure and culture since both are constructed as relational processes and neither is privileged over the other.

#### DIFFERENT KINDS OF DIFFERENCE

Different social divisions, such as class, race, and ethnicity, tend to have certain parameters in common. They tend to be “naturalized,” to be seen as resulting from biological destiny linked to differential genetic pools of intelligence and personal characteristics (Cohen 1988). This naturalization operates similarly, if not even more so, in relation to gender and sexuality, ability, and age. What is important to emphasize here, however, is that in different cultural traditions naturalizing narratives can be different, and certain naturalized categories can be emphasized more than others. For example, in some cultural traditions the elderly are considered to be wise while in others the elderly can be constructed as in “second childhood.” These naturalizing discourses can also be used as discourses of resistance in which, for example, “black is beautiful” and “women are really the stronger sex.”

What is common to all these discourses of naturalization is that they tend to homogenize social categories and to treat all who belong to a particular social category as sharing equally the particular natural attributes (positive or negative) specific to it. Categorical attributes are often used for the construction of inclusionary/exclusionary boundaries that differentiate between self and other, determining what is “normal” and what is not, who is entitled to certain resources and who is not. In this way the interlinking grids of differential positionings in terms of class, race and ethnicity, gender and sexu-

ality, ability, stage in the life cycle, and other social divisions, tend to create, in specific historical situations, hierarchies of differential access to a variety of resources—economic, political, and cultural.

However, there is a need to differentiate carefully between different kinds of difference. In her discussion of epistemology, Sandra Harding (1997, 385) commented that in addition to differences relating to differential power positionings, there are also “‘mere differences’—the cultural differences that would shape different knowledge projects even where there were no oppressive social relations between different cultures.” In our article on the situated imagination (Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002), we pointed out that we need to add to the two dimensions Harding posits a third, which is not necessarily implied in either of the other two: Alison Assiter’s (1996) notion of “epistemic communities,” in which political values, rather than location across power grids or cultural perspectives, become the unifying factors and shape access to knowledge collectively rather than individually.

By incorporating these different kinds of differences into our analysis we can avoid conflating positionings, identities, and values. We can also avoid attributing fixed identity groupings to the dynamic processes of positionality and location, on the one hand, and the contested and shifting political construction of categorical boundaries, on the other (for further elaboration of this point, see Yuval-Davis 2006). This is a problem that, as shown later, is only partially overcome in Fraser’s (1997) recognition/redistribution model and Benhabib’s (2002) sponsoring of it.

#### THE IRREDUCIBILITY OF SOCIAL DIVISIONS

While all social divisions share some features and are concretely constructed by/intermeshed with each other, it is important also to note that they are not reducible to each other. We are not talking here only about a unidimensional differentiation between the powerful and the powerless, nor are some differentiations just a reflection of more profound others. To be black or a woman is not another way of being working class, or even a particular type of working-class person. This is not to deny that in a specific historical context—or even in most concrete historical situations—people are not scattered randomly along the different axes of power of different social divisions. Often people who are positioned in a specific location along one such axis also tend to concentrate in a specific location of another one (e.g., the majority of black people in contemporary Western countries would be found among the lower socioeconomic classes, and women would tend to be poorer than men). This is why Nancy Fraser (1997) can assert that gender

and race are what she calls bivalent collectivities that cut across the redistribution and recognition spectrum, while class relates to the redistributive model and “despised sexualities” to the social and cultural recognition one. However, such generalizations are historically specific, are not inherently valid in every situation, and are under continuous processes of contestation and change. When people are excluded from specific jobs, like teaching or becoming a bishop, as recently happened in the Anglican Church, because of their sexualities, this concerns not only their social and cultural recognition but also their economic position. What is important is to analyze how specific positionings and (not necessarily corresponding) identities and political values are constructed and interrelate and affect each other in particular locations and contexts. Similarly important would be an examination of the particular ways in which the different divisions are intermeshed. One cannot assume the same effect or constellation each time and, hence, the investigation of the specific social, political, and economic processes involved in each historical instance is important.

At the same time, it is important to remember that the ontological basis of each of these divisions is autonomous, and each prioritizes different spheres of social relations (Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983, 1992). For example, class divisions are grounded in relation to the economic processes of production and consumption; gender should be understood not as a “real” social difference between men and women, but as a mode of discourse that relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference, while sexuality is yet another related discourse, relating to constructions of the body, sexual pleasure, and sexual intercourse. Ethnic and racial divisions relate to discourses of collectivities constructed around exclusionary/inclusionary boundaries (Barth 1969) that can be constructed as permeable and mutable to different extents and that divide people into “us” and “them.” Such boundaries are often organized around myths (whether historically valid or not) of common origin and/or common destiny. Constructions of the body, religious and other cultural codes concerning marriage and divorce are crucial in constructing those boundaries. “Ability” or, rather, “disability” involves even vaguer and more heterogeneous discourses than those relating to ethnicity, as people can be “disabled” in so many different ways. However, they involve discourses of “normality” from which all disabled people are excluded. Age represents the dimension of time and the life cycle and shows even more clearly than other social divisions how categories and their boundaries are not fixed and how

their social and political meanings can vary in different historical contexts as well as being continually challenged and restructured both individually and socially.

#### WHICH SOCIAL DIVISIONS?

One of the differences among the different approaches to intersectionality that were portrayed in the earlier sections is that while some (especially Essed, Crenshaw, and Harding) focus on the particular positions of women of color, others (such as Brah, Maynard, Anthias, and Yuval-Davis) have been constructed in more general terms, applicable to any grouping of people, advantaged as well as disadvantaged. This expands the arena of intersectionality to a major analytical tool that challenges hegemonic approaches to the study of stratification as well as reified forms of identity politics.

One of the issues represented, implicitly or explicitly, in much of the literature is how many social divisions are involved and/or which ones should be incorporated into the analysis of the intersectionality process. As mentioned earlier, among black and other minority ethnic feminists, whether or not they adhered to the model of “triple oppression,” race (or race and ethnicity), gender, and class are perceived to be the three major social divisions. Other feminist theorists add other dimensions, such as age (e.g., Bradley 1996); disability (e.g., Meekosha and Dowse 1997; Oliver 1995); sedentarism (e.g., Lentin 1999); or sexuality (e.g., Kitzinger 1987). One of the most comprehensive attempts to include additional axes of social divisions is that of Helma Lutz—although in her formulation they are not axes but rather “basic dualisms”; this is problematic, and she herself considers it a “challenge to consider the spaces in-between” (Lutz 2002, 13). Her list includes the following 14 “lines of difference”: gender; sexuality; “race”/skin-colour; ethnicity; nation/state; class; culture; ability; age; sedentariness/origin; wealth; North-South; religion; stage of social development. Lutz, however, sees this list as “by no means complete; other categories have to be added or re-defined” (Lutz 2002, 13). Indeed, the list is potentially boundless. This is, no doubt, one of the reasons why Crenshaw, when she presented her model of intersectionality at the wCAR conference, produced a visual image of a person standing at a road junction, vehicles coming at her from an indeterminate number of cross-cutting roads.

Do we have to be concerned that the list is limitless? Judith Butler (1990) mocks the “etc.” that often appears at the end of lists of social divisions mentioned by feminists (e.g., at the beginning of this article) and sees it as

an embarrassed admission of a “sign of exhaustion as well as of the illimitable process of signification itself” (Butler 1990, 143). As Fraser (1997) and Knapp (1999) make clear, such a critique is valid only within the discourse of identity politics where there is a correspondence between positionings and social groupings. This is the way additive/fragmentation models of social divisions operate. When no such conflation takes place, Knapp finds rightly that Butler’s talk

“of an illimitable process of signification” can be reductionist if it is generalized in an unspecified way. An analytical perspective which, in a critical or affirmative fashion, concentrates exclusively on the symbolic modes of construction and representation of “difference” (as identity) runs the risk of levelling historically constituted “factual” differences and thereby suppressing “difference” on its own terms. (Knapp 1999, 130)

Knapp’s critique of Butler clarifies the crucial importance of the separation of the different analytical levels in which social divisions need to be examined (discussed earlier). She calls for “theory formation and research which accounts for the diverse conditions which gave rise to the constitution of differences as well as their historical interconnectedness” (Knapp 1999, 130)—or, using the terminology presented here, the ways different social divisions are constructed by, and intermeshed with, each other in specific historical conditions.

There is an important question that needs to be made explicit, however, although it will not necessarily be possible to answer it. Is the issue what Butler calls “the illimitable process of signification itself,” or are there, in any particular historical condition, specific and limited numbers of social divisions that construct the grid of power relations within which the different members of the society are located? There are two different answers to this question, which are not mutually exclusive. The first is that in specific historical situations and in relation to specific people there are some social divisions that are more important than others in constructing specific positionings. At the same time, there are some social divisions, such as gender, stage in the life cycle, ethnicity, and class, that tend to shape most people’s lives in most social locations, while other social divisions, such as those relating to membership in particular castes or status as indigenous or refugee people, tend to affect fewer people globally. At the same time, for those who are affected by these and other social divisions not mentioned here, such social divisions are crucial and necessitate struggle to render them visible. This

is, therefore, a case where recognition—of social power axes, not of social identities—is of crucial political importance.

The second answer relates to what Castoriadis (1987) called the “creative imagination” (see also Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis 2002) that underlies linguistic and other social categories of signification. Although certain social conditions may facilitate this, the construction of categories of signification is, in the last instance, a product of human creative freedom and autonomy. Without specific social agents who construct and point to certain analytical and political features, the rest of us would not be able to distinguish them. Rainbows include the whole spectrum of different colors, but how many colors we distinguish depends on our specific social and linguistic milieu. It is for this reason that struggles for recognition always include an element of construction and that studying the relationships between positionings, identities, and political values is so important (and impossible if they are all reduced to the same ontological level).

#### INTERSECTIONALITY AS A HUMAN RIGHTS POLICY METHODOLOGY

Beyond ontological questions of how many social divisions there are and whether we are dealing with axes of social divisions, dualistic lines of difference or specific forms of discrimination, it is important to note that there is often a conflation between vectors of discrimination and difference and identity groupings. In her presentation to the WCAR conference on intersectionality, Charlotte Bunch described 16 vectors of difference (from gender and class to indigenouness and rural living), and concluded that “if the human rights of any are left unprotected—if we are willing to sacrifice the rights of any group, the human rights of all are undermined” (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 2001, 111). This is problematic both theoretically and politically, as it constructs difference per se as automatic grounds for both discrimination and entitlement for defense from discrimination. It does not attend to the differential positionings of power in which different identity groups can be located in specific historical contexts, let alone the dynamics of power relations within these groups. Nor does it give recognition to the potentially contested nature of the boundaries of these identity groupings and the possibly contested political claims for representation of people located in the same social positionings. These problematics have also affected attempts to construct a methodological approach to intersectionality in development and human rights fieldwork as pursued by Bunch’s Center for Women’s Global Leadership and presented to the WCAR conference.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH TO  
INTERSECTIONAL POLICY

Intersectional analysis has been introduced to human rights discourse as part of gender mainstreaming, for “the full diversity of women’s experiences” to be considered, and in order “to enhance women’s empowerment” (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 2001). As the background briefing paper on intersectionality of the Working Group on Women and Human Rights of the Center for Women’s Global Leadership claims, “developing of new and augmenting of existing methodologies to uncover the ways multiple identities converge to create and exacerbate women’s subordination” is critical.

These methodologies will not only underline the significance of the intersection of race, ethnicity, caste, citizenship status for marginalized women etc but serve to highlight the full diversity of women’s experiences. (Center for Women’s Global Leadership 2001, 1)

The methodology suggested by the working group has four distinct components:

- Data collection, which depends on the availability of desegregated data of various social, legal and identity categories of women. The need for desegregated data was highlighted during the WCAR conference in several forums, including by Mary Robinson, the then UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, who organized the WCAR conference.
- Contextual analysis, which would probe “beneath the single identity to discover other identities that may be present and contribute to the situation of disadvantage.”
- Intersectional review of policy initiatives and systems of implementation in terms of their efficacy in addressing the problems faced by different intersectional identities.
- Implementation of intersectional policy initiatives based on the above.

This policy methodology seems impressive and a step forward. However, it also raises difficult and complex empirical as well as analytical questions. The construction of categories of desegregated data would, by definition, be unambiguous and mutually exclusive, in contrast to the situation generally found in the field. Yet, as Ashish Nandi (1983) points out, even an apparently simple category of ascription as membership in a religious community is often ambiguous and multiplex, as people in many parts of the world may associate with more than one religion at the same time and/or

worship in completely different ways and along different lines of religious authority under the same nominal religion. Benedict Anderson (1991) has identified the devastating effects the introduction of mutually exclusive census categories has had on colonial societies in which peaceful coexistence of communities often depended on categorical opacity. In addition, there is no differentiation between categories of positionality and social identities. This could render invisible the crucially important political struggles being carried out in many parts of the world that problematize and contest the boundaries of social collectivities. Such boundaries are naturalized by specific hegemonic political projects in order to exclude and marginalize certain people. The point of intersectional analysis is not to find “several identities under one”—as the methodology described earlier suggests. This would reinscribe the fragmented, additive model of oppression and essentialize specific social identities. Instead, the point is to analyze the differential ways in which different social divisions are concretely enmeshed and constructed by each other and how they relate to political and subjective constructions of identities.

This means that field methodology should carefully separate, and examine separately, the different levels in which social divisions operate in the communities where they work and which were discussed earlier, i.e., institutionally, intersubjectively, representationally, as well as in the subjective constructions of identities. Only when such a contextual analysis is carried out can there be an intersectional review of policy initiatives and systems of implementation. Such a review should involve, in addition to the policymakers, as many people on the ground as possible. The differential positionings and perspectives of the participants in such a dialogue should be acknowledged without treating them as representatives of any fixed social grouping. As in similar feminist dialogues that Italian and other feminists have termed “transversal” (Cockburn and Hunter 1999; Yuval-Davis 1994, 1997), the boundaries of the dialogue should be determined by common political emancipatory goals while the tactical and strategic priorities should be led by those whose needs are judged by the participants of the dialogue to be the most urgent.

#### CONCLUSION

Intersectional analysis of social divisions has come to occupy central spaces in both sociological and other analyses of stratification as well as in feminist and other legal, political, and policy discourses of international human rights. There has been a gradual recognition of the inadequacy of analyzing

various social divisions, but especially race and gender, as separate, internally homogeneous, social categories resulting in the marginalization of the specific effects of these, especially on women of color.

However, the analysis and the methodology of intersectionality, especially in UN-related bodies, is just emerging and often suffers from analytical confusions that have already been tackled by feminist scholars who have been working on these issues for longer, outside the specific global feminist networks that developed around the Beijing Forum. Wider dialogue and articulation of problems would be useful to both feminist scholars and global feminist networks.

#### NOTES

The first draft of this article was presented in May 2002 in Copenhagen at a meeting of the European Women's Network on Intersectionality. Thanks to the organizers and participants for their helpful feedback.

1. Reprinted also in Lovell 1990.
2. Transversal politics is a democratic practice of alliances across boundaries of difference (see Yuval-Davis 1997).
3. Report of the WCAR meeting as presented by Indira Patel to a day seminar in London organized by WILPF UK, November 2001.

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## A Conversation with Founding Scholars of Intersectionality

*Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Michelle Fine*

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KATHLEEN GUIDROZ & MICHELE TRACY BERGER

Our goal in organizing this conversation was to bring together scholars Kimberlé Crenshaw, Nira Yuval-Davis, and Michelle Fine, whose work has contributed to broad interdisciplinary uses of intersectionality and the intersectional approach. We wanted to know what drew each of them to this approach and what challenges they might have experienced in developing this dynamic site of knowledge with both scholarly and activist roots. We also wanted readers to learn how Kimberlé, Nira, and Michelle teach their students about the intersectional approach. We welcomed their thoughts on debates about intersectionality and, of course, the future of this approach. They were extremely generous with the time and the thoughtfulness they brought to this conversation.<sup>1</sup>

KATHLEEN (KG): Each of you has made very important contributions to our understanding of intersectionality and how we use it in our scholarship, not just for Michele and me, but for many, many others. We are interested in the history of how you came to intersectionality, your understanding of this approach, and your uses of it.

NIRA: I started my work early, first in Israel, then in the United States, and in 1973 I came to Britain. I grew up within the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, so the notion of an automatic sisterhood among women is something which, from the beginning, didn't sound right to me. It was good as a political ideal but definitely not something you would achieve automatically just by sitting in a consciousness-raising

group. Although I started on issues of gender in Israel, in the United States especially I got acquainted with feminism and became very aware of the differences between feminism[s] in the United States and Britain as well. There are real interest differences among women. I also developed a socialist-feminist framework; issues of [social] class became very relevant as well as nationality and ethnicity. And in the United States and then in England, I became aware of issues of race.

I worked on women and nationalism, the role of gender in the Zionist project. When I began on the issues of racism and sexism in the British context, I worked with my friend and colleague Floya Anthias. We developed the theoretical framework which would today be called “intersectional” and which we eventually presented in the article “Contextualizing Feminism”<sup>2</sup> and later developed in our book on racialized boundaries.<sup>3</sup>

KG: What are your backgrounds, Michelle and Kimberlé?

MICHELLE: For almost thirty years I have been engaged in research on how poor and working class urban adolescents explain, embody, reproduce, and resist injustice in their schools, communities, prisons, and broader political arrangements. The research originally grew from my involvement in the violence against women and reproductive freedom movements, and more recently, the projects have been nested within feminist and antiracist struggles for education and prison reform. Given these activist groundings for research, simple gender-based essentialisms were insufficient; over time I came to understand the theoretical and political necessity of analyzing social policies, public institutions, communities, and lives at the intersections of gendered, raced, classed, and dis/ability formations.

In the 1980s and into the 1990s, I was coming of age as a “youngish” social psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania where feminism, critical race theory, and critical theory infused the intellectual and political culture of the university. At this time, feminist literatures were documenting national trends of boys dominating math and science classes; and yet, I was sitting in deplorable urban schools, writing *Framing Dropouts*,<sup>4</sup> and where I couldn’t find many qualified or certified educators and “advanced” math or science classes and labs. As I read the growing literature on the psychology of girls and women, which argued that girls were losing their voices and going underground, I was in the midst of an ethnography of high-school dropouts and “push outs,” hanging out in parks and coffee shops with working class and poor black and

Latina teens, many of whom dropped out of underresourced schools to care for grandmothers, siblings, or their own children in a city that had long turned its back on them. For these young women, “not having a voice” was not their problem; being denied financial and political power was. Gender mattered deeply, but only in intimate relation with race, ethnicity, class, context, place, and the fraying public sector safety net.

Most recently my work has turned toward participatory research with women imprisoned in a New York State maximum security prison and with a research team of women and men who had served at least fifteen years for a violent crime. In both projects, like in schools, the threads of gender, race, and class—or more precisely sexism, racism, and oppression of poor people—are fundamental to the workings of the prison-industrial complex. While there is a story to be told about each thread, it is the braided story of ideological, material, social, and psychological oppression and resistance that must be told. Gender moves across this geography of injustice—in schools, communities, and prisons—in dynamic interaction with race, ethnicity, class, and political life.

KIMBERLÉ: I came to this work in part out of an attempt to resolve conflict by being active in antiracist movements both in college and in law school that were deeply sexist and patriarchal in their orientation and, at the same time, trying to be involved with women’s studies and feminist issues where race reared its head in a somewhat parallel way. My own thinking about it really didn’t even start as an academic enterprise; it was actually from trying to make sense out of why it was the case that certain issues in each of these movements tended to always just disappear.

Perhaps the most cogent illustration of it was when we were struggling at Harvard Law School to integrate the faculty. It was a really controversial struggle because, in large part, the civil rights community saw us as engaging in a type of antiwhite, antiliberal, and anti-Semitic identity politics and didn’t really get on board with the affirmative action piece that we were actually trying to persuade our colleagues at Harvard to adopt.

One of the things that came out of it was a committee assigned to look for people of color to determine if there were any [candidates] who warranted Harvard consideration. Another committee simultaneously was created to look for women candidates. And, not too surprisingly, the first committee didn’t recommend any women, and the committee looking for women didn’t recommend any people of color. To a

certain extent, they were both pointing at each other. The committee for women was thinking that women of color were obviously included in the “people of color committee” and the people of color committee told the “women’s committee” they needed to consider women of color under the rubric of that committee’s work. And that was just a constant reminder that women of color were falling to the margins of rhetorical politics across the board.

That prompted me to start thinking, what is it that consistently happens such that this marginalization is consistently happening? It happened at the leadership level. It happened at every level that one could actually think of. In the first thing I wrote about this,<sup>5</sup> I talked about having been allied with a few African American men to integrate one of those exclusive drinking clubs as a guest, and there was no way we were going to accept them pushing us to the back door. We had a pact that we were not going to take any mess from these folks. When we went to this club, the host came out and basically said that I would have to go around to the back door but my black male friend could go in the front door. And my friend was willing to accept this “compromise”—as long as the exclusion wasn’t based on race exclusively, he was perfectly okay with me going around to the back door. I took that as indicative of a deep problem in the African American political culture that gender barriers were [considered] just marginal, if they actually came up on the radar at all. That, in turn, made me start thinking about political marginality.

As I thought about it more, I got involved in looking at questions of domestic violence here in Los Angeles and tried to get some statistics about arrest rates by neighborhood, which correlated, given the segregation here, with race. What was interesting is both women’s [and civil rights] organizations were really opposed to releasing the statistics, though for different reasons. They [women’s organizations] were of the belief that it would undermine their longstanding struggle to make clear that domestic violence wasn’t a stereotypically black and Latino problem but was a widespread problem across Los Angeles.

They were afraid that a focus on the fact that, because more women of color tend to call the police and go through public services, the statistics look like it’s a greater problem in our community. Men of color [in civil rights organizations] didn’t want to have the statistics released because of the debate going on about violence and police brutality. I looked at these issues and considered them to be *political* intersectionality. Where political interests merge is not always a good place for

women of color, given the way in which the parameters of rhetorical politics play out to reinforce, more or less, an essentialist idea of what feminist politics are and what antiracist politics might be.

That was the activist engagement that brought me to this work. And my own use of the term “intersectionality” was just a metaphor. I’m amazed at how it gets over- and underused; sometimes I can’t even recognize it in the literature anymore. I was simply looking at the way all of these systems of oppression overlap. But more importantly, how in the process of that structural convergence rhetorical politics and identity politics—based on the idea that systems of subordination do not overlap—would abandon issues and causes and people who actually were affected by overlapping systems of subordination. I’ve always been interested in both the structural convergence and the political marginality. That’s how I came into it.

MICHELE (MB): Did any of you experience resistance or “push back” from colleagues, or feel like you had to fight to make this approach more well-known?

NIRA: Yes. Actually, we had a lot of debates and fights from the beginning because, frankly, many other feminists at first didn’t understand what we were talking about. But our fight in a way was double-edged because, on the one hand, by bringing up these differences among women we were accused of depoliticizing the issues.

On the other hand, we had arguments with some black feminists because of a theoretical debate with OWAAD [Organization of Women from African and Asian Descent], which was the feminist organization of black women from African, Caribbean, and Asian descent in Britain. They were talking about triple oppressions of gender, race, and class. And we said, you cannot talk about these oppressions in an additive way, because you cannot talk about being black without considering whether or not you are a man or a woman or whether you are middle class, working class, young, old, straight, gay, etc. Rather than using OWAAD’s additive approach, we said we need to theorize social divisions as constituted by each other in concrete ways, enmeshed in each other, although they each have their own separate discourses and are also irreducible to each other.

After this fight, we were accused by black feminists of being envious of them because during those days of extreme identity politics, at least in Britain, only black activists were “allowed” to discuss issues of race and racism. Both Floya and I were from ethnic minorities, but we

were not black. On the one hand, we were accused of being not political enough; and on the other hand, we were accused of trying to get into political struggles which were not ours. After the poststructural and postmodernist conversion, we were told that we were actually too political and that we really need to talk about much more subtle differences than categorical social divisions. So, we have been rebutting both activists and academics throughout; and we thought we won the argument for a little while.

I went to the World Conference against Racism [WCAR] (in Durban, South Africa) where I met Kimberlé in 2001. I heard the debate on intersectionality there, and the additive approach to intersectionality that we fought against in the early 1980s had revived itself. The debates have been there since the early eighties and, in some way, they're cyclical; but at the same time there is a much wider understanding now about the importance of not applying mechanically an additive approach to intersectional divisions. Acknowledging, for instance, that not all women identify being women as their most important social grouping, let alone that they are all feminists, might avoid exercising some crude and counterproductive tokenistic identity politics.

MICHELLE: That was great. The question of push back, for me, can be addressed from within my disciplinary field, psychology, and in terms of the research we have conducted, especially the project that Lani Guinier, Jane Balin, and I conducted at the University of Pennsylvania Law School.

Psychology, in its most traditional form, has taken up the empirical search for decontextualized universals. Historically, in the United States, academic psychology has swept questions of context, power, injustice, history, and resistance to the critical margins of the discipline. Gender, race, and class have been assigned to the dustheap. In the eighties, feminist psychologists introducing gender as a political dimension of social experience encountered a fair amount of resistance, and most unfortunately assumed that if we chose to complicate our analyses with attention to race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, disability, immigration status, etc., then gender would somehow “wash out” like a recessive gene.

I think Nira just explained this anxiety well. Some feared that intersectionality would violate solidarity among women. Ironically, solidarity was sacrificed and multiracial coalitions rendered precarious precisely because many white feminists failed to attend to the complexities of gender, nested within race, class, place, and politics.

There is another kind of push back I want to mention—and that’s push back against intersectional research, launched doubly by those most oppressed by institutional politics and those most privileged. It’s a funny collusion. In the late eighties, when we were all teaching at Penn, Lani Guinier, Jane Balin, and I conducted a study of young men and young women in the law school on how gender and race wove through the academic and political culture of law school socialization. We surveyed first-, second-, and third-year students and conducted focus groups and individual interviews with white students and students of color, both men and women.

We analyzed the data with a dedicated intersectional analysis and were able to discern how gender, race, ethnicity, and class dynamics permeated the academic culture and affected students’ academic standing. For instance, we found that women and men entered law school with similar credentials, but by year three, men were substantially more likely than the women to be in the top 10 percent, on law review, and accruing the benefits of prestige and money. First-year women were far more likely than men to say they wanted to pursue public interest law, but by year three, the women sounded like the men—fewer than 10 percent were interested in public interest law. Also, most first-year women were offended by the use of the generic “he” in classrooms, but by year three, they grew accustomed and approximated the men. This led to the title of our book, *Becoming Gentlemen*.<sup>6</sup>

But it wasn’t only gender dynamics circulating through the law school socialization process. While white students—especially males—understood the academic task was to learn to read the legal cases from the perspective of the law, many students of color acknowledged that “I can read these texts from the point of view of the victim, the perpetrator, the community, or the lawyer; and I’m supposed to only see it from the point of view of lawyer.” Law school, we concluded, insisted upon professional socialization designed to encourage students to “become gentlemen,” as one professor told his students, and to view the world from the perch of white elite privilege. The weight of the law school experience played out very differently by race, by ethnicity, by class, and by gender.

We conducted small data feedback sessions with the deans, students-of-color groups, and women-in-law groups. Similar to Kimberlé’s experience in Los Angeles, nobody wanted us to release the findings. We heard both explicit and subterranean pleas expressed by administrators

and students—especially students of color and white women—to not release the data. These students didn't want us reporting that their academic achievement did not match that of white males; and the law school didn't want us presenting institutional data that made it look bad. While we were trying to make a critical argument about organizational dynamics that appear neutral but bear significant adverse consequences for white women and students of color, we met with backlash from the students most negatively affected as well as the institutional "powers that be."

NIRA: I studied psychology and sociology as an undergraduate, and chose sociology to the amazement of everybody in the department. Psychology had the higher status because of what I would call "reification" of psychological perspectives. When I left Israel for a couple of years to attend Harvard, I became acquainted with feminism on the activist level; but in academia, gender was completely unknown.

When I came to Britain, I was lucky because there was a historical moment in which the British Sociological Association had the first conference on issues of sexual divisions in society. We started to organize a sociological women's study group; therefore, gender, and not just class, became legitimized as a category of social difference. Race and ethnicity also became legitimized [for study] at that time, but they were all kept separate. Unlike in the United States [and in Israel], Marxist sociology was very popular in Britain, so discussing the interrelationship of gender and class was widely acceptable. But the minute some of us tried to introduce the interrelationships of gender to race and ethnicity, the eyes of many women in our group became glazed, as it was then considered by most socialist feminists to be only of marginal interest and relevant only to a small minority of women. This was a context in which a separate, and to a large extent a separatist, black women's movement developed in the UK and developed the notion of "triple oppression." Floya and I were arguing—unlike the white or the black feminist movements in the UK at the time—that issues of ethnicity and race are relevant not only to minority racialized women but also that the categories of ethnicity and race are relevant to everyone—there is no human being who does not "have" ethnic and racial belonging, as well as gender, class, and stage in the life cycle, although such memberships can be contingent, contested, and multiplex. Subsequently, the black women's movement developed at a distance from the white women's movement because of these triple oppressions [arguments].

Groups like Southall Black Sisters developed which adopted a much more subtle intersectional approach and were not afraid to call white feminists to support them in their struggles against domestic violence in their communities in Southall. When people would say, “But you are just going to encourage racism,” they pointed out that you don’t fight racism by encouraging sexism; rather, you need to fight both at the same time. For example, there was an attempt to deport men from minority groups if they perpetuated domestic violence, and Southall Black Sisters said, no, because white violent men are not deported when they practice domestic violence. The issue was how to fight both racism and sexism without encouraging the other.

In a way, the door for recognition of intersectionality on the academic level in Britain—especially in sociology—was much earlier, I think, than in the United States. However, in terms of transforming mechanistic identity politics into a more subtle and developed intersectional perspective, this has taken time and there are still ongoing debates against notions of identity politics, which have been an obstacle in some of the struggles.

MICHELLE: Before we move on, I want to point out a political space where I believe intersectional analyses are critical and underexplored. This has to do with gender, class, and race as women negotiate the neoliberal state; that is, how girls and women from very different political and demographic life spaces survive when the State refuses to attend to the needs of communities and families. Under the theoretical influence of French analyst Frigga Haug, Sarah Carney and I have written on the swelling responsibilities attributed to women under neoliberalism. The point is relatively simple: that the range of so-called private responsibilities that fall to girls and women as daughters, mothers, wives, lovers, granddaughters, neighbors, and sisters widens substantially when government retreats. This ideological turn affects all women across race, ethnicity, and class; however, poor and working class girls and women of color pay an exorbitant price. They are more likely to be under assault by government policies; denied resources; responsible for sick, homeless, and/or incarcerated family members; and overscrutinized by police, social workers, and immigration officers. And, in some cases, they are more likely to commit a crime or be accused of neglect or abuse of their child. Neoliberalism is bad for the nation, communities, and families; but, it is toxic for women and children living in poverty.

In this political context, I think we are witnessing the popular com-

modification of intersectionality. I'm also concerned about a kind of "flattening" of intersectionality, with racial disparities in health, education, or criminal justice appearing to be artifacts of culture or genetics, rather than systematic effects of cumulative oppression. Newspapers such as the *New York Times* run articles about high rates of venereal disease among teen women. The headlines are something like "one in four teenage girls has a venereal disease" and "one in two black girls . . ." While the second statistic may be read by some as evidence of racism in the health care system, the reporting is grossly disconnected from any structural analysis. These articles could easily be read as evidence of teen promiscuity, particularly for African American and Latina girls. We are besieged by "floating factoids," often disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, class, etc., and severed from structural, intersectional analyses. On the landscape of popular media, these intersectional statistics accumulate as impressionistic dots in a racist painting. While progressives may use these data to sound an alarm about the need for sexuality education and reproductive and sexual health care, the Right has cleverly exploited the information to insinuate the rampant promiscuity of teen girls, especially girls of color, and insist again on the need for abstinence-only education programs.

KIMBERLÉ: I see flattening in the law as well. A lot of people read intersectionality as just multiplying identity categories rather than constituting a structural analysis or a political critique. That's been really troubling to see because, yes, it does lead to just a listing of people and a description without any analysis as to how their particular conditions are located within structures of power. It sounds like just another form of identity politics, which the postmodern [perspective] then turns into a point of critique as well.

NIRA: I would add other analytical levels, not only structural and political but also experiential and representational, because identity politics tends to conflate all these different analytical levels and doesn't differentiate between individual and collective representation. Because of this, there is a denial of any differential power relations within groups—and groups and categories are automatically constructed as if they are the same.

KIMBERLÉ: Yes, that's right.

NIRA: I remember when, in Britain, with the politics of multiculturalism, identity politics also became a source of funding, which created some weird situations. For example, a black woman who was hired by the local authority out of this special funding was wanted by the race unit,

claiming she is black, and the sex-equality unit wanted her, claiming her as a woman! One had to choose according to one dimensional identity. But what happens now is that all the special race-equality and sex-equality and disability-equality units have been abolished under the whole notion of mainstreaming, and today such a black woman hired would “represent”—or at best advocate for—all women, all blacks, all disabled.

One issue with the attempt of official or legal discourse to adopt intersectionality is that policymakers don’t know what to do about it; they try to make it into identity categories and to flatten and make them as if they’re all the same without recognizing the different social divisions and the fact that people are positioned in varied places. The fact that you are a black woman or a disabled lesbian or whatever does not make it all the same. They apply this additive principle instead of looking at the *constitutive* nature of this issue, the different levels in which these are operating, and where the need for correction comes from. I think this is the most difficult political issue now, which is, of course, informed by a particular analytical approach.

MB: I think that’s really striking when, Kimberlé, you say you almost can’t recognize what intersectionality looks like when you look at the academic literature. And Michelle, when you talk about the ways in which different disciplinary trainings have adopted intersectionality. And then, Nira, when you’re talking about the political policy level. I’m wondering if you could say something about when you train law students, when you train graduate students, and even undergraduates, what are examples of recent work that you think does “intersectionality” or the “intersectional approach” well?

NIRA: In my teaching, I lead a graduate course called “Gender, Sexuality, and Ethnic Studies,” which looks at the interface between these different kinds of social divisions. The core theoretical module is called “intersectionality and social exclusion,” and we look at it in various ways. Part of it is in relation to various projects of the politics of belonging, which I work on, because it’s not only a question of discrimination but also it’s a question of constructions of collectivities and boundaries and difference. And it’s not just in terms of racism and sexism, which operate within societies, but also the whole relations among collectivities, among nations, and what it all means in a global society as well. This is one level.

The other level is, of course, about conflict, exploitation, exclusion, and inferiorization as well as how different policy approaches homog-

enize and reify members of racialized collectivities and their boundaries. Last, but definitely not least, we also discuss how political activists—feminists, antiracists—have adopted an intersectional perspective and what are the issues that arise in that context. All of this is very much linked to the epistemological perspective of the course, which is linked to “situated knowledge” and “situated imagination.” Different activists on the ground have to tackle different issues.

I think it’s what I’m hearing, Michelle, in the various groups that you are talking about, and Kimberlé, what you are doing as well, because the whole issue of intersectionality is not only in terms of the structure of society and as a political goal, but also how experientially this is seen in the “situated gaze” of each participant. These things need to not be flattened, but be teased out and examined when we deal with issues of transversal solidarity across boundaries. These are the dimensions on which we try to focus in our teaching, as well as fight to make it a mainstream analytical tool.

MICHELLE: I teach intersectionality in doctoral courses on social theory and research methods, including writings by Kimberlé and Nira. I recruit intersectional frameworks into courses where students are theoretically framing and methodologically designing their research projects. The first point of intervention for intersectionality is in the area of theory, insisting that students conceptualize through an intersectional framework; that is, theorize with complexity. Let me give an example. At the City University of New York Graduate Center, over the last ten years we have formed the Participatory Action Research [PAR] Collective, a gathering of activists, researchers, students, progressive policy makers, youth, and organizers working together on research of use to community campaigns. We were asked to consult with a global human-rights group who had assembled a remarkable group of youth activists from across twenty different countries and to design a cross-national survey that would track the systematic red-lining of educational opportunities lacerating the globe, disproportionately denying education to girls, youth living in poverty, immigrants and indigenous people, and children of low caste and low status. Relying upon the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, we catalogued forms of discrimination known to the activists in the room, intending to document across countries the policies, conditions, and dynamics that limit children’s access to education, and then to present the material in the aggregate to human-rights commissioners in Geneva.

We circled the room generating a list of obstacles that included some of the obvious, for example, money, transportation, lack of schools and educators, health problems, the need for child labor, etc. And a young woman from a community in South Asia raised her hand. She said, “I don’t know if this counts as discrimination, but in my community the men are so excluded from employment that they drink a lot, they beat our mothers, and girls stay home to take care of their moms, so we don’t go to school. Is that discrimination?”

A serious debate ensued. One of the lawyers suggested that caring for a mother would not be recognized as discrimination by human-rights commissioners. In response, a number of the youth activists and PAR Collective members insisted that we retheorize how public sector discrimination enters the home and lands on the bodies of girl children, and how political and economic conditions constrain young women’s pathways to education. A long conversation followed about what discrimination looks like in real political contexts for various youth. Only by deconstructing the idea of discrimination through a rigorous intersectional analysis that legitimizes place, context, gender, caste, material conditions, and relational responsibilities, could we reconceptualize discrimination in ways that could be measured locally and could be useful for local human-rights campaigns.

Just as it’s important to think conceptually about intersections, it’s important to build intersectionality into research designs, methods, and analysis. Let me give another example. In the 1990s, Lois Weis and I started our research for *The Unknown City*,<sup>7</sup> an ethnographic analysis of hundreds of poor and working class African American, Latino, and white women and men in Jersey City and Buffalo, studying community life in deindustrializing urban America. Pressed by local activists to gather information about community experiences with “violence,” we asked everyone to tell us what kinds of violence occur in the community. Posing the same question to white men, black men, Latinos, white women, African American women, and Latinas, we learned that the simple term “violence” is understood quite differently across this political matrix—despite everybody living within the same class strata and the same zip code. When asked about violence in their communities, white men told us stories about men of color committing crimes on the streets. With the same probe, black and Latino men detailed stories of police violence. Almost all of the women—across racial and ethnic groups—narrated stories of childhood and adult domestic violence. White, African Ameri-

can, and Latina women reported incredibly high levels of violence, with rates above 80 percent. Indeed, white women reported the highest rates and, unlike the African American and Latina women, the white women had basically told no one. They didn't tell family members or confess to a priest. They wouldn't go to a shelter because, presumably, "that's what black women do." They didn't call the police because their husbands or brothers or cousins were cops.

By unfolding the experience of domestic violence through multiple lenses of gender, race, and ethnicity within class, we came to hear a shared working-class terror of violence across richly intersectional stories, with profoundly distinct policy implications. If we had relied only upon police records or shelter statistics, we would have concluded that violence against women is a huge problem in black and Latino communities, but not in white communities. And we would have been wrong.

KIMBERLÉ: Well, I think clearly because there are disciplinary differences between the professions, particularly in law, we're writing and teaching against a very structured set of understandings about the irrelevance of categories and identities in the first place. We start with that, and then we build onto that a belief that the law has a structured arrangement which is inherently neutral. The very project of trying to introduce questions of how power gravitates around some social categories and creates them and how it polices others is, in and of itself, seen as a deeply political and atypical project.

My teaching of intersectionality really comes in the context of arguing and showing how some of these myths about the law are, in fact, longstanding, rhetorical, and ideological practices that allow the law to function as a so-called neutral arbiter. It also creates the things that it says it's arbitrating against or between. With that, critical race theory, critical legal studies, and feminist legal theory are all projects that, at various points, have tried to enter the law by positing the importance of structural analysis and the importance of categories. To a certain extent, the project has been successful in that it forces the law to take into account things that it doesn't want to when it has to figure out how, for example, to think about discrimination.

The very gesture of conceding some categories at the same time makes it virtually impossible for the law to think about *multiple* categories. One of the basic things I start with in all of my classes on intersectionality is cases where women of color have tried to make a claim and the law just doesn't know what to do because it wants to see the claim as

either a race claim or a gender claim. If, for example, all African Americans are similarly situated and discriminated against, the law tends to say, “Well, that’s not race discrimination.” Or if women of color have a different set of job opportunities and less opportunity, the tendency for the law is to think it’s not gender discrimination, it’s something else. The same kind of categorical erasures that we see in politics you also see replicated in the law. What I’m doing in my classes is just trying to heighten students’ awareness to the erasures that happen as a function of just the basic legal categories of discrimination.

We talk about sexual harassment as a particular example, in part because the question about sexual harassment is often what kind of harassment it is. Is it race? Is it gender? And what do we do with the evidence? Is it an additive or do we have to look at race and gender separately; or is it multiplicative? Some of the same theoretical questions that play out outside of law, also play out inside it, the very categories of discrimination that the law has created.

We then talk about the legal issues associated with both feminism and antiracism—a lot on domestic violence and on rape—all to highlight the point that reforms predicated on the belief that the woman in question was non-raced in any particular way, or I would say more implicitly raced as white, didn’t provide the same traction and they weren’t as effective because, in fact, women are differently situated with respect to presumptions of chastity or veracity. A lot of the strategies to reform rape law, for example, didn’t work well for women of color. And you still have differentials in the number of women’s claims that actually get taken up and prosecuted, perpetrators who actually get sent to jail, and the number of years that they get sent to jail for. Just looking at rape, domestic violence, and other areas gives students a sense that although the law appears to be neutral, the failure to acknowledge intersectionality means that some women are completely underserved by what the law claims it does. That’s broadly the way that the law, more or less, amplifies a lot of the issues that you see in the humanities. The way that the law puts it is that how you interpret something really determines whether a woman gets a settlement or not, or whether someone gets protected against domestic violence or not, or whether a woman goes to jail for killing a spouse. Women of color, particularly African American women, are least likely to be able to use some of the defenses that feminists developed to explain why a woman would feel entrapped. If there are various stereotypes about you that create an alternative narrative

about what kind of woman you are, the standard [defense] rap is just not available.

More broadly, what I've been trying to do over the last ten years or so is to take domestic issues into the international arena and, in particular, take up this question of mainstreaming that Michelle and Nira have mentioned. My own critique of the "mainstreaming move" is that it clearly is not an intersectional move and it's not a multivalent move. In other words, my sense of some of the actors in women's international organizations—both NGOs as well as traditional ones like the Commission on the Status of Women, is to want to take gender into every arena including, for example, the WCAR. This is all well and good, but the idea that race might be taken back into gender and into those institutions is really contested. There's an imbalance in how intersectionality gets used, mostly as a point of entry for gender but not as a point of entry for race.

And lastly is a question about what the differences between post-modern, antiessentialist, and intersectional critiques are, because I find my students conflating them a lot. In fact, they might come out similarly in some contexts, but in others I see the direction of the critiques as being very different. We spend a fair amount of time trying to ferret out what the convergences and divergences are between these intellectual traditions.

KG: Is there anything else you want to add about how intersectionality is related to these issues?

KIMBERLÉ: I think there's a paradox in intersectionality in that, on one hand, it seems to be so widely articulated and people just throw it into their basic statements about what they do and what's important. Maybe because during the last ten months of the [2008] presidential election I watched how little traction intersectionality has in mainstream politics. On the other hand, it's surprising how effortlessly some of the more complicated notions of gender, social power, and activism have been cast aside in the pursuit of a goal that at least some of us were somewhat critical of. That is, the idea of putting a woman in power when at the same time intersectionality didn't seem to have had much effect—at least in mainstream feminist discourses—on what kind of arguments could be made, what kind of comparisons were seen as legitimate, the claims that gender is more restrictive as a force than race, and even revealing the extent to which no one is just a woman. It's sort of like that statement, "You can have wide reach, but not very deep." I think that

I've been really surprised at the very significant difference between the academic circulation of the ideas and debates and the places where it failed to make a crossover into politics.

NIRA: It's interesting that the [2008] American presidential campaign constituted in some ways an embodiment of identity politics of "the white woman" versus "the black man." There is a difference between the American and the British feminist contexts, because in Britain—definitely on the activist level but also generally—the sensitivity to intersectional analysis is much greater and more accepted. One of the things which probably is not analyzed enough—and there is a link to what Michelle said about neoliberalism—is the role of feminism in the expansionist neoliberal project, the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq, and the entire discourse of legitimizing the conflict that supposedly uses an intersectional analysis about women, Muslim women, and women who need to be rescued by the "enlightened West." The cooption of feminist and antiracist discourse into this neoliberal and empire-type or imperialist discourse is very important. One thing that is so frustrating and disempowering is how cooption under the guise of mainstreaming and the guise of total inclusiveness has prevented and depoliticized a lot of the issues that, in some ways, would have been easier to confront twenty years ago. Twenty years ago I could have talked about the "big refusal" and, in a way, today the issues that you raise in this context are even more important because resistance is being swallowed up by this supposedly inclusive discourse. This is one of the difficulties we need to struggle with. It cannot be easily solved just by finding a new language because of the fact that everything is being coopted so quickly. I think this is food for thought and an expression of frustration. This is one focus that needs to be looked at. Intersectionality is one of the expressions of the progress of feminist and antiracist analyses, but so often it is ignored, coopted, or swallowed into a new kind of identity politics.

MICHELLE: I know what worries me. As enthused as I am about this conversation and the development of intersectionality as theory and design, I am concerned that intersectionality is becoming faddish, such as in the social sciences using a technique like a two-by-two analysis of gender by race. I worry that we are witnessing a period of flattening the intersections and decoupling lives from political conditions; and that intersectional analyses are being used to splinter social movements rather than create the grounds for varied groups to come together.

At the same time, the deep work of intersectionality taken up by people like Liz Cole and Abigail Stewart, Aida Hurtado and Oliva Espin, Janie Ward and Brinton Lykes, is changing the face of psychology. As I mentioned earlier, the PAR Collective has taken up participatory work with women in prison and with Muslim American youth. These projects have confirmed, across sites and contexts, the stunning significance of gender as it braids with race, ethnicity, class, and sexuality in very specific historic moments and within contentious political dynamics.

When we teach intersectionality, we need to encourage students to splice intersectionality not only into their thinking about theory, design, method, and analysis but also to provoke a radical imagination for creating research products of use—to borrow a phrase from Marge Piercy—products that grow in the rich intersections of social experience and speak back to struggles born at these intersections.

#### NOTES

1. This telephone conversation took place on Friday, June 13, 2008. Prior to the call we provided some guiding questions; however, these served more as a springboard to a semistructured conversation. The conversation was recorded, transcribed, and edited for clarity.
2. Anthias and Yuval-Davis, “Contextualizing Feminism.”
3. Anthias, Yuval-Davis, and Cain, *Racialized Boundaries*.
4. Fine, *Framing Dropouts*.
5. Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins.”
6. Guinier, Fine, and Balin, *Becoming Gentlemen*.
7. Fine and Weis, *Unknown City*.

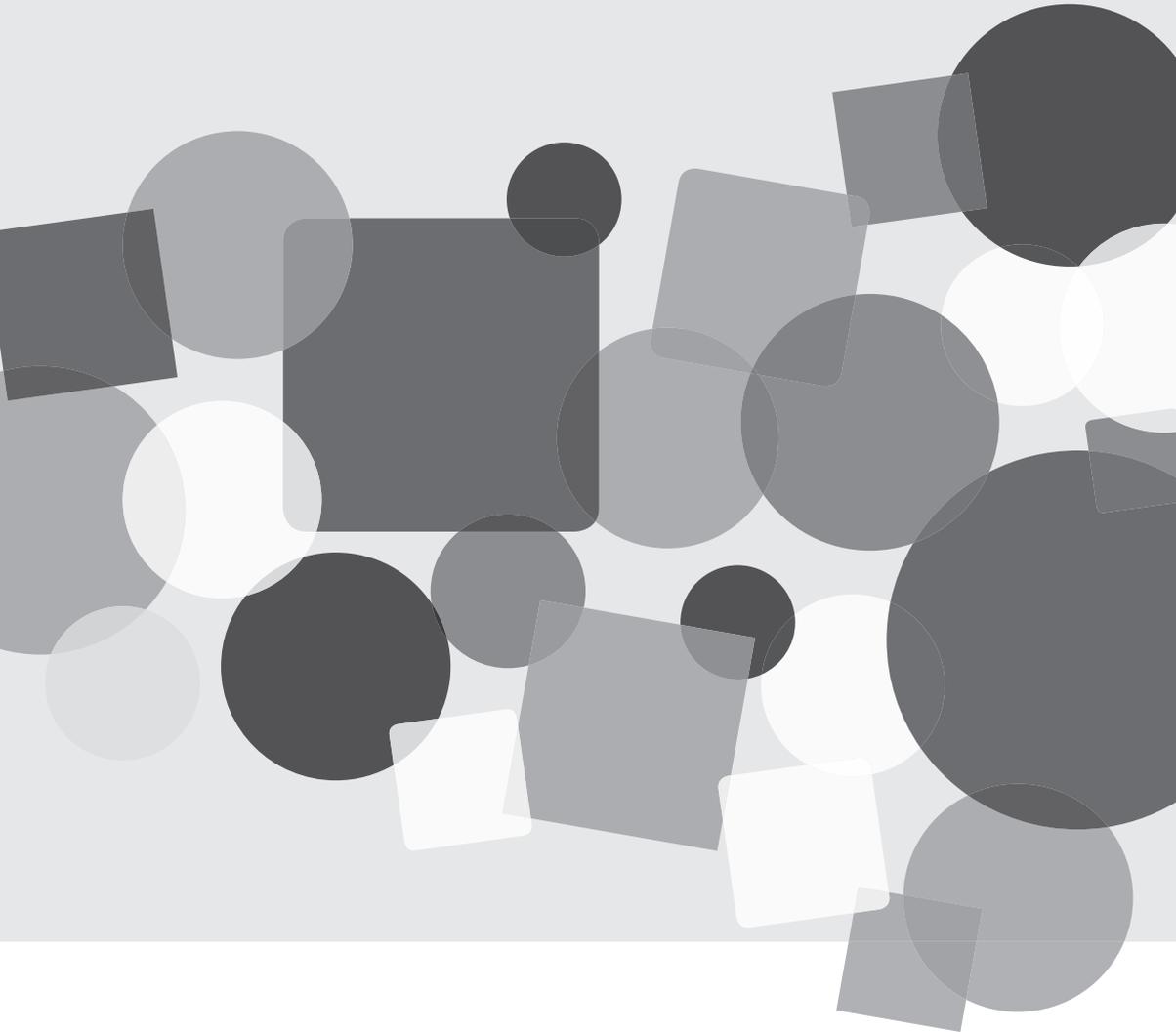
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II

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THEORETICAL EXPLORATIONS



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## From Intersections to Interconnections

*Lessons for Transformation from*

*This Bridge Called My Back:*

*Radical Writings by Women of Color*

.....

ANALOUISE KEATING

*I believe that feminism must stretch toward an unseen place.*

—MAX WOLF VALERIO

First published in 1981, *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* has become a classic of sorts, a frequently cited text in feminist scholarship and women's studies curricula.<sup>1</sup> Coedited by Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa (1981, 1983), this multigenre collection brought together twenty-nine U.S. women-of-color feminists from diverse ethnic/racial, economic, sexual, religious, and national backgrounds. *This Bridge Called My Back* simultaneously invited women of colors<sup>2</sup> to develop new alliances and challenged "white"-identified middle-class women feminists to recognize and rectify their racism, classism, and other biases. In so doing, *This Bridge Called My Back* broke new ground and introduced intersectionality into feminist discourse before the term itself was widely known. Indeed, as I'll suggest later in this essay, several contributors moved *beyond* intersectionality to offer complex relational perspectives on identity formation and alliance making. Unfortunately, however, the book's impact on twentieth-century feminist scholarship was less extensive than its iconic status might suggest. As Norma Alarcón (1990) has observed, although mainstream feminists often paid reverential respect toward *This Bridge Called My Back* and used it to acknowledge women's diversity, these acknowledgments were superficial, masking a continued focus on gender defined in overly simplified,

monolithic terms.<sup>3</sup> Is this assessment still valid in the twenty-first century? Has feminist theorizing (finally!) learned from the book's challenges? Do contemporary feminist theorists (of all colors) integrate contributors' most radical lessons into their own lives and build on the invitation to consider identity issues in more complex terms?

It was my desire to explore such questions, coupled with my alienation both from feminist theory and from the academic feminists in my life at that time, which compelled me in the late 1990s to ask Gloria Anzaldúa if she'd be willing to revisit *This Bridge Called My Back* and coedit, with me, a follow-up book. As we envisioned it, our new collection would not just celebrate the twentieth anniversary of *This Bridge Called My Back*. More importantly, it would assess feminist progress and invite readers of all colors to build on contributors' insights by creating new theories and practices designed to enact transformation. The process of editing our book—eventually titled *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation*—both challenged and confirmed our belief that we (U.S. feminist/womanist scholars of all colors/sexualities/genders/etc.) have made only limited progress since the early 1980s. Or, as Anzaldúa puts it in our preface to *this bridge we call home*, we realized “how much has shifted in the last twenty years, but also how little has changed” (2002b, 3).

To be sure, feminist scholarship has experienced remarkable growth. When I see the awareness of intersectional issues expressed by some of my own graduate students or read the powerful assertions of young feminists like Indigo Violet, one of the contributors to *this bridge we call home*, I have great hope for the future of women's studies and academic feminism more generally. As Violet asserts, describing her own experiences as well as those of her peers, “*This Bridge Called My Back* awakened deep truths for a generation. . . . A new generation of people are taking these lessons to heart, sharing stories with each other . . . and recognizing the entwined nature of our histories and our existence in America” (2002, 486). In her writing and activism, Violet builds on *Bridge* insights to enact new forms of alliance making that go beyond—without ignoring—conventional identity-based boundaries.

However, this careful inclusionary approach is still the exception, not the norm. At the conferences I attend, in the classes I teach, on the listservs to which I subscribe, and in the publications I read, I still encounter many of the same issues exposed in *This Bridge Called My Back*: the angry, jumping-to-conclusions debates; the unthinking, knee-jerk judgments and accusations; the rigid, embattled self-naming; the hierarchical rankings and “I-am-more-feminist-than-you” stance; and the oppositional politics expressed with un-

thinking regularity. Self-identified feminists—no matter how they self-define (whether “of color” or “white”; whether male, female, or trans; whether lesbian, bisexual, heterosexual, homosexual, or gay)—continue to judge each other based on identity labels and condemn each other without adequately listening or (apparently) trying to understand other perspectives. It exhausts me! Despite the book’s status and its impact on some feminists, its theoretical insights have not been adequately explored and applied. Although scholars use *This Bridge Called My Back* to illustrate intersectional identities and issues, they do not examine contributors’ theoretical contributions to intersectionality or to feminist/womanist theorizing more generally; nor do they explore intersectionality’s theoretical implications. Whether “of color” or “white,” most scholars still overlook the book’s more radical challenges.

This oversight speaks to a more widespread limitation in much progressive scholarship. All too often, feminist and other social-justice scholars remain trapped in what I call “status-quo stories”: worldviews that normalize and naturalize the existing social system, values, and standards so entirely that they deny the possibility of change. Status-quo stories contain “core beliefs”<sup>4</sup> about reality—beliefs that shape our world, though we rarely (if ever) acknowledge their creative role. Generally, we don’t even recognize these beliefs as beliefs; we’re convinced that they offer accurate factual statements about reality. Status-quo stories train us to believe that the way things are is the way they always have been and the way they must be. This belief becomes self-fulfilling: we do not try to make change because we believe that change is impossible to make. Status-quo stories are divisive, teaching us to break the world into parts and label each piece. We read these labels as natural descriptions about reality.<sup>5</sup>

Look, for instance, at how “race” functions in U.S. culture: we have become so accustomed to identifying each other based on skin color, physiological features, and other external markers that we assume racial categories are factually accurate, unchanging, and homogeneous. Ironically, these assumptions—coupled with our daily unthinking references to “race”—create “race,” making it more permanent and inflexible.<sup>6</sup> Similar comments could be made about sexuality, gender, and other identity categories, as well as the concurrent belief in self-enclosed individualism.<sup>7</sup> Trapped by the labels, we cannot engage fully. As Andrea Canaan explains in *This Bridge Called My Back*, when we focus so narrowly on identity labels, we “stereotype and close off people, places, and events into isolated categories. . . . We close off avenues of communication and vision so that individual and communal trust, responsibility, loving, and knowing are impossible” (1983, 236).

This “urgent need” to stereotype and label is extremely widespread and deeply internalized. No matter how sophisticated our theoretical analyses might be, and no matter how we identify—whether as “of color” or “white,” as “female” or “male” or “trans,” as “lesbian” or “straight” or “bisexual” or “queer,”—we have *all* been trained to read and evaluate ourselves and each other according to status-quo stories. We have been indoctrinated into a supremacist worldview—an overreliance on rational thought and hierarchical binary thinking which creates a restrictive framework that labels, divides, and segregates based on socially defined differences. However, when we automatically label people by color, gender, sexuality, religion, or any other politically charged characteristics or assumed differences, we build walls and isolate ourselves from those whom we have labeled “different.” These automatic labels distort our perceptions, creating arbitrary divisions and an oppositional “us against them” mentality that prevents us from recognizing potential commonalities. Status-quo stories about identity establish and police boundaries—boundaries that shut us in with those we’ve deemed like “us” and boundaries that shut us out from those whom we assume to be different.

We need new stories, new tactics, and new visions. While I do not advocate moving backward, I believe that sometimes we find new visions by returning to the past. As Renae Bredin suggests, “We have come so far from the bridge, only to find that the way home is a return across that same bridge” (2002, 330). And so, I return to *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color* and find there tools enabling us to build radical visions for transformation, theoretical contributions—or what I’m calling “lessons”—that we still need to learn from, expand on, and implement more fully in our scholarship and our teaching. There are of course many lessons in *This Bridge Called My Back*, but in the following pages I focus only on three: (1) making connections through differences, (2) forging an ethics of radical interrelatedness, and (3) listening with raw openness. In my return to *This Bridge Called My Back* I go forward. Building on contributors’ insights and errors, I suggest a few possible directions for feminist theorizing in the twenty-first century.

#### LESSON #1: MAKING CONNECTIONS THROUGH DIFFERENCES, SEEKING COMMONALITIES

As I’ve already mentioned, *This Bridge Called My Back* is especially praised for its attention to differences among women. At its strongest and most provocative, however, *This Bridge* does not simply emphasize difference. Rather,

it redefines difference in potentially transformative ways. While some contributors rely on status-quo stories that reinforce self-enclosed identities and rigid racialized/gendered/sexualized differences, others do not. I have been especially struck by Andrea Canaan, Mirtha Quintanales, Audre Lorde, Rosario Morales, and Gloria Anzaldúa. These writers attempt to forge alliances and coalitions that do not ignore the differences among women (and in many instances men) but instead use difference as catalysts for personal and social change. Through their explorations of difference, they enter into what Helene Lorenz describes as the “unimaginable gulfs of difference” between self and other (2002, 502). As the phrase “unimaginable gulfs” might suggest, these differences are formidable; they cannot be fully understood or entirely anticipated. At times these differences are so sharp, so profound, and so deep that they seem permanent and impossible to span.

Rather than gloss over such differences, Canaan, Quintanales, Lorde, Morales, and Anzaldúa acknowledge and explore them; risking the personal, they expose (both to themselves and to their readers) their own previously hidden fears and desires. This risk, although incredibly dangerous, is vital to community building. As Anzaldúa explains, “To bridge is to attempt community, and for that we must risk being open to personal, political, and spiritual intimacy, to risk being wounded” (2002b, 3). Making themselves vulnerable, these contributors engage in open conversations about differences. More specifically, they use difference—or, more precisely, the dangerous self-exposure and exploration of differences which this exposure makes possible—to discover and/or create commonalities. Significantly, they forge commonalities without assuming that their experiences, histories, ideas, or traits are *identical* with those of others. Let me emphasize: as I use the terms, “*commonalities*” and “*sameness*” are not synonymous. Rather, “*commonalities*” indicates complex points of connection that both incorporate and move beyond sameness, similarity, and difference; commonalities acknowledge and contain difference. When defined in this complex fashion, commonalities indicate one of intersectionality’s most important theoretical contributions, and the search for and invention of commonalities indicates an important methodological approach.

These tricky negotiations among sameness, similarity, and difference represent a radical departure from conventional practices. Generally, feminists and other social-justice theorists define differences oppositionally, in binary self/other terms; however, these binary configurations inadvertently reinforce an exclusionary (and often invisible) norm. As Lorde explains, we have been trained to define differences as deviations from a false standard,

or what she terms the “‘mythical norm,’ which . . . in america [sic] . . . is usually defined as white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian [sic], and financially secure” (1984, 116, her emphasis). This oppositional definition of difference distorts our ability to forge intricate alliances, for it compels us to define difference as “deviation” and therefore to regard all differences as shameful marks of inferiority. Driven by our shame of difference-as-deviation, we ignore, deny, and/or misname the differences among us. In a mistaken attempt to demonstrate solidarity, we hide our differences (as well as those of others) beneath a facade of sameness. But of course differences don’t disappear just because we reject them. Ironically, it is often the reverse: the denied differences grow stronger as we pretend they don’t exist by seeking refuge behind stereotypes, monolithic labels, and other false assumptions of sameness. Think, for instance, of the mainstream U.S. women’s movement of the 1970s and early 1980s, when gender—defined in simplistic terms—was supposed to trump the many differences among women by creating an automatic (pseudo)universal female bond. As *Bridge* contributors demonstrated, this assumption of a homogeneous womanhood created new divisions.

In *This Bridge Called My Back*, writers acknowledge, express, and investigate differences, yet—and simultaneously—they insist on commonalities. This intertwined acknowledgment of differences and commonalities, coupled with a willingness to risk self-exposure, can revolutionize our approaches to difference. Making themselves vulnerable, *Bridge* authors draw on their personal experiences to explore the stereotypes and the limitations in identity labels. Their bold explorations challenge assumptions of sameness, demonstrating that it is not differences that divide us but rather our refusal to openly examine and discuss the differences among us. This point is worth repeating because it’s so often misunderstood: Differences are not, in themselves, divisive. Rather, it’s our refusal to openly acknowledge, examine, and discuss these differences that divides us.<sup>8</sup>

This nuanced approach to differences culminates in Anzaldúa’s theory and practice of *El Mundo Zurdo*, or “The Left-Handed World.” This activist theory spans Anzaldúa’s career and in many ways embodies her visionary, inclusionary stance. In addition to titling the last section of *This Bridge Called My Back* “El Mundo Zurdo: The Vision,” Anzaldúa included a discussion of *El Mundo Zurdo* in her essay, “La Prieta”; and at various points throughout her career she returned to and expanded on this theory and practice.<sup>9</sup> With *El Mundo Zurdo*, Anzaldúa proposes and enacts a spirit-inflected, visionary approach to community building that enables very different people—men

and women from diverse backgrounds with a wide variety of needs and concerns—to coexist and work together to enact revolutionary change. As she explains in “La Prieta”: “We are the queer groups, the people that don’t belong anywhere, not in the dominant world nor completely within our own respective cultures. Combined we cover so many oppressions. But the overwhelming oppression is the collective fact that we do not fit, and because we do not fit, *we are a threat*” (1983b, 209, her emphasis).

Anzaldúa replaces conventional definitions of difference-as-opposition with a relational approach. She acknowledges that inhabitants/practitioners of El Mundo Zurdo are not all alike; their specific oppressions, solutions, and beliefs are different. She accepts these differences and uses them to create new forms of commonality: “These different affinities are not opposed to each other. In El Mundo Zurdo I with my own affinities and my people with theirs can live together and transform the planet” (1983b, 209). Joined by their rejection of the status quo and their so-called deviation from the dominant culture, inhabitants of El Mundo Zurdo create new alliances and use these alliances to transform their worlds.

Anzaldúa’s theory of El Mundo Zurdo originated in her daily life when, in the late 1970s, she organized a series of poetry readings called El Mundo Surdo Reading Series<sup>10</sup> in San Francisco. This series was extremely diverse and included progressive people of all types: feminists, U.S. “Third World” writers, lesbians, and gay men. Unlike many other progressive social-justice activists and theorists of this time period who were uniting into identity-specific groups, Anzaldúa refused to self-segregate and insisted on creating alliances among people from a variety of different social locations. Despite the many differences among them, her El Mundo Surdo participants shared several commonalities, including their personal experiences of alienation, discrimination, and oppression; their interest in issues of social justice; their shared rejection of the status quo; their belief in the transformational power of imagination and the spoken word; and their work as creative writers and artists.

With her theory of El Mundo Zurdo, Anzaldúa demonstrates that we can seek commonalities without ignoring differences (whether in cultures, experiences, beliefs, or desires) among people. As she asserts in her preface to *this bridge we call home*, “Our goal is not to use differences to separate us from others, but neither is it to gloss over them” (2002b, 3). Anzaldúa grounds this nuanced approach in her holistic, spirit-infused worldview, which creates broader, more inclusive contexts for difference. Defining each individual as part of a larger whole, she insists on a commonality shared by

“everyone/everything”; despite our many differences, we “share a category of identity wider than any social position or racial label” (2002a, 558).<sup>11</sup> For Anzaldúa, this shared identity category is foundational and enables her to replace the rigid boundaries imposed by status-quo stories with a relational approach.

The belief in our interrelatedness is the second lesson I explore.

## LESSON #2: FORGING AN ETHICS OF RADICAL INTERRELATEDNESS

Because we are radically interrelated, what we think and do impacts others—all others, no matter how different or distant they seem. To be sure, this concept of interrelatedness is a key tenet of many indigenous worldviews—ranging from the Dakota belief expressed in the phrase “all my relatives” (*mitakuye owasin*), which reminds us that we are related to all existence, to the Buddhist teaching of codependent arising, to Thich Nhat Hanh’s theory of interbeing. Indeed, interdependence is even partially grasped by some nineteenth-century U.S. American transcendentalists like Ralph Waldo Emerson and Walt Whitman. However, I first saw interrelatedness embodied and lived out within the pages of *This Bridge Called My Back*: in Rosario Morales’s assertion that “we are all in the same boat” (1983, 93); in Luisah Teish’s belief that “my destiny is infinitely tied with that of everybody else” (Anzaldúa 1983c, 223); and in Anzaldúa’s bold claim that “we have come to realize that we are not alone in our struggles nor separate nor autonomous but that we—white black straight queer female male—are connected and interdependent. We are accountable for what is happening down the street, south of the border or across the sea” (1983a, foreword). We are interrelated and interdependent—on multiple levels and in multiple ways: economically, socially, ecologically, emotionally, linguistically, physically, and spiritually. We are interlinked in every way that we can possibly imagine, as well as in ways that we cannot yet fathom. As Inés Hernández-Ávila states, “We are related to all that lives” (2002, 523).

Interconnectivity is foundational to *This Bridge Called My Back*. Indeed, I would argue that a key part of Anzaldúa’s motivation for initiating this collection of writings by women of colors was her own deeply held belief in our radical interrelatedness.<sup>12</sup> As she writes in an unpublished draft of her 1983 foreword to the collection’s second edition, she believes that “every person, animal, plant, stone is interconnected in a life and death symbiosis.”<sup>13</sup>

I want to emphasize this lesson of radical interconnectivity because it’s one that we too often forget. *This Bridge Called My Back* is so often associated

with the recognition of differences that it's easy to overlook its equally important points about interrelatedness. Jacqui Alexander makes a similar observation: "In the midst of uncovering the painful fault lines of homophobia, culture, and class within different communities of belonging, [and] advancing critiques of racism within the women's movement, [*This Bridge Called My Back*] did not relinquish a vision of interdependence, of interbeing. . . . Not a transcendent vision, but one rooted in transforming the dailiness of lived experience, the very ground upon which violence finds fodder" (2002, 97). As Alexander suggests, this "vision of interdependence" is not some abstract belief in an otherworldly reality to which we escape; it is, rather, deeply embedded in everyday life and impacts even our most ordinary actions and encounters.

Not surprisingly, then, positing radical interrelatedness has concrete ethical implications. Because we are all interconnected, the events and belief systems impacting other people—no matter how different and/or distant these others seem to be—affect us as well. To borrow Rosario Morales's analogy, we are all in the same boat, and we all rise or sink together. If we view ourselves as interrelated, we must consider our actions' impact on others. On the personal level, then, interconnectivity and accountability are closely intertwined—like two sides of the same coin. When we perceive ourselves as radically interrelated, we learn to self-reflect and carefully think through the implications of our words and deeds before we speak or act.

Recognition of our profound interrelatedness has revolutionized my life in ways that I'm still trying to comprehend. In my scholarship and teaching, positing interconnectivity has challenged me to reconsider my use of binary-oppositional frameworks. Like many people trained in the academy, I have honed my debate skills; I have learned to think on my feet, to quickly assess and find the weaknesses in opponents' arguments and perspectives. I focus on these weak spots as I champion my own views. Given my progressive politics, as well as my status as a woman of color in the academy, this oppositionality has seemed vital for my survival. However, after living so intimately with *This Bridge Called My Back*, working with Gloria on *this bridge we call home*, and reflecting on my personal and professional life thus far, I have come to realize that my oppositional politics have inhibited my growth, damaged my health, threatened my relationships, and harmed me in other ways.

Ironically, I arrived at this realization while editing *this bridge we call home*. Excited about the book's progress and in awe of the brilliant women and men participating in our project, Gloria and I wanted to provide a virtual space

for everyone to meet and exchange ideas. To facilitate community building and dialogue, we started a listserv for all contributors. Although many contributors used the listserv to share insights and express their excitement about our project, a few people reacted violently when they learned that Gloria and I would be including contributions by people who do not identify as “women of color” in the book. The anger was visceral and shocking as several contributors expressed their intense disappointment that our new book would not provide the same type of “safe” women-of-color-only space as that provided by *This Bridge Called My Back*. I still do not fully understand the dynamics, but these reactions shifted from sorrow to aggressive anger—directed not toward the editors but instead toward each other. Instead of expressing their anger directly by confronting Gloria and me about our decision to create a radically inclusionary book, the listserv conversation took a strange detour into a volatile debate between pro-Palestinian and pro-Israeli contributors. The rhetoric grew increasingly hateful and hostile; each side treated its “Other” with total disdain, dehumanizing anyone who held an opposing view, refusing to listen and understand their Other’s perspectives. It was a stunning display of oppositional energies, and it made us physically ill. As Anzaldúa writes, “The contentious debates . . . churned a liquid fire in our guts” (2002b, 2).

This painful clash among our contributors led me to reflect on my own oppositional politics and energies. As I carefully monitored my initial reactions, I noted my strong desire to react oppositionally, to fight back, to counter the angry words with my own anger, to meet aggression with aggression, and to give what I was receiving. Our listserv—this beautiful space designed to facilitate visionary planning and bonding—had been hijacked by a few very angry people, and I was angry in turn. I was hurt, and this wound made me furious! I wanted to point out that the hostility was misdirected and should be directed toward Gloria and me; they had been sidetracked. I wanted to scold these contributors; I wanted to remind them of *This Bridge Called My Back*’s radical vision; and I wanted to suggest that they adopt the contributors’ teachings and stop judging each other so harshly. I wanted to respond by attacking those contributors who were slinging hostile words at each other. I was so mad! I composed (but did not send) many angry emails, filled with harsh words and strong critiques of the flaws in both sides’ perspectives—the stereotyping, the othering, and the hate. Instead, I became physically ill, and (after many discussions and much soul-searching), Gloria and I decided to shut down the listserv.

My illness forced me to slow down and reflect on the angry debate. Through this reflection and conversations with Gloria, I was reminded of the limitations in oppositional strategies. Our experiences illustrated Irene Lara's assertion: "Standing in rigid opposition is a strategy for survival, but it has also killed us and will continue to sever our souls and assail our hearts. Western binary oppositions wound us in many ways. . . . Feeding the interests of the dominant, these false splits keep us from ourselves, each other, and our visible and invisible world" (2002, 434).<sup>14</sup> Because binary oppositions have their source in the dominating culture and support its values and worldviews, our oppositional politics are not as transformative as we might assume.

Based on either/or thinking and dualistic ("us" against "them") models of identity, this binary-oppositional approach reinforces the status quo. Oppositional logic reduces our interactional possibilities to two mutually exclusive options: either our views are entirely the same or they are entirely different. In this either/or system, differences of opinion and differing worldviews become monolithic, rigid, and divisive. When we examine the world through this binary lens, we assume that the differences between our views and those of others are too different—too *other*, as it were—to have *anything* (of importance) in common. This assumption keeps us trapped within our existing ideas and beliefs, for it prevents us from developing new forms of knowledge and new alliances. After all, if we're so busy defending our own views, where is the room for complexity, compromise, and exchange? How can we possibly learn from social-justice theorists who hold views different from our own?

Positing radical interconnectivity, I am shifting my politics and pedagogy from oppositional to holistic approaches. In my classrooms, interdependence offers alternative epistemologies and serves as a crucial point of departure for teaching about and enacting social justice. Exposing the limitations in status-quo stories about self-enclosed identities, I invite students to examine both our radical interconnectedness and the ways this interconnectivity makes us accountable—on multiple levels and in multiple ways. This recognition, when it occurs, encourages us to develop new alliances. As Anzaldúa explains, "The knowledge that we are in symbiotic relationship to all that exists and co-creators of ideologies—attitudes, beliefs, and cultural values—motivates us to act collaboratively" (2002b, 2).

However, these collaborative actions will only succeed when we begin moving beyond binary thinking and dualistic self/other identities, which brings me to the third lesson I explore.

LESSON #3: THE IMPORTANCE OF  
LISTENING WITH RAW OPENNESS

We must listen to each other. It sounds so obvious . . . doesn't it? But we (I'm thinking here of feminist scholars and students; however, it applies to those in other social-justice disciplines as well) spend so much time "talking back" (hooks 1989) and "transforming silence into language and action" (Lorde 1984), that we seem to forget the importance of listening—opening ourselves and really *hearing* what others say. This, too, is a lesson found in *This Bridge Called My Back*. As Mitsuye Yamada reminds us, "One of the most insidious ways of keeping women and minorities powerless is to . . . let them speak freely and not listen to them with serious intent" (1983, 40). I interpret the phrase "serious intent" to represent a type of deep listening that takes tremendous effort and requires a willingness to be altered by the words spoken.

Throughout *This Bridge Called My Back* contributors insist on the importance of listening with serious intent—listening carefully, thoughtfully, and humbly, ready to be changed by what they hear. Judit Muscovitch, for example, challenges her Anglo-American women audience to stop tokenizing Latinas and other women of colors and to do their own homework: they must "*read and listen*" to what women of colors have to say (1983, 80, her emphasis). Similarly, in her "Open Letter to Mary Daly," Lorde implies that Daly has not read Lorde's work with an open mind, with the desire to be altered through what she learns. Lorde asks Daly, "Do you ever really read the work of black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations?" (1983, 95). Although these examples, taken on their own, seem to imply a unidirectional approach, where women of colors voice their experiences and concerns as white-raced women silently hear what is said, listening with raw openness is multidirectional. We need numerous overlapping dialogues among all beings. We need dialogues where listeners do not judge each other based on appearance or in other ways jump to conclusions but instead just open up their minds and listen.

I describe this deep listening as *listening with raw openness* to underscore its difficult, potentially painful dimensions. When we listen with raw openness we make ourselves vulnerable: we risk being wounded. Peeling back our defensive barriers, we expose ourselves (our identities, our beliefs, and our worldviews) to change. By so doing, we learn new, sometimes shocking truths about ourselves and others. As Anzaldúa suggests, we open "the gate to the stranger, within and without" (2002b, 3).

Listening with raw openness begins with the belief in our interrelatedness, with the willingness to posit and seek commonalities—defined not as sameness but as intertwined differences and possible points of connection. It requires that we make space for what Anzaldúa describes as “an unmapped common ground” (2002a, 570). As the word “unmapped” suggests, this common ground cannot be narrowly labeled or described. Resisting the certainty of precise definition, it must be created tentatively and (perhaps) temporarily, through our interactions. We posit commonalities and step out on faith; we engage in conversations and investigate what we might have in common as we listen to and explore each other’s positions.

Like most academic sites, feminist classrooms, conferences, and listservs often operate according to the binary-oppositional politics I described earlier in this essay. In these situations, we can be very quick to judge each other—often in negative, extremely harsh terms.<sup>15</sup> Yet these judgments are driven by overly simplistic, status-quo thinking based on stereotypes that invite us to look at a person, label her, and categorize her based on these labels. We assume that we fully know her position, motivations, values, and beliefs: we *know* her . . . because of her appearance and the identity groups to which she seems to belong, because of her previous comments, because of her overly assertive tone, or because of other such external signs. Okay, maybe we *do* know what she’ll say, but can we be certain that we will fully understand what she means? Do we thoroughly know the intentions and desires behind her words? My point here is when we assume that we entirely know this other person/this other group, we stop listening “with serious intent.” After all, if “I know you,” then I don’t need to listen to your words. I’ve heard them already, I’ve heard them many times, and so I’ll just react. I will dismiss your words and perspective while loudly repeating my own views.

Listening with raw openness demands intellectual humility—the willingness to embrace uncertainty, contradiction, and limitation, coupled with the willingness to self-reflect. Our understanding is always partial and incomplete. How could it be otherwise? To imply that we already have 100 percent accurate and complete information and/or knowledge about another person or situation prevents intellectual growth. I believe that we should remain open to learning more, and acknowledging the possibility of limitations in our views. Through this acknowledgment, we expand our views and enhance our learning. In my epistemology, openness to change is one of the primary ways that new knowledge is created.

Applied to those we encounter, this intellectual humility demands that we recognize each individual’s “complex personhood”: every person we en-

counter has a specific, highly intricate history, an upbringing and life experiences that we cannot fully know. We don't know the forces that shaped her and, at best, we can only partially ascertain her intentions and desires.<sup>16</sup> We will misunderstand, despite our best efforts. Perhaps some misunderstanding is inevitable. Here again *This Bridge Called My Back* is instructive. Despite the editors' desire to create an inclusionary space for all radical women of colors, they did not fully achieve their goal. *This Bridge Called My Back* has absences, gaps, silences, and spaces where marked but invisible others do not appear. As Deborah Miranda (2002) notes, the collection does not adequately represent Native women, and as Nada Elia (2002) points out, it totally ignores women of Arab descent. There are other omissions as well. Even our best intentions can fall short. What might we learn if we could view errors—when acknowledged with grace—as pathways for growth, avenues that lead to fuller understanding?

*We stand at a major threshold in the extension of consciousness, caught in the remolinos (vortices) of systemic change across all fields of knowledge. The binaries of colored/white, female/male, mind/body are collapsing. Living in nepantla, the overlapping space between different perceptions and belief systems, you are aware of the changeability of racial, gender, sexual, and other categories rendering the conventional labelings obsolete. Though these markings are outworn and inaccurate, those in power continue using them to single out and negate those who are "different" because of color, language, notions of reality, or other diversity.*

—GLORIA ANZALDÚA

As Anzaldúa suggests, we live at a nexus point, or what she calls *nepantla*, the Nahuatl word meaning "in-between space." For Anzaldúa, *nepantla* represents an unstable, unpredictable, precarious, and transitional space/time/epistemology lacking clear boundaries, directions, or definitions. During *nepantla*, our status-quo stories and comfortable self-conceptions are shattered as apparently fixed categories—whether based on gender, ethnicity/"race," sexuality, religion, nationality, or some combination of these categories and perhaps others as well—unravel. Boundaries become more permeable and begin breaking down. This loosening of previously restrictive labels, while intensely painful, can create shifts in consciousness and transgressive opportunities for change.

I find this shift in Anzaldúa's own thinking, where she transforms the oppositional politics and intersectional identities of *This Bridge Called My Back*

into increasingly holistic politics and identities in her twenty-first-century writings. Thus in the above epigraph, drawn from Anzaldúa's 2002 essay, "now let us shift," Anzaldúa describes conventional identity categories as "obsolete," "outworn," and "inaccurate." As she investigates the "changeability" in these categories and labels, she questions and begins to transform the clear-cut distinctions between women "of color" and "white," asserting that "whiteness may not be applied to all whites, as some possess women-of-color-consciousness, just as some women of color bear white consciousness" (2002b, 2). I want to underscore the radical nature of Anzaldúa's provocative claim. By emphasizing consciousness, she shifts from the external (culturally-imposed racialized categories) to the internal (self-selected ways of thinking and acting). This shift, in turn, enables her to envision inclusionary communities that simultaneously draw from and move beyond the oppositional politics employed by most academics and activist scholars.

Unfortunately, however, few theorists are willing to blur boundaries and question oppositional politics in such extreme ways. Although we "deconstruct" some of our old worldviews and theories, we still cling to identity-based labels and claim the power of self-naming in the face of erasure. Look! Even in this essay—an essay designed to *interrogate* these social categories—I've only somewhat loosened my own grip on them!

Our collective resistance to change leads me to describe this current theoretical moment as a space/time of *nepantla*. For me, *nepantla* also represents a crossroads of sorts—a space/time with many options: we can remain where we are, locked within the narrow safety of status-quo stories, fixed identities, and oppositional politics. We can try to protect ourselves by actively resisting change. (After all, who knows what the future will bring, if we give up our old worldviews?) We can reinforce the existing categories, and perhaps even create a few new ones. Or, we can move in an extremely different direction. We can let go of our old worldviews and step out on faith, attempting to create the world we envision. We can question the barriers that (seem to) divide us. We can risk listening with raw openness. We can stretch feminism to new places.

To be sure, we have no maps, no clear-cut plans, and no definitive solutions. However, I am convinced that these lessons from *This Bridge Called My Back*—making connections through differences, forging an ethics of radical interconnectedness, and listening with raw openness—offer guidelines for those of us interested in stretching feminist theorizing in new directions, moving beyond intersectionality into radical interconnectivity.

## NOTES

I dedicate this essay to Gloria Anzaldúa and the contributors to, as well as the spirit of, *This Bridge Called My Back*. *Mil gracias* to the students in my Fall 2007 U.S. Women of Colors graduate course for reading and commenting on an earlier draft of this essay.

1. For the most recent example of *This Bridge*'s iconic status, see the 2007 annual conference of the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA), which featured a tribute panel to *This Bridge* as part of the main events.

2. I borrow the phrase "women of colors" from Indigo Violet and use it, rather than the more commonly used phrase "women of color," to underscore the diversity within this collection.

3. For additional critiques of mainstream scholars' superficial treatment of *This Bridge*, see Franklin, "Recollecting" and Aanerud, "Thinking Again."

4. For more on core beliefs see Reginald Robinson: "A core belief flows from feelings and imaginations, and ordinary people reinforce this belief through words and deeds. From this core belief, ordinary people co-create their experiences and realities. Core beliefs, experiences, and realities are concentric circles, overlapping and indistinguishable" ("Human Agency," 1370).

5. See Keating, *Teaching Transformation*, especially chapter 1, for more on status-quo stories.

6. For an exploration of the ways we co-create our racial reality, see Robinson, "Race Consciousness," and for an extensive discussion of the problems with racialized status-quo stories, see my *Teaching Transformation*.

7. For critiques of self-enclosed individualism, see Leela Fernandes, *Transforming Feminist Practice* and Keating, *Teaching Transformation*.

8. For specific examples of these difference-inflected commonalities, see Mirtha Quintanales's letter to Barbara Smith, "I Paid Very Hard." In it, Quintanales fearlessly explores difference while drawing parallels between her experiences as an "essentially middle-class (and white-skinned woman)" immigrant from Cuba and the experiences of women she describes as "black," "Third World," "white, poor, and working-class." See also Audre Lorde's "Open Letter to Mary Daly," where Lorde posits a series of commonalities with Daly while, simultaneously, challenging Daly to recognize profound differences among women.

9. For some of Anzaldúa's later versions of *El Mundo Zurdo*, see her *Interviews/Entrevistas*, "now let us shift," and "Counsels from the Firing."

10. Note the change in spelling from "El Mundo Surdo" to "El Mundo Zurdo." The shift from "s" to "z" in the word "Zurdo" occurred when *This Bridge Called My Back* was in press. Although Anzaldúa was not pleased with this alteration, eventually she accepted and adopted it. For more on this issue see her archives, located at the Nettie Lee Benson Latin American Collection at the University of Texas, Austin.

11. I explore Anzaldúa's holistic worldview in more detail in "Shifting Perspectives."

12. See for instance Anzaldúa's discussions of interconnectivity in *Interviews/Entrevistas*, especially in her interviews from the early 1980s.

13. These manuscripts can be found in the Benson Collection, University of Texas, Austin.

14. See also Jacqui Alexander: “We are in fact interdependent, neither separate nor autonomous. As human beings, we have a sacred connection to one another, and this is why enforced separations wreak havoc on our souls. There is great danger . . . in living lives of segregation. Racial segregation. Segregation in politics. Segregated frameworks. Segregated, compartmentalized selves. Our oppositional politic has been necessary, but it will never sustain us; while it may give us some temporary gains . . . it can never ultimately feed that deep place within us: that space of the erotic, that space of the soul, that space of the Divine” (“Remembering This Bridge,” 99).

15. For discussions of these difficult classroom/conference politics, see Fernandes Cervenak et al., “Imagining Differently” and Anzaldúa’s “En rapport, In Opposition.”

16. I borrow the idea of complex personhood from Cervenak et al., “Imagining Differently,” who borrowed it from Avery Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*.

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Intersectionality and the Risk  
of Flattening Difference  
*Gender and Race Logics, and the Strategic Use  
of Antiracist Singularity*

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RACHEL E. LUFT

Intersectionality has become de rigueur in feminist studies, and rightly so. Twenty-five years of feminist scholarship, primarily by women of color, have shown the descriptive, analytic, and moral inadequacies of single-issue approaches to both studying and changing the social world (Collins 1995, 1998, 2004; Combahee River Collective 1982; Crenshaw 1995; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983). Yet there can be unintended consequences to the blanket application of intersectionality. Uniform deployment may inadvertently contribute to flattening the very differences intersectional approaches intend to recognize. Flattening, in turn, impedes intersectional social change.

In this essay I argue that significant differences in the current dominant logics of gender and race<sup>1</sup> call for strategically different approaches to feminist and antiracist practice in certain settings when the aim is social change. Specifically, I suggest that the abiding essentialism of mainstream gender ideology is best deconstructed with intersectionality; however, “color blindness,” as the ruling logic of what scholars call the post–civil rights period of new racism (Collins 2004), sometimes requires contingent, race-only methods for antiracist results. As a response to contemporary gender and race formations, my argument is an attempt to rehistoricize intersectionality by

rooting it in the specific context of the present era. A toolkit of effective feminist, antiracist resistance strategies must be historically calibrated. I suggest that today's intersectional, tactical repertoire should include within it the periodic use of single-issue tactics.

In the section that follows I set the stage for this discussion by warning against the risks of flattening difference that can accompany the universally applied, uncritical practice of intersectionality. My concern is that as intersectionality becomes the new standard among progressives—for example, women's studies faculty, liberal nonprofits, Left-movement activists—it is increasingly operationalized across the board in ways that neutralize the specific projects of feminism and antiracism. I set the parameters for this analysis by focusing on applied intersectionality, at what I call the microlevel of intervention. The central argument appears in the subsequent section, where I compare contemporary gender and racial formations in order to demonstrate their different ruling logics. In light of these differences, I suggest that intersectionality in the service of consciousness change should not be applied universally but instead should be engaged strategically and differentially. While the current gender formation calls for intersectionality, at times the current racial formation is best met with the temporary deployment of singular, race-centric methods. Though this is not true in every case—most antiracism work, as with everything else, is best served by intersectional analysis and methods—there is an important domain of antiracist resistance that will benefit from tactics tailored to its particular features. Those of us who teach courses about intersectionality or race to predominantly white students, for example, are familiar with the challenges presented when they deny that race matters and that racism exists, while also insisting on stereotypical patterns. A better understanding of the racial logic that informs this consciousness will further both intersectional and antiracist intervention.

I expand on the notion of strategic singularity by drawing on a contemporary case study of single-issue politics, the antiracism workshop movement. I analyze its methods in light of the racial logic of color blindness, and examine the internalization of this logic at the level of consciousness and identity. It is this internalization, I claim, that should inform the practice of intersectionality in microresistance strategies. I conclude by suggesting that a strategically singular approach to antiracist consciousness-raising in the post-civil rights age is an important corrective to a uniform, ahistorical application of intersectional resistance strategies.

INTERSECTIONALITY: MICROLEVELS OF INTERVENTION  
AND THE RISK OF FLATTENING DIFFERENCE

Coined by legal theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 (Crenshaw 1995, 378n5) and popularized by Patricia Hill Collins, intersectionality “denotes the various ways in which [social forces] interact to shape the multiple dimensions” of experience (Crenshaw 1995, 358). While intersectionality is often used to “describe [the] micro level processes” of identity, Collins reminds us that ultimately intersectionality reflects “the notion of interlocking oppressions [which] refers to the macro level connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class, and gender” (Collins 1995, 492). The best intersectional work utilizes intersectionality as an analytic framework that starts from this assumption about structure, power, and multiplicity, and then operationalizes it as a methodological principle for taking multiple interactive processes into account (Bettie 2003; Grewal 2005; Roberts 1999).

As a white, feminist, antiracist, intersectionality scholar, I share this understanding of the ongoing, interactive, and productive nature of the social forces that shape individual life, patterns of oppression and privilege, and institutions. However, I have also come to believe that emphasizing the simultaneous and interactive workings of gender, race, and other axes of identity and oppression is not always the most effective approach in certain contexts when the aim is intervention. By intervention here I mean intentional acts of resistance, designed to interrupt hegemonic attitudes or practices regarding gender and/or race. Intersectionality is a crucial premise when seeking broad interventions, such as the demystification work of cultural or textual analysis, the enactment of social policy, the transformation of institutional norms, or mass social-movement building. The same is not true, however, for the early stages of microlevel interventions. By early stages I mean the introductory process of deconstructing and demythologizing gender and race. By microlevel I mean the live, interactive engagement of individuals and small groups, such as in settings like the university classroom, popular forms of political education, consciousness-raising groups, antioppression workshops, and some modes of grassroots organizing. By focusing on microlevel interventions I do not intend to distract social change attention away from the structural origins of inequality. The question is not whether political education and consciousness-raising will end oppression—surely they will not, as attitude studies indicate (Schuman et al. 1997)—but rather whether educators, trainers, organizers, and organizational leaders

are being as effective as we can be with the opportunities for microintervention that we have in the course of our daily work. I return to the importance of this site of resistance in a later section.

My argument is that intersectionality is not the most strategic methodological principle for the early stages of microinterventions when the objective includes antiracist consciousness change. In a post-civil rights context in which color blindness is the abiding ethos, race must be centrally and singularly figured simply in order to (re)introduce it to conscious discourse. I am not arguing here that race is a more fundamental form of oppression than gender (Mann 2000, 475) but that its current logic of domination requires an exceptional logic of resistance at the level of individual consciousness. Intersectional work that employs gender, race, and other terms simultaneously in these settings may serve to neutralize the significance of race because of its contemporary iteration, thereby reproducing its hegemony. It is on these grounds that my position seeks to rehistoricize intersectionality.

As intersectional frameworks have been accepted—at least rhetorically—by large swaths of the progressive Left in the last decade, they have been taken up by a range of actors, from women’s studies faculty, to gender and race workshop leaders, to movement activists, etc. This popularization promises to correct the shortcomings of single-issue approaches.<sup>2</sup> But the merit of intersectionality as an analytic frame does not necessarily translate into the efficacy of operationalizing it as a methodology in all settings. Applying intersectionality as the new feminist, antiracist default runs two risks. The first is that those of us who use it this way may be unintentionally contributing to the backlash we see in our classrooms, institutions, and coalitions. Here backlash may look like entrenchment, factionalism, or withdrawal. We can do this despite the accuracy of any information we offer, if our delivery does not take into account the logic of the system in which we are trying to intervene. Indeed, that logic is so clever it feeds on some of our well-intended efforts.

The second risk is the appropriation of “race, class, and gender” language for the progressive currency it brings, without attendant antiracist, anticlassist, and antisexist practices. As more movement actors adopt intersectional frameworks without substantive pursuit of intersectional aims—whether out of naiveté or a more insidious adherence to hegemonic investments—the disconnect contributes to mystification and cooptation. Empirical exploration of these claims is a worthy pursuit for intersectional scholars (Luft and Ward forthcoming). For my purposes here, the argument

I am raising relies on a general assessment of cultural and strategic shifts in feminist pedagogy and antioppression movement activity in recent years. In this way I situate the university classroom in the broader climate of popular ideology and progressive mobilization.

Several years after her initial work on intersectionality, Patricia Hill Collins became concerned about the risk of flattening difference in the very process of attempting to highlight it and warned against creating a “new myth of equivalent oppressions” (Collins 1998, 211). She asserted that race and gender “represent two divergent ways of constructing groups” and noted in particular that “most African American women would identify race as . . . fundamental” (Collins 1998, 209–10). Other feminists of color have observed this tendency as well (Anzaldúa 1990), and while they refer to the nature of white supremacy to account for it, they do not mention the specific logic of color blindness. I add to this account by suggesting that it is the way in which race today is enacted and perceived in the popular consciousness that determines its impact and that should inform feminist, antiracist strategies of resistance. I am not disagreeing with the analytic merit of intersectionality, for I believe there *are* multiple dimensions of social life operating in every micromoment. Rather, I am questioning the methodological wisdom of applying it universally when the aim is consciousness transformation.

My position that feminist and antiracist interventions should not always draw from the same intersectional guidelines is based on two arguments. The first is that gender and race systems run according to different logics which are not mutually reducible. The second is that these logics inform the reception of intervention efforts and that by understanding these processes we can tailor resistance strategies to better navigate them. To be effective, feminist and antiracist intervention efforts must take into account both the ruling logics and their implications for the tactics of resistance. The next two sections address each of these positions in turn.

#### GENDER AND RACE FORMATIONS: DIFFERENTIAL LOGICS

My claim that feminist and antiracist interventions should not always draw from the same intersectional guidelines follows from my assessment that patriarchy and white supremacy do not run on the same oppression track. While sharing some general features—such as an ideology of essential difference, hierarchy, and the exploitation of labor—patriarchy and white supremacy are differently constituted systems of oppression. In order to make a case for strategically different antisexist and antiracist microlevel interventions,

I will briefly identify key differences in gender and racial systems of oppression and their ruling logics. I focus on the contemporary period that began at the end of the movement era of the 1960s. There is an irony and a risk in typifying an entire era in a work that understands the lessons of intersectionality, for “one of the concerns frequently aroused by the periodizing hypothesis is that these tend to obliterate difference and to project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity” (Jameson 1997, 3–4). Gender and racial logics are themselves multiple and intersect other ruling discourses. It is nonetheless important to identify key features of ruling regimes, for “if we do not achieve some general sense of a cultural dominant, then we fall back into a view of present history as sheer heterogeneity. . . . [Instead, the aim is] to project some conception of a . . . systematic cultural norm . . . in order to reflect more adequately on the most effective forms of any radical cultural politics today” (Jameson 1997, 6).

Both patriarchy and white supremacy rely on the construction and exaggeration of essential difference. As a central tool in the maintenance of each system, difference, whether biological or social, is the rationalization for hierarchy, exclusion, objectification, exploitation, and disenfranchisement. Nineteenth-century feminist and antiracist resistance activities in the United States frequently accepted essential difference between women and men and between whites and people of color but argued that this difference should not preclude fair treatment (Rosenberg 1992; Takaki 1990). By the middle of the twentieth century most feminist and antiracist movements had changed strategies and were rooting their arguments in the negation of difference, or essential sameness (King 1957; Scott 1994). If hierarchy depended on difference, difference would be deconstructed. Since the movement period of the 1960s, however, there has been a significant divergence in the respective ruling logics of dominant racial and gender formations.

In Michael Omi and Howard Winant’s now classic formulation, a racial formation is “the sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (Omi and Winant 1994, 55). In particular, it describes the “social, economic and political forces [which] determine the content and importance of racial categories and by which they are in turn shaped by racial meanings” (Omi and Winant 2007, 24). Every historical period constitutes its own racial formation(s), which are sustained by racial projects that do “the ideological ‘work’ of making [the] . . . linkage between structure and representation” (Omi and Winant 1994, 56).

Relatedly, feminist scholarship has theorized sex and gender in impor-

tant articulations such as the “sex/gender system” (Rubin 1975), “gender regimes” (Connell 1987), and the “gender system” (Lorber 1994). In order to maintain a coherent framework for comparing racial and gender logics, and because Omi and Winant’s use of “formation” pithily establishes the historical, structural, and discursive nature of power constellations, I use the term “gender formation” to refer to the sociohistorical processes by which gender categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed.

If gender and racial formations are a complex of social, economic, and political forces, then gender and racial logics are the ideological rules by which these forces operate. Fredric Jameson uses the term “cultural logic” to describe the “social and mental habits” of an era, “the collective consciousness of a . . . system” (Jameson 1997, xiv, xix). Gender and race logics are composed of ideologies that reflect “the broad mental and moral frameworks, or ‘grids,’ that social groups use to make sense of the world, to decide what is right and wrong, true or false” (Bonilla-Silva 2001, 62).

The period since the movements of the 1960s has produced contradictory economic patterns for both women and people of color. There are higher percentages of women in the labor market and increasing numbers of women in the professions, in conjunction with the feminization of poverty and the greatest rollback in social welfare programs since their creation in the early twentieth century. Similarly within communities of color an elite sector has penetrated the electoral politics, professions, and neighborhoods of white America, while the majority of people of color remain far below whites, according to most indicators of well-being (Blank 2007). Indeed, along several of the most significant measures, people of color are faring worse than they were before the civil rights movement (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Marable 1983, 2000). Women continue to experience economic exploitation, structural exclusion, social paternalism, state regulation, and male violence; in addition to these forms of oppression people of color also face the terrors of state violence. Women of color who live at the nexus of these oppressive regimes experience the multiplicative, interactive effects of these mechanisms of social control. The purpose of this overview is to identify the common contours of the current gender and racial formations.

Western gender and racial ideologies that attend these structural developments are rooted in histories of essential difference. Gender and race essentialisms construct, highlight, and exaggerate differences between the sexes and between races. Overwhelmingly attributed to nature, these differences have rationalized a great variety of social structures and arrangements. Despite this fundamental similarity, gender and race logics differ from each

other in every historical context. In the rest of this section I explore one particular distinction in the postmovement period.

## Gender

While the sex/gender line is drawn differently today than it was a hundred or a thousand years ago, the line between the sexes—the assertion of sex/gender difference—is still the foundation of the sex/gender system (Rubin 1975). The tireless efforts of sociobiologists to find new biological origins for gendered behavior, the popular self-help publications printed every year that assure women and men that a return to their “natural” roles will bring happiness and successful heterosexual relationships, and the market’s insistent reproduction of occupational segregation attest to an ongoing popular obsession with essential gender difference and its “natural” manifestations.

In the context of this prevailing gender essentialism, the postfeminist era (Steinem et al. 1993)<sup>3</sup> beginning in the 1980s has been characterized by a common-sense assumption that structural barriers to gender equity have been overwhelmingly eliminated. Young white women and some women of color, in an echo of popular beliefs, frequently proclaim their freedom to create themselves, to be and do anything they choose. This individualistic account of social opportunity is consistent with dominant American ideologies of individualism and meritocracy. It functions to obscure structural gender inequity as well as interpersonal sexist mechanisms. Together, gender essentialism and the abiding myth of individualism serve to explain disparate gender outcomes as some contradictory combination of “nature” and personal choice. The dominant logic of the current gender formation consists of enduring gender essentialism and the denial of ongoing macro- and microgender inequality.

In the face of this “postfeminist” gender formation, feminist political education and consciousness-raising efforts are usually driven by a two-part strategy: debunk difference and expose inequality. Most Americans argue ontological difference, and feminism responds first with the theory of social construction, seeking to minimize and reinterpret difference, and second with an exposé of systemic inequality. The main exceptions to this discursive pattern since the 1970s have been the cultural feminism of the second wave and some transgendered individuals now, both of which reassert essential difference and root gender in the body. The genderqueer movement has already undermined the latter’s tendencies, however, and argues for a more radically fluid and performative understanding of gender (Nestle, Howell, and Wilchins 2002).

## Race

The post–civil rights racial logic has displayed a more wily, recuperative bent than the contemporaneous gender logic. Whereas gender essentialism is still normative, racial essentialism has become unfashionable since the civil rights movement. Contemporary race scholars refer to new, post–civil rights social desirability norms which consist of (1) the social rejection of prejudice and the resulting individual need to assert the lack of prejudice, and (2) the social denial of the structural presence of race and the resulting individual need to assert the lack of individual and institutional race noticing, or color blindness (Bonilla-Silva 2001; Collins 2004; Dovidio and Gaertner 1986; Schuman et al. 1997). These norms have become linked in the popular American consciousness, and the association goes something like this: *Prejudice is bad. Even to acknowledge any kind of racial difference between people implies racial hierarchy. Therefore the denial of difference indicates the lack of prejudice, which is good.* The moral cadence here is an important constitutive dimension.

Since the 1970s social psychologists have documented the ambivalence white Americans have for people of color despite the new social desirability norms, and the cognitive dissonance this ambivalence produces in an era in which racial bigotry is morally repugnant (Dovidio and Gaertner 1986). Together ambivalence and dissonance produce a moral, emotional, and identity investment in color blindness, though the pretense of color blindness is that it is cognitive (“I don’t even see skin color”). The average white American can undertake impressive linguistic contortions to assert color blindness and therefore the moral virtue that accompanies it: “You see the guy over there, no the one wearing jeans, no the other one wearing jeans, the one with the black curly hair. . . .” Color blindness is central to the post–civil rights formation contemporary race scholars call “modern,” “symbolic,” or “new” racism (Schuman et al. 1997).

As with the prevailing postfeminist assumption that structural inequality and the microrelations of sexism ended with the second wave of the women’s movement, so does the post–civil rights period obscure the racialization of structural opportunity and most aspects of daily life. I have suggested that the dominant contemporary gender logic includes both gender essentialism and the facade of structural equity. In the face of the latent contradiction here between difference and sameness, difference trumps: inequality is still explained by difference, whether essential or personal choice. The dominant contemporary race logic, however, has an additional twist in the vehe-

ment rejection of the *appearance* of essentialism. Where most Americans will claim some belief in gender difference, most white Americans and some people of color will insist there is no racial difference, even as whites harbor a host of racialized stereotypes and associated feelings they now attribute to culture (Schuman et al. 1997).

Color blindness, therefore, as the core racial logic of the post–civil rights period, claims to dissolve racial difference while masking the mechanisms of racial inequality. In this way color blindness is the reigning racial project—“linking discourse and structure”—of the post–civil rights era. In the face of this ruling logic, contemporary race scholars and movement actors devote much of their time proving the existence of ongoing racial inequality, indeed, of proving the existence of “race” itself. The assertion of (structural, experiential, and cultural) difference is often the first and most laborious step of antiracist activity.

In a loose comparison of current gender and racial formations, both consist of ongoing systemic obstacles to equity, and both are supported by ideologies that claim these obstacles do not exist. What distinguishes gender and racial formations for my purposes here is the current logic of difference. While some level of gender essentialism is relatively ubiquitous and uncontroversial in contemporary American society, racial essentialism is repressed, framed as cultural difference, and sublimated to color blindness. This cognitive, moral, and emotional racial logic calls for a precise intervention strategy.

#### THE LOGIC OF SINGLE-ISSUE POLITICS

In this section I make the case that the specific modality of political intervention should inform the choice of tactics. Text, policy, the classroom, and the coalition, as varied sites of intervention, command different processes of resistance and counterresistance. How hegemony and resistance operate on and in an individual differs, depending on whether the individual is positioned in any given moment as reader, citizen, student, or activist. I am suggesting that interventions that happen through macro, impersonal, or noninteractive mediums—text, policy, mass-movement building—usually need intersectionality (especially when centered on gender). Those that create introductory, interactive experiences—the classroom, a workshop, some coalitions—must selectively navigate intersectional and single-issue approaches (especially when dealing with race). This argument applies to white and multiracial settings. In all or predominantly people of color settings, where there is far less adherence to color blindness and far more agree-

ment that race matters, intersectionality is an important inoculation against the perpetuation of other hierarchies within communities of color. Indeed, people who advance race-only positions in the latter settings are likely to do so at the expense of women of color (Stansell 1992).<sup>4</sup>

After years of immersion in intersectional theory and politics that I came to through feminism, I was first confronted with the strategic<sup>5</sup> use of single-issue politics while conducting fieldwork on antiracism training organizations between 1998 and 2003. Antiracism training organizations (DeRosa 1994; Shapiro 2002) are run by racial-justice organizers who use a workshop to further antiracist activity in communities and organizations. Unlike their mainstream diversity management counterparts who want to manage diversity in order to preserve institutional harmony and efficiency (Gordon 1995), antiracism trainers aim to “undo racism” by starting with an analysis of power, history, and privilege. They consider themselves political organizers and movement builders and are quite explicit about their singular focus on race, which forms a core part of their methodology.

At the start of each workshop, many antiracism trainers communicate a “contract” of workshop rules.<sup>6</sup> In addition to general workshop guidelines is the injunction to “Focus on racism.” Discussion of gender or sexism, class or classism, religion, etc. will only happen in the context of racism. Anything else will be considered “escapism.” And indeed, when participants raise matters having to do with other oppressions or identities, trainers steer them back to the issue of race and racism. They claim that such references operate to dilute the attention to racism, which then ends up weakening antiracism efforts, as well as coalitions easily divided by racism. They believe that single-issue racial politics are necessary to catalyze antiracism during the early period of exposure, and that intersectionality is for a later developmental stage, once individuals and groups are avowedly, trustworthily antiracist.

While participant observing my first trainings, every time I heard the injunction against escapism I experienced a good intersectional theorist’s shock that contemporary political activists would be willing to make such a claim. After dozens of workshops in various parts of the country, however, I came to see that the term escapism was descriptive more than theoretical or political, and actually quite accurate. When a white woman made a statement about gender in a race workshop, or a white man a point about class, regardless of whatever substantive merit the comment had, its *function* in the training was indeed almost always to reroute the discussion away from race. These remarks would exceptionalize the speaker, excluding them from the class of whiteness the trainers were trying to establish in their attempt to

introduce the materiality of group identity. Participants of color rarely raised questions of gender or class in these settings, and when they did it almost never challenged the issue on the table regarding race. However, when a white woman made a point about gender, a white man a point about class, or a white Jew a point about anti-Semitism, the effect was overwhelmingly to triangulate race or racism, to refute the notion of race's ubiquity, and thereby to remove the speaker from accountability to whiteness or racial privilege (Luft 2004).

The introduction of gender, class, ethnicity, and other forms of difference served in these interactive settings as a release valve for the intensity of personal confrontation with racism and antiracism. According to anti-racism trainers, that confrontation with one's personal implicatedness in a racial system—the fact that *everyone* is racialized according to a hierarchy of advantage and disadvantage, and that other identity categories do not neutralize this fact—is a necessary developmental stage in the process of racial reeducation, racial identity transformation, and ultimately behavioral change.

The following example helps to illustrate the practical uses of singular antiracism methods as they are used in antiracism trainings. At an important moment in a People's Institute for Survival and Beyond training in Seattle in 1999, a white male trainer asked what appeared to be a rhetorical question: "What is the dominant culture in the U.S.?" As expected, participants called out the usual list of answers, including the following sequence: "white," "male," "white male." Instead of agreeing, however, the trainer pushed back: "Did we (white men) drop out of the sky? Aren't we part of a culture (of whiteness)?" He wanted to be sure that white women were implicated in the reproduction of whiteness and racial privilege as well. The training model rests on a notion of white collective inheritance as antidote to the illusion of a naturalized white "nonracialism" (Winant 2004). At this moment in the training, a white woman associate, one of the local liaison organizers jumped in, as if on cue: "Don't we as white *women* benefit from a lot of what white men benefit from?"

The function of this exercise and others like it is to create a cognitive confrontation with a white collective identity momentarily undifferentiated by gender (or social class, ethnicity, etc.) that, the trainers hope, white participants will accept as descriptive of their lives. The bottom line of this lesson is not that race trumps gender but that, however interactive, neither does gender trump race. Gender is temporarily taken out of the equation in order to ensure that white women in particular experience personal and collective

accountability to the racial system. An antiracist white collective racial identity is a prerequisite, antiracism trainers believe, for whites to sustain antiracist practice *in the face of the ruling logic of color blindness*. Racial collectivity is not racial homogeneity, though the latter becomes a temporary teaching device. The kind of resubjectification this confrontation with identity and power aims to elicit happens interactively in small group settings such as these political education workshops, the college classroom, or a coalition.

Certainly, understanding the way in which gender operates as a class is also central to feminism, and locating oneself in the sex/gender system is an important step toward feminist politicization. Additionally patriarchy, like white supremacy, obscures the structural obstacles to equity. Unlike white supremacy, however, the current gender formation continues to affirm gender difference even while offering contradictory messages about its importance. The current racial formation, however, has made color blindness its primary device of mystification.

Single-issue antiracist methods are designed to respond to the particularly “sticky” attachment to color blindness as the post-civil rights social desirability norm. By “sticky” I mean the prevailing emotional and moral investment in the cognitive adherence to nonracialism. According to my fieldwork in antiracism workshops and my personal experience in the classroom, as well as in social-movement literature (Starr 2004), organizational literature (Ward 2008), and a wealth of anecdotal and published feminist and antiracist accounts (Maher and Tetreault 1994), these attachments are exhibited similarly across small group settings: classrooms, political workshops, movement groups, and organizational meetings.

Whites frequently believe that if neither American society nor they are racialized or racist, then the world is fair and they are good. Many people of color attempt to negotiate an experiential understanding of the fact of the racial system, while still wanting to trust that they have a chance. Personal identity becomes linked to some relationship to color blindness, to greater or lesser degrees and in different ways depending on one’s race. Destabilizing color blindness threatens to throw people into cognitive dissonance: if being good (whites), or having chances (people of color), depends on a race-free society, and they are presented with evidence of profound racialization, then either they are no longer good/no longer viable, or the evidence is lying. The attempt to resolve the dissonance—to stay good—leads many whites to defend their fierce attachment to color blindness. Resolving dissonance—believing they have a chance—can lead people of color to protect whatever promise of the American Dream they have salvaged, but most al-

ready have enough clues to its mythology that they deal with dissonance by dropping the trappings of color blindness they have internalized. If offered the tools to resolve dissonance in an antiracist way, however, some whites also emerge from the stage of confrontation with a newfound antiracist race consciousness.

### Operationalizing Difference Differentially

Strategic response to the fact of different ruling logics of gender and race consists of differential approaches to intervention. When the leading issue is gender, such as in gender courses, gender workshops, or organizations devoted to gender issues, a strategy informed by an intersectional analysis of patriarchy consists of a “one-two punch”: deconstructing gender difference and proposing gender interaction with other identities and forces. Both pieces are often shocking to Americans, especially those with several dominant identity categories.

Operationalizing antiracism in the face of dominant racial logics, however, requires a different strategy. If the majority of whites believe—or say they do, or *want* to believe—that race and racism no longer exist, and plenty of people of color maintain some investment in the American Dream, the optimal antiracist strategy must begin by (re)introducing the social fact of racial difference. In a diversity workshop, strategy session for a social-movement group, or race class, for example, as I am (re)introducing the notion of race, I begin by erring on the side of its homogeneity. My objective is to communicate the broad ways in which race works as a collective force on groups, or the power of group membership in American society. Here homogeneity becomes a temporary heuristic. This strategy is also successful with progressives who believe they are already “down with” feminism and antiracism and who may invoke the discourse of intersectionality, while exceptionalizing themselves from the social realities of the particulars it describes.

While gender consciousness-raising begins by debunking difference, racial-justice education must begin by *asserting* it, where “it” is the fact of the active racialization of every aspect of daily life. The development of disparate feminist and antiracist intervention strategies reflects an understanding of disparate gender and race logics and, therefore, of most Americans’ disparate starting assumptions.

This is perhaps easiest to do in the academy, where traditional disciplinary singularity usually divides courses according to gender or race, facilitating the use of an intersectional pedagogy for the former and a race-primary strategy for the latter. In my gender classes, for example, when white women

universalize their race-unconscious experience to all women, I respond with intersectional counterexamples to decenter whiteness. When the same thing happens in my race classes, however, I emphasize race-primary lessons, in order to recenter race, so as to denaturalize it. The differential response to what may be the same student reflects the importance of context and objectives. This already imperfect approach gets even more complicated for those of us teaching race, class, and gender courses, or working within other already explicitly intersectional paradigms. Here we must move fluidly between intersectional and singular tactics, being cognizant of how we may compromise one kind of consciousness-raising opportunity for another, in any given moment. The overall goal is the advancement of feminist and anti-racist intersectionality, through interacting developmental processes. This is the practice of operationalizing intersectionality differentially.

#### CONCLUSION

Feminists of color have argued that neither feminism nor antiracism alone can adequately describe the social world, nor succeed in justly changing it. Intersectionality has been the most important analytic and methodological tool in a generation for linking together discrete social histories, theories, and movements. However, in a general social context of race-consciousness repression, to draw always on the duo “gender and race” when teaching, training, or facilitating feminist, antiracist consciousness-raising can backfire. Offering only intersectional frames in all white or multiracial settings provides the opportunity for people to triangulate race. Triangulation becomes a loophole which frees people from having to resolve the dissonance created by cognitive confrontation with the fact that race still matters, and matters for *them*. In light of the dominant race logic, successful antiracist intervention requires an exceptional, developmental, single-pointed strategy, used in contingent, temporary ways. Race-only methods during the early stages of consciousness-raising for whites or white-majority groups are better able to confront cognitive, emotional, and moral attachments to the ruling racial ideology. In this way they are more likely to ensure more substantive antiracist transformation in the service of the broader, intersectional project of feminist, antiracist social change.

The argument for the strategic use of single-issue methods attempts to rehistoricize intersectionality in the context of the ruling logics of the time. While its analytical virtues are clear, intersectionality’s methodological application will be strengthened with accountability to the setting in which it is being used. As intersectionality at its best is precisely the recognition of

historical specificity, I believe it is vast and flexible enough to include within it the strategic uses of singularity.

#### NOTES

1. Though there are other important axes of power that intersect—class, sexuality, religion, nationality, and disability, to name only the most commonly invoked—in this paper, I focus on gender and race for substantive reasons and hope that the example encourages examination of other categories in this light.

2. By popularization I am not suggesting that intersectionality began as elite theory and trickled down to the masses. Indeed, the concept emerged from the ground up (Combahee River Collective 1982; Evans 1979; Jones 1998). The coinage of the succinct term “intersectionality” has converged with the diffusion of social-movement lessons into the Left and facilitated its usage.

3. I am indebted to Jane Ward and Susan Mann, who reminded me of the importance of this point.

4. Thanks to Elisa Knotts for help in clarifying this distinction.

5. A methodology of strategic singularity is the practical corollary to the notion of strategic essentialism as articulated by Spivak (1984–85) and shares its risks and strengths.

6. Language in this section comes directly from the trainings of the People’s Institute for Survival and Beyond, a national training and organizing collective founded in 1980 and based in New Orleans. Its methodology is also used by other training groups, such as Crossroads Anti-Racism Organizing and Training of Chicago, and Challenging White Supremacy, in San Francisco.

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## Black Women and the Development of Intersectional Health Policy in Brazil

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KIA LILLY CALDWELL

Long considered to be a racial democracy, in recent decades Brazil's image as a racially harmonious society has been severely scrutinized by scholars and antiracist activists.<sup>1</sup> Since the emergence of the black women's movement in the late 1980s, black women have been at the forefront of efforts to challenge racism and promote racial equality in Brazil. Activists in the black women's movement have long argued for the importance of recognizing the ways in which race and gender, and by extension racism and sexism, function as mutually constituting aspects of social identity and experience.

This essay examines black women's attempts to influence health policy development in Brazil and explores the ways in which black women activists have sought to develop a race- and gender-centered perspective on health in the country. My analysis connects feminist conceptualizations of intersectionality that have been developed in the United States with on-the-ground health activism that has been undertaken by black Brazilian women.

This essay uses the paradigm of intersectionality to explore how factors such as race, class, and gender influence African-descendant women's experiences of health and illness.<sup>2</sup> It also examines how an intersectional approach to health policy development can be used to address the specific health needs of African-descendant women in Brazil. The first part of this essay discusses feminist conceptualizations of intersectionality that have been developed in the U.S. context and their utility for examining the health needs of African-descendant women. The second part of this essay provides a framework for conceptualizing racial and ethnic health disparities in Bra-

zil. It also calls attention to the lack of racially specific health data in the country. In the third part, I examine how activists in Brazil's black women's movement have sought to develop intersectional approaches to health. This section profiles several nongovernmental organizations that have developed significant programs focusing on the health of black women. The fourth part of this essay examines the significance of black women's transnational activism, particularly in relation to the Third United Nations World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (WCAR), which was held in 2001. This discussion underscores the ways in which black women have used transnational activism to pressure the Brazilian government to implement health policies that benefit the black population.

#### FEMINIST CONCEPTUALIZATIONS OF INTERSECTIONALITY

While the concept of intersectionality, as formulated by African American feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw, was not originally developed to address issues of health policy, it provides an effective and important means to broaden health policy beyond a race- or gender-only focus.<sup>3</sup> In her work, Crenshaw posits the concept of structural intersectionality to describe how African American women, and other women of color, are positioned within interlocking structures of domination. Crenshaw's discussion of domestic violence underscores the importance of examining the "intersectional location" of women of color when considering the development of policies and remedies to address the social, economic, and political disempowerment of racially dominated groups (1995, 360).

African American feminist sociologist Patricia Hill Collins has further elaborated the concept of intersectionality by examining its significance as a tool for understanding "the ability of social phenomena such as race, class, and gender to mutually construct one another" (1998, 205). As Collins observes, African American women "can be seen both as a group that occupies a distinctive social location within power relations of intersectionality and as one wherein intersectional processes characterize Black women's collective self-definitions and actions" (1998, 205). In Collins's view, intersectionality is most usefully applied as a conceptual framework or heuristic device for examining structural power relations, rather than as a framework for describing "any actual patterns of social organization" (1998, 208). As she notes, "intersectionality provides an interpretive framework for thinking through how intersections of race and class, or race and gender, or sexuality

and class, for example, shape any group's experience across specific social contexts" (1998, 208).

In recent years, a growing number of feminist scholars of health have also begun to openly advocate the use of an intersectional approach in research on health disparities and health policy. Recent work by Lynn Weber and Deborah Parra-Medina argues for the value of intersectional approaches to health, noting, "On the one hand, intersectional approaches complicate the traditional models of health and illness by incorporating more dimensions, situationally specific interpretations, group dynamics and an explicit emphasis on social change. On the other hand, they provide a powerful alternative way of addressing questions about health disparities that traditional approaches have been unsuccessful in answering" (2003, 222).

Lynn Weber's subsequent work has further highlighted the contributions of "social justice-driven health disparities research," arguing that "feminist intersectional scholarship, which is empirically based (that is, resting on direct observation of behavior), not positivist (assuming distance and disengagement between researcher and researched)" suggests new ways to bridge the gap between theory in the academy and social action (2006, 33).

#### CONCEPTUALIZING RACIAL/ETHNIC HEALTH DISPARITIES IN BRAZIL

According to the 2000 national census, the African-descendant population in Brazil was estimated to total 76.4 million, or 45 percent of the total population. Recent demographic data have also shown the size of the African-descendant population to vary from 46 percent to 70 percent (Torres and del Rio 2001, 94). These numerical ranges reflect the difficulties of gathering accurate data on the size of the African-descendant population in Brazil. The use of color categories and the tendency for individuals to lighten or whiten their identities in government surveys has increased the difficulty of assessing the "true" size of the African-descendant population. Based on available data, it is estimated that African-descendant women make up approximately 44 percent of the female population in Brazil.

Socioeconomic indicators demonstrate that Afro-Brazilians are severely disadvantaged in the labor market. A living-standards survey conducted by the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics in 1996–97 found that "white workers in the northeast had an average income 60 percent higher than that of African descendants in the region, whereas in the southeast, whites earn an 83 percent higher average income than African descendants" (Beato 2004, 777). These data point to income disparities between white

Brazilians and Afro-Brazilians and also highlight regional differences in income. As noted in this survey, racial income disparities were higher in the southeast, the most industrialized region of Brazil, than in the northeast, the least industrialized and most impoverished region of the country. Research on black women's placement in the labor market in São Paulo, the largest metropolitan area in Brazil, further underscores racial disparities in income and highlights the gendered aspects of racial income disparities. This study found that, in 2000, "African descendant women earned 39.3 percent, African descendant men 51.8 percent, and white women 74.6 percent of the hourly income earned by white men" (Beato 2004, 777).

Given that people of African descent constitute a sizable percentage of Brazil's overall population and likely constitute the majority of the country's poor, I advocate use of the term *minoritized group*, rather than *minority group*, to describe their status in Brazilian society. Referring to Afro-Brazilians as a minoritized group highlights the ways in which social, economic, and political processes have positioned Brazilians of African descent as a numerically significant group that has largely been excluded from power. However, it is important to note that my use of the term minoritized group contrasts sharply with terminology that has been used by researchers such as Torres and del Rio, who have classified Afro-Brazilians as "the most important minority due to their numbers" (2001, 96, 97). Drawing on critiques of official data collection methods that have been made by black activists and antiracist scholars, I seek to challenge use of the term *minority group* due to its tendency to perpetuate the view that Afro-Brazilians are a numerical minority and that white Brazilians constitute the majority of the national population.<sup>4</sup>

Examining health disparities in Brazil highlights the Afro-Brazilian population's status as a minoritized group. While Brazil has long been considered to be a racial democracy, or a society that accords equal opportunities to all of its citizens, regardless of race or ethnicity, a growing body of research has documented health disparities between white Brazilians and Afro-Brazilians. Beginning in the 1990s, an increasing, though still relatively small, number of researchers began to investigate the health status of Afro-Brazilians.<sup>5</sup> Much of this research was prompted by concerns about health disparities that had long been expressed by activists in the black movement. For nearly two decades, members of Brazil's black movement, particularly black women activists, have called on the government to address the health status of African-descendant men, women, and children as part of the struggle to achieve racial equality. In recent years, various illnesses and health concerns

that have a disproportionate impact on Afro-Brazilians have been identified by scholars and health activists, including sickle cell anemia, type II diabetes, hypertension, and infant mortality. Researchers have also found striking disparities in life expectancy for different color/racial groups in Brazil. Based on data from Brazil's national census for 2000, the life expectancy for the white (*branca*) population was found to be 73.99 years, while the life expectancy for the black (*preta*) population was found to be 67.64 years, and 68.03 years for the brown/mixed-race (*parda*) population. This translates into a 6.35 year difference in life expectancy for the black (*preta*) population and 5.96 years for the brown/mixed-race (*parda*) population, when compared to the white population (Lopes 2005, 25).

Racial/ethnic disparities in health are further compounded for Afro-Brazilian women by gender-specific conditions and illnesses. When compared to white women, Afro-Brazilian women have been disproportionately affected by a number of gender-specific reproductive health issues, such as fibroid tumors, maternal mortality, cesarean sections, female sterilization, and clandestine abortions.<sup>6</sup> In addition, activists in the black women's movement have long suspected that Afro-Brazilian women have been subjected to sterilization, including forced sterilizations, at higher rates than white women (Roland 1999). Furthermore, high rates of female sterilization among women of all racial/ethnic backgrounds and social classes largely reflect the lack of contraceptive options available in Brazil.<sup>7</sup>

Researchers, health professionals, and antiracist activists with an interest in the health status of Afro-Brazilians have faced a number of challenges in their attempts to document and address health disparities in Brazil. Perhaps the greatest challenge has been the lack of racially specific health data in the country. Recognizing the ways in which official data collection methods used by the Brazilian government have perpetuated the statistical invisibility of the Afro-Brazilian population is essential to understanding and assessing the extent to which the health needs of this group have been neglected. Official denial of race as a salient category of social identity and social experience enabled the Brazilian state to forgo the collection of racial data in the national census and government records for much of the twentieth century. Furthermore, until 2004, Brazil lacked an official policy that would permit the collection of health data by race. Prior to the development of this policy, it was extremely difficult to ascertain the health status of Brazilians of African ancestry. In many ways, the lack of racially specific health data is consistent with official representations of Brazil as a racial democracy, or a society in which racism is considered to be virtually, if not completely,

nonexistent. Official views of Brazil as a nonracist society have fostered a color-blind approach to health that has proven detrimental to the health and well-being of many Afro-Brazilians.

Fátima Oliveira, an Afro-Brazilian physician and long-time activist in the black women's movement, black movement, and women's movement, has been a forceful advocate for the development of specific health policies for Afro-Brazilians. Oliveira's numerous publications, including books and journal and newspaper articles, have been instrumental in the development of an intersectional approach to health in Brazil. In her recent book, *Saúde da População Negra, Brasil, 2001* (Health of the Black Population, Brazil, 2001), Oliveira calls attention to the role of activists in Brazil's *movimento negro* (black movement) and their allies in the health and scientific research sectors in "establishing and consolidating the field of study, research, and assistance called the health of the black population" (2002, 28). However, Oliveira has also critiqued the lack of racially based health data in Brazil and argued that the lack of research on the health status of nonwhite populations prevents the development of generalizable conclusions. As she notes, "There are no data, so it is not possible to generalize. Generalizing is not possible, since there are no data. But leaving this vicious circle requires responding, sincerely, to the question: why aren't data produced?" (2002, 32).

#### INTERSECTIONAL APPROACHES TO BLACK WOMEN'S HEALTH IN BRAZIL

Activists in Brazil's black women's movement have been leading advocates for the development of research and policies focusing on racial/ethnic and gender health disparities. In most cases, black women's calls for health programs and initiatives that attend to the needs of the Afro-Brazilian population have been grounded in their personal experiences and observations, as well as their activism in black organizations, women's organizations, and black women's organizations. The emergence of the black women's movement in the late 1980s marked a new phase of political activism that began to bridge the struggles for racial and gender justice in Brazil. During the late 1970s and 1980s, a number of important black movement and women's movement organizations were formed throughout the country. These organizations played a crucial role in placing issues of race and gender on the political agenda as the country gradually returned to democratic rule, following the establishment of a military dictatorship in 1964.<sup>8</sup> However, although the black movement and women's movement both achieved a measure of success in promoting discussions of racism and sexism during the

late 1970s and 1980s, the relationship between both forms of discrimination and their combined impact on black women were rarely emphasized. As a result, while black women were involved with both movements from their inception, they often found that their concerns were marginalized.

During the mid-1980s, black women began to form separate groups within women's organizations and black movement organizations to focus on their specific concerns.<sup>9</sup> These early groups led to the establishment of autonomous black women's organizations in subsequent years. Nongovernmental organizations were formed throughout Brazil during the late 1980s and 1990s to address how the combined impact of gender, race, and class discrimination affected black women in a range of ways, from self-esteem, personal identity, and intimate relationships to employment, sexuality, and reproductive health.

Black women activists have been at the forefront of efforts to call attention to the impact of racial discrimination and social exclusion on the health status of Afro-Brazilians. Black women's health activism in Brazil initially stemmed from concerns about the reproductive rights of Afro-Brazilian women and later began to address a broader range of health issues, both for black women and the black community more generally. While an exhaustive discussion of individual black women's organizations is beyond the scope of this essay, it is useful to highlight the contributions of several leading black women's organizations that have developed significant health-related initiatives.<sup>10</sup> Table 1 profiles five black women's nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) that were formed in the cities of Porto Alegre, São Paulo, and Rio de Janeiro during the late 1980s and 1990s.<sup>11</sup> All of these organizations have been at the forefront of efforts to address the health needs of black Brazilian women. It should be noted that all of these organizations are located in either southern or southeastern Brazil. These regions of the country have historically had a higher concentration of black women's NGOs.

The nongovernmental organizations listed in table 1 have played a leading role in developing an intersectional perspective on the health of Afro-Brazilian women. Activists in these organizations have promoted greater awareness of the specificities of black women's experiences with regard to health by calling attention to the ways in which racial, gender, and class dynamics shape patterns of illness and wellness in Brazil, as well as access to quality healthcare.<sup>12</sup> It is also important to recognize that while the terms "intersectional" and "intersectionality" have not typically been used by activists in the black women's movement, the political praxis of activists reflects an intersectional view of race, gender, class, and sexuality that posits them as

TABLE 1. Health-Related Programs Developed  
by Black Brazilian Women's Nongovernmental Organizations

<i>Organization Name</i>	<i>Location</i>	<i>Year Founded</i>	<i>Health-Related Initiatives and Programs</i>
Maria Mulher	Porto Alegre (RS)	1987	Violence and women's health, HIV/AIDS prevention, psychological and economic assistance for HIV-positive women. Research on domestic violence and health issues.
Geledés	São Paulo (SP)	1988	STD prevention, reproductive health, mental health. Organized 1993 Seminar on Reproductive Rights and Policies of Black Women. Produced two publications on black women's health during 1990s <sup>1</sup>
Criola	Rio de Janeiro (RJ)	1992	Reproductive health, health promotion in local communities, HIV/AIDS prevention, publications (magazines, books), training seminars for health professionals.
Associação Cultural de Mulheres Negras (ACMUN)	Porto Alegre (RS)	1994	HIV/AIDS prevention, research on HIV/AIDS and other health issues.
Fala Preta!	São Paulo (SP)	1997	Reproductive health, STD prevention, HIV/AIDS prevention, sickle cell anemia awareness.

Source: Caldwell 2007.

Note: Abbreviations for Brazilian states: RJ—Rio de Janeiro; RS—Rio Grande do Sul; SP—São Paulo

<sup>1</sup> The health department of Geledés was responsible for health-related programs and initiatives until the late 1990s. Geledés discontinued most of its health-related work when members of the health department left to form Fala Preta! in 1997.

mutually constituted and inseparable determinants of black women's social identities and social experiences.

Black women health activists have sought to bring a gendered perspective to discussions of racial health disparities and to include race in discussions of women's health. By developing an intersectional approach to health, activists in the black women's movement have called attention to the ways in which race and gender shape Afro-Brazilian women's experiences with regard to health and illness, particularly in relation to health concerns that affect black women in disproportionate numbers, such as fibroid tumors, sterilization, and maternal mortality. In their work with local communities, government officials, and policymakers, activists in the black women's movement have utilized an intersectional perspective that emphasizes racism, sexism, and classism as interlocking forms of domination that have material consequences in terms of health and wellness.

#### TRANSNATIONAL DIMENSIONS OF HEALTH POLICY ADVOCACY

While black women's organizations have been active at the local and national level since the late 1980s, activists began to adopt transnational networking as a political strategy in the early 1990s. Black Brazilian women participated in the conference processes for the United Nations World Population Conference in 1994 and the United Nations World Conference on Women in 1995. Black Brazilian women's more recent involvement in transnational activism centered on the conference process for the WCAR, which was held in Durban, South Africa in September 2001. By broadening the antiracist agenda to include "related intolerance," which opened space for discussion of gender, this UN conference provided an important and rare opportunity for both antiracist activists and feminists of color from different geographic regions to network and develop a global antiracist agenda.<sup>13</sup> Black Brazilian women activists played key roles in the preparatory process for WCAR and during the conference proceedings. Their involvement in the national and regional preparatory processes for WCAR and subsequent participation in the conference provided an important means of articulating a black feminist perspective on issues such as health, labor, and development. Black women's participation in WCAR and the previous UN world conferences greatly increased the visibility and concerns of activists in the black women's movement and provided a mechanism for them to pressure the Brazilian government to address racial and gender disparities in the country.

The Network of Black Brazilian Women's Organizations (*Articulação de Organizações de Mulheres Negras Brasileiras*) was formed during the preparatory process for the third WCAR. Formation of the network was an important step in the process of consolidating a collective political voice for black women at the national level.<sup>14</sup> The Network of Black Brazilian Women's Organizations held a national meeting in September 2000, at which time the executive secretariat was charged with producing "a document that would gather in one place all current and relevant information and proposals for the struggle of black women as they lobby on public policy" (Network of Black Brazilian Women's Organizations 2001, 7). The document, *We, Brazilian Black Women (Nós, Mulheres Negras)*, was subsequently published by the Network of Black Brazilian Women and endorsed by thirty entities representing the black movement and black women's movement in the country.<sup>15</sup>

*We, Brazilian Black Women* is an important source for understanding the aspirations and objectives of activists in the black women's movement, particularly as they relate to health policy development. This report also merits special discussion since it offers the most comprehensive analysis of black women's status found in any document published by the black women's movement prior to that point. A wide range of issues relevant to black women's experiences are covered in the fifty-two-page Durban report, including health, life expectancy, employment, education, violence, sexuality, and the media. The document also contains proposals in all of these areas and discusses their significance in light of international treaties, UN declarations, and domestic policy. The level of detail found in this document and its engagement with substantive policy issues underscore its significance as a policy text that sought to frame black women's issues in ways that would resonate with officials from Brazil and other countries present at the Durban conference. In a compelling discussion of the importance of developing a "racial/ethnic perspective on health," the report notes:

From infancy to adulthood, "premature death" from preventable causes, including a higher rate of maternal and infant mortality, is a reality for the black population in Brazil. The blatant lack of concern for diseases that occur more frequently in the black population—such as high blood pressure, sickle-cell anemia, type 2 diabetes, and uterine fibroid cysts—has strong, negative repercussions for the reproductive health of black women and provides evidence of how racism is entrenched and institutionalized in healthcare delivery and research, as well as in the educational apparatus, notably in the training of

healthcare professionals. (Network of Black Brazilian Women's Organizations 2001, 23)

By providing statistical evidence of black women's unfavorable status within Brazilian society, the Durban document sought to challenge the Brazilian government's historical silence about the discrimination experienced by them. As Nilza Iraci, the communications director for Geledés, noted in a July 2001 newspaper interview, "Whenever we go abroad, we hear that racial democracy exists and that in our country there is not racism. When we bring up the reality of black women, there is always a suspicion that we are exaggerating the facts. With this document we are showing that we are not working with a 'victimization' [mentality], but with data that reflects [sic] reality" (Almeida 2001).

Iraci's comments underscore the importance of having empirical data on racial inequalities for use in the struggle against racism in Brazil. As was noted earlier, the infrequent collection of data by race in Brazil has largely been shaped by beliefs that the country is a racial democracy and, as a result, does not need to collect data in government documents such as the national census. In their efforts to document and challenge racial health disparities in Brazil, activists in the black women's movement have had to contend with the lack of racially specific health data and color-blind approaches to health.

The Durban report reflects black women activists' understandings of the significance of the UN process for policy development and the promotion of progressive cultural change at the national level.<sup>16</sup> Activists in the black women's movement hoped that their documentation of black women's status would be useful in their efforts to prompt the Brazilian government to align its discourse and practice, particularly with regard to racism, and to recognize the plight of black women within international arenas. The Durban document was also viewed by activists as a tool that could be used by the official delegation to the World Conference against Racism and members of Brazilian civil society in their negotiations for specific public policies at the local, state, and national levels (Almeida 2001).

#### POST-DURBAN HEALTH POLICY DEVELOPMENTS

Policy developments since the 2001 UN World Conference against Racism have constituted a watershed in the evolution of the antiracist struggle in Brazil. As a number of Brazilian and North American scholars have noted, marked changes in official government discourse and policy development

related to racial issues took place after WCAR (Dzidzienyo 2005; Htun 2004; Martins et al. 2004; Telles 2004). An important shift in official government discourse on race occurred when President Fernando Henrique Cardoso's administration admitted to the existence of racism in Brazil in a 2001 report to the Committee for the Elimination of Racism, making Cardoso's administration the first to officially acknowledge racism in a government document. Beginning in late 2001, several affirmative action and antidiscrimination programs were also instituted at the federal, state, and local levels. In most cases, these policies have focused on the establishment of quotas for the black population, in employment and university admissions. President Cardoso made a formal gesture of support for affirmative action by signing a presidential decree on May 13, 2002, the 114th anniversary of Brazilian abolition, which instituted a national affirmative-action program in the Brazilian public administration.

The increased discussion and implementation of affirmative-action policies at the federal, state, and local levels since 2001 has been an important and unprecedented development in Brazil. However, the impact of the Durban conference on the promotion of health policies focused on the black population has been an equally important development and one that has received less scholarly attention.<sup>17</sup> The increased discussion and implementation of health policies for the black population has been especially significant since, in many cases, they reflect concerns that activists in the black women's movement and black movement have long focused on. However, one of the major challenges for health activists has been the Brazilian government's tendency to create innovative health initiatives without following through in terms of implementation. Brazilians customarily describe this phenomenon in terms of policy "not leaving paper" (*não sair do papel*), a phrase that conveys the notion of policies being written, but never implemented. This has been true of two important health programs that have languished on the books for over a decade and have yet to be fully implemented. The first, the Integral Women's Health Program (*Programa de Assistência Integral à Saúde da Mulher*, PAISM), was developed by the Ministry of Health in 1984 but has suffered from poor implementation. PAISM was initially intended to address women's health needs in an integrated and holistic manner, including prenatal care, birth, and postnatal assistance; cancer prevention; STD care; adolescent and menopausal care; and contraception assistance. Similar to PAISM, the National Program for Sickle Cell Anemia (*Programa para Anemia Falciforme*, PAF) was initially developed in 1996 but failed to be implemented for nearly a decade. In 2005 federal regulation called for the establishment

of PAF within Brazil's nationwide Unified Health System (*Sistema Unico de Saúde*). This regulation has since resulted in more widespread implementation of PAF. If fully implemented, both PAISM and PAF would likely have a substantial impact on the health and well-being of African-descendant women in Brazil.

The 2005 federal regulation which called for the establishment of the National Sickle Cell Anemia Program within Brazil's national health system is one of several important changes in health policy that have taken place in recent years. In 2004, a visible emphasis on the health of the black population began to surface within the Ministry of Health and other federal agencies. If fully elaborated, these shifts in health policy would dramatically alter the racial landscape of health and wellness in Brazil. Below, I discuss some major developments in health policy for the black population in Brazil. This is not an exhaustive discussion of health policy changes in this area, however. During 2004, the Brazilian Ministry of Health developed a National Health Plan that made Brazil the first country in the world to call for the inclusion of racial/ethnic information in all health records. The National Health Plan also addressed the health status of black and indigenous women by including specific provisions to promote the health of women from both groups. The Ministry of Health's cosponsorship of a National Seminar on the Health of the Black Population in August 2004 provides further evidence of high-level discussions of the racial dimensions of health in the Brazilian federal government post-Durban.<sup>18</sup> In 2004, Brazil's National AIDS Program also began to develop initiatives focusing on the Afro-Brazilian population and the national campaign for HIV/AIDS prevention targeted Afro-Brazilians during 2005.

During March of 2007, with the official endorsement of President Luis Inácio ("Lula") da Silva, the Brazilian federal government launched a national plan to confront the feminization of the AIDS epidemic, as well as other sexually transmitted diseases. The plan contains a section on race/ethnicity that discusses the special vulnerabilities that black and indigenous women face in relation to the AIDS epidemic, due to their greater exposure to the consequences of "structural violence" (Ministerio de Saúde 2007, 15). In addition, the plan recognizes the impact that stigma, prejudice, and racism have on black and indigenous women and argues for the importance of addressing the specificities of both groups' experiences with regard to health as part of the effort to decrease the spread of HIV/AIDS in the female population.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

It is important to see recent changes in the discussion and implementation of racially conscious health policies within the Brazilian government at the federal, state, and local levels as the fruit of long-fought struggles by black activists, particularly black women activists. While, in recent years, the presidential administrations of Cardoso and Lula have promoted more open discussions of race and racism in Brazil, this shift was not simply due to the goodwill of political leaders; instead, it was the result of decades-long efforts by black activists. The development of public policies to address racial inequities in health, education, and employment following the *WCAR* also demonstrates the impact of black activists' transnational organizing on policy development at the domestic level, further underscoring the importance of external pressure in promoting state action to combat racism.

Although some gains have been made with regard to health policy development in recent years, it is crucial to recognize that the long-term impact of black women's efforts to influence health policy will likely depend on a number of factors, including willingness on the part of government officials, health professionals, and researchers to admit to and address racial disparities in health, as well as greater acknowledgment of the specific health concerns of black women. In addition, the full implementation of programs that have long been on the books, such as the Integral Women's Health Program and the National Sickle Cell Anemia Program, continues to be a pressing need. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, greater attention must be paid to the ways in which black women are rendered invisible by health initiatives that focus on women or Afro-Brazilians without acknowledging the intersectional relationship among gender, race, class, and health.

Although specific public policies for the black population have been roundly criticized by prominent scholars of race in Brazil, such as Peter Fry, Simone Monteiro, and Marcos Chor Maio, ongoing racial disparities in access to and quality of healthcare, education, and employment remain vexing social and economic challenges in Brazil (Fry et al. 2007). In the face of such challenges, activists in the black women's movement continue to highlight the need for nonuniversalist public policies that address racial, gender, and class inequalities, a need that is made all the more critical by Brazil's ongoing process of democratization, which involves not only access to formal citizenship rights but also the creation of discursive and political space for marginalized groups to assert identities and interests that differ from the norm.

Ultimately, black women's efforts to promote the development of nonuniversalist health policies underscores the importance of activists, scholars, and the Brazilian state reconceptualizing health disparities in ways that acknowledge the interrelationship among racial, gender, and socioeconomic inequalities and developing intersectional approaches to combat them.

#### NOTES

1. Beginning in the 1950s, Brazilian and U.S. scholars undertook research on Brazilian race relations under the auspices of UNESCO (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization). These studies were originally conducted in an effort to understand Brazil's ostensibly harmonious and exemplary racial dynamics. Ultimately, much of this research debunked Brazil's image as a racial paradise. Relevant early studies include Bastide and Fernandes (1959) and Wagley (1952). More recent critiques of Brazilian race relations include Beato (2004), Dzidzienyo (2005), Martins, Medeiros, and Nascimento (2004), Oliveira (2002), Roland (1999), and Telles (2004).

2. In this essay, the terms "black," "Afro-Brazilian," and "African-descendant" are used to refer to people and communities of African descent in Brazil. The term "black" is employed in my analysis primarily in reference to the black women's movement. The terms "Afro-Brazilian" and "African-descendant" are employed as descriptors for individuals and communities of African descent in the country. These terms are used in acknowledgment of the fact that Brazilians of African descent may not self-identify as "black."

3. See Weber and Parra-Medina (2003) and essays in Shulz and Mullings (2006) for discussions of intersectional approaches to health in the United States.

4. Relevant research on data collection methods in Brazil includes Oliveira (2002), Roland (1999), and Telles (2004).

5. Research on racial/ethnic health disparities in Brazil is still in its early stages. Doctoral dissertation research by Maria Ines Barbosa (1998) and Fernanda Lopes (2003) offered some of the earliest examinations of racial/ethnic health disparities in the field of public health in Brazil. The 2005 publication of an edited volume on the health of the black population by the National Health Foundation (*Fundação Nacional de Saúde*, or FUNASA) reflects increasing discussion of racial/ethnic health disparities within the Brazilian federal government.

6. Abortion is illegal in Brazil. Feminist health researchers and activists have long argued that the country's high rates of maternal mortality result from the frequent practice of clandestine abortions by women. The issue of abortion is also closely tied to larger questions of reproductive rights in Brazil. Given the illegality of abortion in the country and the fact that few reliable contraceptive options are available, many women rely on the practice of sterilization to control their fertility.

7. Brazil has long had some of the highest rates of female sterilization in the world. According to Vieira and Ford (1996), although voluntary sterilization is not permitted by the Brazilian constitution and health ministry guidelines only recommend sterilization for women older than thirty-five whose health would be affected by another pregnancy, female sterilization is widely and clandestinely performed following cesarean sections.

In addition, a 1997 law was passed by the Brazilian parliament to curb the practice of tubal ligation; however, this law has not been systematically enforced.

8. Brazil was ruled by a military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985. The country underwent a process of state-led political liberalization that allowed for increased political participation by members of civil society beginning in the late 1970s. A number of important social movements, including the black movement and women's movement, re-emerged during the late 1970s.

9. See Safa (2005) for a recent discussion of autonomous organizing by indigenous and African-descendent women in Latin America. Caldwell (2007) also provides an in-depth discussion of the development of the black women's movement in Brazil.

10. Table 1 does not provide an exhaustive discussion of all of each organization's programs. Readers may consult the organizations' websites for additional information on their programs and areas of focus: Maria Mulher (<http://mariamulher.org.br>); Geledés (<http://geledes.org.br>); Associação de Mulheres Negras (<http://www.acmun.org.br>); Criola (<http://criola.org.br>); Fala Preta! (<http://falapreta.org.br>).

11. The names of these organizations highlight their efforts to challenge racism and sexism in Brazil. Here I provide English translations of the organizations' names, as well as descriptions found on their websites, where relevant. The phrase *Maria Mulher* means "Maria woman" in English. The term *Criola* refers to black women born in the Americas and dates back to the colonial slave era. "Associação Cultural de Mulheres Negras" is translated as "Black Women's Cultural Association" in English. The phrase *Fala Preta!* means "Speak Black Woman!" According to English-language material available on the Geledés website, "Geledé is originally a kind of female secret society of a religious nature existing in traditional yorubás [sic] societies, it expresses the female power over the land fertility, procreation and the community's well-being. The Geledé cult aims at easing and revering the ancestral mothers to assure the world's balance" (<http://geledes.org.br>) (accessed 24 March 2008).

12. Fátima Oliveira has advocated an intersectional approach to health in Brazil, stating that "it is unacceptable, on the basis of being antiscientific, to not perceive the interpenetration of the variables sex/gender, race/ethnicity, and social class as informing the process of health/illness" (2002, 31).

13. During the 1990s, activists in the black women's movement became involved in significant forms of transnational organizing. A number of black women participated in the First and Second Encounters of Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Women in 1992 and 1995. These encounters were sponsored by the Network of Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Women and sought to foster dialogue among black women in the region. Black Brazilian women also played a visible role in the preparatory process for the Fourth World Conference on Women that was held in Beijing during 1995.

14. See Caldwell (2007) for a discussion of perspectives on national-level organizing within the black women's movement.

15. Versions of this document were published in Portuguese, English, and Spanish, and copies were presented to governmental and nongovernmental representatives for all of the countries participating in the Durban conference.

16. Alvarez (2000) discusses Latin American feminists' views of the UN process and

transnational advocacy networks in terms of both gender-conscious policy development and broader cultural change.

17. Most scholarly analyses of developments post-Durban have focused on policy developments with regard to affirmative action for the African-descendant population in employment and university admissions. This may be largely due to the controversial nature of affirmative action policies in Brazil, as well as in countries such as the United States.

18. The national seminar was organized by the Ministry of Health and the Secretariat for the Promotion of Racial Equality (SEPPPIR). "Working to Achieve Ethnic Equality in Health," a regional workshop for Latin American and Caribbean nations, was also held in Brasília, Brazil, in December 2004. The workshop was sponsored by the Brazilian Ministry of Health, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and SEPPPIR and was organized by the Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Pan American Health Organization.

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## The View from the Country Club

### *Wealthy Whites and the Matrix of Privilege*

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JESSICA HOLDEN SHERWOOD

Exclusive country clubs are an important context for research, for two reasons. The first is that the people there are unusually privileged. Scholars of inequalities have paid much good attention to the poor, women, and people of color; but no matter the approach, there are insurmountable limits to a scholarship of inequality that only looks “down.” Some social scientists issue reminders to look up, emphasizing “the ruling capitalist class, for it is the major initiator of action.”<sup>1</sup> Michelle Fine decries the tendency to always study the Other, or the “marked” side of every categorical distinction, calling it collusion in the othering done by the elite. She charges that the collective neglect to study dominant groups contributes to the sanitization of their lives, keeping their dysfunctions hidden.<sup>2</sup> Similarly, Susan Ostrander encourages people to study up because “a lack of knowledge about elites contributes to obscuring and therefore maintaining their position in society.”<sup>3</sup>

The second reason clubs are important to examine is that, while they do not autonomously reproduce inequalities, they *are* cogs in a more complex machinery. Along with private schools, exclusive neighborhoods, and other voluntary and professional organizations, country clubs provide important opportunities for face-to-face interaction and solidarity building among wealthy people. These experiences foster a consciousness that transcends one’s family or firm, a consciousness that inspires classwide coordinated actions. At the same time, clubs provide a context in which to know the important people with whom to coordinate.<sup>4</sup> Clubs like those in this study serve important purposes. Club members’ talk about inequalities is equally

important, given their influential and privileged positions in class and race hierarchies.

While scholars of inequality recommend “studying up,”<sup>5</sup> they acknowledge that it can be more difficult than studying members of subordinated groups. Especially when it comes to social class, the privileged are thought of as elusive subjects of study. I thought that my own social locations—being white, knowing some people who are rich or powerful, and having the cultural capital to interact with them effectively and comfortably—might enable me to overcome that elusiveness.

Seeking a setting characterized by the concentration of privilege, I decided to study the most exclusive and prestigious social clubs in my area. I used personal contacts to start a snowball sample of club members and asked each subject for referrals. This technique relies on club members’ social networks, precisely the same tool used to determine club membership. I had no trouble securing interviews, probably because I always introduced myself using one or more names of previous subjects. I conducted interviews with a total of thirty-eight club members; all interviews were recorded and transcribed, and all interviewees were given pseudonyms.

I focus on a club that I call “Oldfamily.” Subjects describe its character as “the white-shoe WASPY<sup>6</sup> club,” and say that its reputation was of a “typical old Yankee blue blood, sort of . . . stodgy, nose-in-the-air kind of place.” With its hundred-year history, Oldfamily traditionally topped the area’s prestige hierarchy. Subjects disagree on whether that hierarchy is obsolete or persists today. If nothing else, there are senior Oldfamily members known informally as the “old guard,” who embody the conservative traditions of an earlier time.

I interviewed twenty-one members of Oldfamily, and eleven members of two comparable local clubs. One is “Rosary,” whose members’ pseudonyms begin with “R.” Though it began a hundred years ago as another WASP club, it developed into the club for Irish Catholics. The other club is “Suburban,” whose members’ pseudonyms begin with “S.” In contrast to Oldfamily, Suburban’s reputation among other clubs’ members is one of “new money” and an attendant lack of refinement. Still, its history is of WASP exclusiveness. But like Oldfamily and Rosary, this exclusiveness has softened in recent years to include some members of other ethnic groups.

In addition to Oldfamily, Rosary, and Suburban, I also interviewed six members of a slightly different club. “Northern” is in a different geographical area, and less prestigious, so it is not included in the “Class” and “Race” sections below. But I sought it out because Northern is a battleground of

women's status: some women there (names starting with "N") chafed at limitations on their golfing times. They agitated for change and eventually sued the club for gender discrimination.

## PRIVILEGED PERSPECTIVES ON INEQUALITIES

### Class Accounts and Intersections

Given the American ideals of open access and equal opportunity, club members must account for the fact that their clubs only admit new members by selective invitation. They account for their exclusion in either of two ways: by arguing that there is really no meaningful exclusion taking place, or, if exclusion is acknowledged, by excusing and justifying it.

Variants of the first theme range from simply denying that there is any screening to saying that the only filter is social ties, or residence, or affordability, to saying that virtually anyone could afford to belong. The affordability filter will be discussed below, since it is prominent in accounts of the clubs' racial-ethnic compositions.

Accounts that justify or excuse the exclusion are more common. There are several ways in which club members can claim to be innocent of performing exclusion. They can pawn it off on club leaders, as in Rosary member Regina's comment, "There's a bunch of old guys apparently that run the place."

Club members can claim that they belong only for the golf course and don't personally care about the composition of the club. In an account that simultaneously provides a pat on the back, they can claim to participate in clubs only as part of their identity as good parents.

**KEN** (Oldfamily member): One of the major benefits of being a member there is as much for [my son] as it's been for me, because . . . he has just been exposed to a lot of successful people as role models that he may otherwise not have been exposed to.

Club members use these and other discursive tools to de-problematize country clubs' policies and their own membership. Whether or not it's intended, this helps to keep strong both socioeconomic solidarity and the legitimization of inequality.

The class hierarchy in America is sustained by the system of capitalism. Capitalism, and the government that supports it, are the reasons why Americans have such a pronounced class hierarchy. And yet, subjects in this study are not merely "classed actors," neutral and unified. There is internal varia-

tion just as there is among all persons; and as in any group, people's gender and race influence some of this variation.

The upper classes are gendered in the following ways. Perhaps most importantly, it has traditionally been overwhelmingly men whose income and assets qualify them for the top economic stratum. Women generally qualify as wives or inheriting daughters; many wealthy heiresses even turn their own fortunes over to their husbands' control.<sup>7</sup> This is a sign that wealth is not a direct road to power. It's also a reminder that compulsory heterosexuality<sup>8</sup> is an important influence on how men and women relate. Gender relations in the upper classes remain male dominant. As shown below, the norms of masculinity and femininity influence the identities, behaviors, and relationships of people in the upper classes.

The upper classes are mostly culturally and demographically white.<sup>9</sup> Club traditions of homogeneous membership and intergenerational continuity hint at the racial segregation historically accompanying class segregation. Whiteness has been, until recently, a definite requirement for belonging in exclusive clubs and other elite contexts. Today, nonwhites are granted admission; but the contexts remain culturally white. Those nonwhites—indeed, any non-WASPs—who belong to the clubs in this study are assimilated enough so that they do not disturb the “comfort zone” that dominates members' conception of who does and does not belong. Also, the persistent overlap between the categories of white and affluent subtly strengthens class and race inequalities, because each dimension of inequality is lent legitimacy by its alignment with the other.

### Racial-Ethnic Accounts and Intersections

Interviewees offer two groups of accounts for the racial-ethnic composition of their clubs, which is somewhat more diverse today than what was traditionally.<sup>10</sup> The first account justifies the homogeneity that still largely characterizes the clubs, and the second emphasizes what heterogeneity there is.

Interviewees *justify homogeneity* mainly by asserting that affordability is the one hurdle to belonging. When members must account for the racial-ethnic homogeneity of their clubs, sometimes they do refer to the racialized character of class stratification—without ever acknowledging the racism responsible. Interviewees simply point out that nonwhites are, on the whole, less likely to be able to afford to belong.

EVAN (Oldfamily member): You have to think that any country club, by virtue of membership and dollars, limits who belongs there. And so I

think to that end, you don't get the broader spectrum of people who can belong, because you're dealing with people who have enough disposable income to belong to the club, or play the games or whatever, so it does limit somewhat the people who belong, and I think . . . so it's not a cross section of the world we're looking at, that belong there.

Affordability provides an impersonal account for the overwhelmingly white character of the clubs. This account reflects, and relies on, the presumption that economic stratification (of the acuteness found in America) is correct and natural. The club's exclusiveness is framed not as something that members are doing but simply as the outcome of impartial market forces. As for the potentially awkward fact that affordability varies by racial-ethnic group, there are ways to explain it. The dominant stratification ideology<sup>11</sup> of American culture presumes meritocracy and equal opportunities for all individuals. This color-blind<sup>12</sup> assessment of affordability neglects the history of institutionalized discrimination that has prevented racial-ethnic minorities from accumulating wealth at the rate of their white counterparts.<sup>13</sup> In other words, the institutionalization of white privilege is unacknowledged and remains unchallenged.

On the other hand, interviewees *emphasize* how much *heterogeneity* there is in their clubs. Four out of every five subjects point to the presence of non-WASPs in their clubs. In an overstatement, one Suburban member says, "Now we've got United Nations over there."

Additionally, to emphasize their heterogeneity, interviewees note that their club is more diverse than in the past. Another account is that, while one's own club may not be terribly diverse, it's at least better than others. Of the three clubs, accusations of homogeneity are leveled at *each of the other* clubs. For example, one Oldfamily member says that his club has the most African Americans of any club in the area; but a Rosary member calls his club "more diverse" than Oldfamily. Another Oldfamily member calls Suburban "less diverse than Oldfamily"; but a Suburban member counters that "we probably have a broader spectrum of people," and so on.

This circularity suggests that the accusations of homogeneity do not reflect real knowledge about differences in club composition. The finger-pointing represents a strategy to improve the image of one's own club, given the new cultural value placed on diversity.

Country club members are proud of the recent diversification of their membership. Where possible, they portray themselves as heroes of a new, color-blind era of racial harmony. They do deserve some credit for the

changes, but exclusion remains. Only wealthy minorities gain admission, and as exclusive club members make clear, the proper cultural capital is needed, whatever one's racial-ethnic status. Even if admissions decisions are color-blind, they remain conscious of culture. One white interviewee mused that, when blacks joined Oldfamily, they must have thought, "Okay, yeah, I'll be the well-behaved WASP with dark skin." The cultural conformity—assimilation—required for country club membership points to the shallowness of the diversity that is currently valued. By admitting a couple of affluent, prominent black men who like to play golf—minorities with gender and class privilege—these clubs are only complying with the "letter of the law" in the current cultural climate. They have achieved racial-ethnic diversity without becoming at all multicultural—never mind the "strong multiculturalism" that seeks to redress inequalities.<sup>14</sup>

The dominant diversity discourse ignores racism and can distract attention from power differences and inequalities that remain to exclude most Americans from "the good life." As such, contemporary efforts to create diversity at exclusive clubs, schools, and so on are superficial measures that fail to address the original reasons why the remedies are necessary. Worse, the legitimacy lent by token diversity can help to preserve intact the social structures that reproduce inequalities.

The upper class remains culturally white today, though a few nonwhites now belong. Research shows that those nonwhites who have gained entry into the power elite have done so by assimilating into white culture.<sup>15</sup> The few nonwhites in this study bear this out.

Race is gendered here, too, because of the truism that the upper classes are more open to men than women arrivistes. Though blacks are closer than whites to gender parity in earnings, this disappears at the top of the economic scale: for nonwhites as well as whites, the very top earners are more likely to be men than women.<sup>16</sup> The nonwhite club members in this study are all men, which may also reflect that the dominance required to arrive at the door of the club appears more fitting, to existing members, as part of a man's rather than a woman's identity.

### Gender Accounts and Intersections

Women—white women, at least—have always been a part of country clubs. This section covers not women's exclusion but the explanations for the status of women within their clubs. Given the situation of the country clubs within the larger societal gender order, and systems of class and race privilege, they are more alike than different. This is not a sample with tremendous internal

diversity, but there are the following distinctions: Oldfamily's founding history is gender neutral. At Rosary, Suburban, and Northern, by contrast, tradition dictated that the "man of the house" holds a family membership, and only he may vote and serve in leadership positions. Northern has struggled with sex discrimination lawsuits. Rosary and Suburban recently changed their restrictions to remove gendered language: now it's something like "principal members" having more privileges than "restricted members." But de facto, women's status remains lower than men's.

Gender discourse stands in contrast to positive talk about racial diversification. By and large, both men and women shrug off the gender inequality in country clubs as sensible and unproblematic. From this, three themes emerge: marriage, femininity, and masculinity, each as peculiar to this affluent context.

*Marriage and Money.* Interviewees' accounts about women at country clubs rest on an important principle that is at once obvious and terribly consequential. The talk presumes that nearly everyone involved is part of a heterosexual, procreative marriage where the woman assumes the majority of the domestic duties. This is compulsory heterosexuality: people are automatically thought of within this framework. This is especially true in the context of the club. Members think of their clubs as "family places"; so it follows that women in clubs are viewed in terms of their domestic identities. The existence of nontraditional women—without children, without husbands, with high-powered careers—barely registers in subjects' minds.

In the clubs in this sample, the majority of members are not only married couples, but—as I was consistently told—the majority are breadwinner-homemaker marriages. This is an inversion of the national pattern, where wives are more likely than not to be in the paid labor force.

Homemakers are considered to be lower-status adults, both by these interviewees and in mainstream culture.<sup>17</sup> This sentiment is reflected in the restrictions on women at many clubs and also in interviewees' comments. Disparagement of homemaker wives can be "self-serving othering," which by contrast reflects well on one's own group.

JESSICA: Why do you think the women at these other clubs haven't made an issue out of their limitations?

OLIVIA (Oldfamily member): Because I think it's the makeup of the women also. They're happy to be stay-at-home wives. They're happy for that.

They're happy to stand in the reflected lights of their husbands, so to speak, where I don't think the Oldfamily women are.

The litigants at Northern indulge in some of this talk, when discussing the more traditional women in their club.

NELL: He makes the real money, he's the breadwinner, and you're just this sub—and they grew up like that. I've heard the women talking how lucky they are. It's sad.

NINA: They currently, I think, have five women on the board. They're all bought and paid for in different ways.

Perhaps men are too savvy today to so bluntly disparage homemakers. But their talk—and club policies—show that they consider them subordinate.

RALPH: Most of all the women in this club are nonworking females.

JESSICA: The majority?

RALPH: The vast majority are women who are married to men who are successful men, and the women don't work. And they play golf all the time. I can tell you right now there isn't a woman at that table who (*gestures across the club veranda*) doesn't play a lot more golf than I do. And I can also tell you that there probably isn't a woman at that table that gives a damn about playing Saturday or Sunday morning either. They play with their husbands Saturday or Sunday afternoon and they play all week, all week.

The implication is that the homemaker is, or at least should be, grateful and uncomplaining. This popular sentiment contributes to the persistence of gender inequality in marriages and, thus, in country clubs, too.

Gender equality is especially unlikely to spring from the breadwinner-homemaker marriages that populate these clubs. Much research documents the elusiveness of marital equality and the material and ideological reasons why most husbands retain the upper hand. Among other factors, "it seems to be easier to create an egalitarian relationship . . . if both partners make similar amounts of money."<sup>18</sup> This is because money is a well-documented source of marital power. Given that the men of these country clubs earn incomes in the very top tier nationally, their wives are especially unlikely to approach matching them in income. In this way, country club wives with jobs are still much like their homemaker counterparts and are, on this criterion, further from gender equality than wives in most dual-earner marriages. Wives in such asymmetrical marriages are unlikely to have the power to de-

cide which club the family will join, or to call for resigning if conditions are unsatisfactory.

*Feminine Civility.* Femininity—acting appropriately like a woman—means different things in different contexts. Country club members’ expectations are influenced by the most culturally valued form, emphasized femininity: “femininity organized as an adaptation to men’s power, and emphasizing compliance, nurturance, and empathy as womanly virtues.”<sup>19</sup>

A sociologist studying an upper-class women’s organization found its members more concerned with preserving their status as “ladies” than with the organization’s stated social mission. Following the expectations for emphasized femininity, the members excused their limited activity by saying that “they did not want to offend people in the community by being controversial.”<sup>20</sup> Elsewhere, women at an elite college paid a price for displaying such disagreeability. Wellesley students protested the choice of Barbara Bush as commencement speaker, and hundreds of letters to the school reprimanding the young women followed, many chiding them as lacking in the “manners” suitable to “real (upper-class) women.”<sup>21</sup>

Similarly, interviewees here consider the struggle for women’s equality at clubs in terms of manners. Marian, an Oldfamily woman who did lobby for improvements in the women’s locker room, insisted, “I’m not a strident person, and I’m not, I’m really not, a Bella Abzug type or whoever they were afraid I was gonna be.” She may have been trying to frame herself as not disagreeable, but she and her husband still felt punished by the club leadership.

Marian is exceptional in her assertiveness. I spoke to Suburban women and asked them how they felt about the restrictions on their golfing. Suzanne, a serious golfer, expressed dissatisfaction about the weekend restrictions and said she mentioned it repeatedly to club leaders.

JESSICA: You keep bringing it up, but have you organized other women members?

SUZANNE: Oh, no. I wouldn’t do it because I’ve been a member since the day I’ve been born.

Though her standing as a legacy might add to her clout at the club, Suzanne sees it instead as entrenching her in mannerly social obligations.

Sabrina is an athletic career woman, younger than Suzanne and never married. I expected her to be a candidate for lobbying for change at Suburban. When she noted that she didn’t get to golf much, I asked:

JESSICA: Did you speak up about the tee-time restrictions?

SABRINA: Oh, yeah. I mean all the women did, but it was not like they're going to do much about it, so I just ended up quitting.

(later)

JESSICA: So when you resigned, did you let them know, "I'm resigning because I'm unhappy about these things?"

SABRINA: No. Basically I told them that I was going to be working in [another city] and that since there were no times that I was going to be able to play, what was the use? So I don't think I was particularly belligerent about it or anything. It's been so long I can't remember. No, I don't think so. I don't think I was obnoxious or anything.

Note how Sabrina equates this simple truth telling—a far cry from circulating a petition or bringing a lawsuit—with being “belligerent” and “obnoxious.” Given the constraints of emphasized femininity, there is very little cultural space for women to speak up on their own behalf.

Like Suzanne, Sophia grew up at Suburban. She admits, “I just wasn't a person that stood up for women's rights,” and attributes her complacency to growing up amidst sexism. Familiar with the case at Northern, she blames the litigants for their agitation:

SOPHIA: They have a terrible reputation at the course. And *they've ruined it for themselves* . . . Terrible. Even their husbands are blackballed. That's the awful thing. (emphasis added)

Instead of a lawsuit, Sophia advocates adjustment and patience in the face of club sexism. Even with her career, she notes that she simply doesn't mind waiting until afternoon to play on weekends. Sophia is adhering to “the genteel code that expects women, especially elite women, to suffer in silence when they disagree or are offended.”<sup>22</sup>

Olivia, in considering women's predicament, notes, “So you bring a lawsuit. Who's gonna play [golf] with you?” Women at sexist country clubs are indeed in a bind. I argue that their bind is tightened both by the expectations of femininity and also by the implicit deals they have in marriages to wealthy men.

*Genteel Masculine Dominance.* Traditionally, the men at Oldfamily have been some of the most powerful in the state. Their privilege has been so unshakable that they have not needed to make a display of superiority over their wives. Research on gender relations usually supports this rule via its

converse: that men who *lack* social/economic/institutional power are more prone to making exaggerated masculine displays of dominance. These masculine displays are seen both in public settings of “the street” and the workplace, and in domestic arenas of housework and violence.<sup>23</sup> In the case of elite clubs, the dramatic displays are absent because the men’s power is so certain. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner use the term “quiet control” to convey how men with race and class privilege rule their families.<sup>24</sup> Conversely, overt sexism is part of the culture at other clubs: because the men elsewhere are less elite, they may be more motivated to enforce masculine privileges at their clubs.

Oldfamily members are proud of their egalitarianism, and both men and women in the club give the men rhetorical pats on the back for their progressiveness. It works well for Oldfamily members to attribute women’s status at clubs to the enlightenment of Oldfamily men and the backwardness of men elsewhere. (Though to be fair, some Oldfamily members supplement this account with other ones, too.) One Oldfamily member attributed the difference to “new money” at Suburban. But more often, the reason given for the difference is ethnicity. (In fact, “new money” is sometimes a veiled reference to Jewish or other non-WASP people.)

URSULA (Oldfamily member): I also think that WASPS are, I never sat around and talked about WASPS the way I am today, but I think WASPS are better about giving women equality than some other ethnic groups are, who like to assert their masculine right. I truly think that’s the case.

Many interviewees, when considering sexism at country clubs, invoke Italians as the prime example.

HAROLD (Oldfamily member): I don’t want to really stereotype people, but if you look at the club here in [this state] that’s the most notorious in terms of the treatment of women, it’s Venetian. And it’s all Italian. And I think it’s cultural.

GLORIA: Venetian, that was a big one, because I remember it being in the paper. I don’t know how it was resolved, but I remember thinking, “I’m glad I belong to the Oldfamily, where we’re so progressive, I can play golf when I want.”

The masculinity at the elite clubs of this sample is sanitized in comparison to the “others,” which are backward. Interviewees are extolling masculinity of a certain culturally ethnic sort. This is also a class-specific masculin-

ity: as noted, men with the most power have the least need for overtly sexist displays.

Some scholars critique the apparent gender liberalism of powerful men as shallow. Messner writes that the sensitive displays of the (usually white and affluent) “New Man” deserve more skepticism than praise.<sup>25</sup> Rather than heralding real change, “these gender displays may serve as signs that, in fact, serve to divert the feminist critique of masculinity on to less powerful groups of men, who supposedly embody the atavistic traits of ‘traditional masculinity.’”<sup>26</sup> A structural analysis of power reveals how a focus on men’s personal styles and gender displays shifts attention away from a critical scrutiny of men’s institutional power, thus helping to restabilize hegemonic masculinity, and the positions of power held by upper-class, white, heterosexual men. Interviewees’ veneration of elite, WASP masculinity is an example of this very phenomenon. Their talk shows how racism can be used in the service of male dominance. Also, Messner’s argument serves to remind observers that the apparent liberalism at Oldfamily and similar sites should not be confused with a real antisexist social movement.

It is no surprise that Oldfamily members proudly report their progressivism. However, it is notable that members at *all four* clubs use the strategy of pointing out how another club is worse than their own.

JESSICA: Well, that sort of brings me to tee times for men and women, because isn’t it true that women’s tee times are restricted?

SOPHIA: Right. I think less and less however. You could find some clubs, I can mention a couple to you. Rosary is the prime one where women don’t have much say in the doings of the club. Suburban is more family oriented and I think women have a lot more say.

RICHARD (*about the Northern leaders*): The idiots running the joint didn’t learn the first time. I mean that to me is industrial-strength stupidity. But you can’t protect stupid people from themselves. They’re gonna do that, it’s mind-boggling why they did what they did, but they’re paying for it now.

These put-downs are similar to finger pointing about racial-ethnic exclusivity. They are best interpreted not as gauges of the gender regimes at different clubs but as examples of a useful account that serves speakers and their own clubs well. Putting down another group is a common way to make a status distinction while simultaneously minimizing or excusing the flaws in one’s own group.

In their complacency about gender inequality, club members are reflecting the state of contemporary mainstream culture. As in the case of race, most people think of “discrimination” as a workplace issue; outside the workplace, women as a whole are not widely considered to be an oppressed group.

Interviewees’ talk also reflects the state of their marriages, or at least of the average marriage among club members. Women are presumed to be homemaker wives, whose duty it is to support their husbands. One small piece of this support is to stay off the golf course so men may use it at certain prime times. Note that in many clubs, these prime times are reserved for “men,” not for “people with careers,” a designation that would include working women and exclude retired men. Such a lack of clarity shows that the account about careers is, at least partly, a smoke screen for sexism.

Country club women in general have made a deal in marriage of “trading power for patronage,” which is one option for adapting to subordinate status.<sup>27</sup> This deal restricts their opportunity to advocate on their own behalf, as does the related set of expectations for upper-class femininity. The women in this population are thus in a bind, which makes their seeming complacency more understandable.

Conversely, the men in this population are cultivating a discourse that sanitizes their class- and race-specific brand of masculinity. Their moderate displays are contrasted with those of men who are not WASPS, who are denigrated in racial-ethnic terms as less progressive and more chauvinistic. Thus, gender here is race-specific as well as class-specific. By replacing displays of male dominance with gender-equal displays, such men hope to escape feminist critique. But these privileged men in fact possess and use the power to keep themselves at the top of gender, class, and race hierarchies.

The hegemony of asymmetrical marriage and the images of dominant femininity and masculinity are some of the components of the societal gender order. This order is reproduced at multiple sites, and the country club should be viewed as one of many interlocking contexts, rather than as the single causal agent in its own right. As long as the broader gender order has legitimacy, little real change will take place at exclusive clubs.

#### DISCUSSION

Club members contend, using several kinds of accounts, that the exclusion they practice is inoffensive. This is despite the fact that the financial and cultural requirements for membership bar people from most ethnic groups and economic strata from belonging.

However, subjects' accounts concerning gender are necessarily different from the ones addressing class and race exclusivity. White women have always been part of country clubs. While not (in most cases) kept off the club property, women have typically been kept off the golf course at certain prime times, off the board of governors, and out of the men's grill room. Gender is different from the other two main axes of domination in that, while class and race depend on various distancing mechanisms, gender hierarchy depends on a close symbiosis between men and women.<sup>28</sup> Gender segregation is more culturally accepted than explicit racial segregation. Some club members speak approvingly of separating the sexes, in a way that they would not, today, of separating "the races." This may be, ironically, because gender subordinates are in many ways closer to their dominators than class and race subordinates.

Class, race, and gender hierarchies are all important organizing principles of American society, with some uniqueness and some overlap. Ideologies justifying economic stratification and racial stratification are related, since class is raced and race is classed. According to the dominant ideology about inequality, the American Dream of meritocratic, color-blind equal opportunity is a reality. The talk of club members reflects complete support for this ideology. Their color blindness includes ignoring white privilege institutionalized in America and so, ironically, can be deemed racist.

The dominant ideology is individualistic about class and race more than gender. The dominant, though not unanimous, position is that men and women are "just different." Club members seem to think of the women in terms of their domestic identities, in keeping with their view of the club as a family place. But the notion that men and women are just different extends beyond home and family, helping to maintain male privilege.

We have seen some examples of the intersections of male privilege with class privilege and race privilege: men in this population dominate in their marriages, thanks to their wealth. At the same time, their security allows them gender displays that seem superior to the more blatantly patriarchal nonwhite men.

The rich white men profiled here are triply privileged by class, race, and gender. We might suppose that any subordinate status would take some time and energy away. The drag of one subordinate status amid privilege affects both the affluent white women studied by Susan Ostrander and also the affluent black men studied by Ellis Cose.<sup>29</sup> The men here, by contrast, are especially able to coordinate self-interested action; the weight of wealth, culture, and social structure are generally on their side.

This overdetermination of privilege poses a challenge for activist interventions such as regulating social activities like country club membership. That would require radical change; however, radical success would be evident in neighborhoods, classrooms, and social lives that are no longer bounded by class, race, or gender. The problem of exclusive private social clubs would have disappeared.

In the meantime, what do we learn by studying this phenomenon? These country club members enjoy a “matrix of privilege”<sup>30</sup> more than most. But their talk is very mainstream, reflecting the assumption that inequalities occur naturally and unproblematically. In the interviews, club members use tools of the dominant culture to give accounts. In recirculating these beliefs about class, race, and gender, country club members contribute to reproducing the inequalities and maintaining their privileges.

My goal was to expose and critique the cultural accounts that support inequalities. The analysis presented here shows how much of elite discourse—discourse that is taken for granted in America—actually serves to reproduce inequalities. This analysis might contribute to the articulation of both a counterdiscourse challenging the transmission of privilege and to an activism interrupting it.

#### NOTES

1. Domhoff, *Powers That Be*, xiv.
2. Fine, “Working the Hyphens.”
3. Ostrander, “Surely You’re Not in This Just to Be Helpful,” 7.
4. Mills, *Power Elite*; Useem, *Inner Circle*; Domhoff, *Who Rules America*.
5. Nader, “Up the Anthropologist.”
6. “WASP” stands for “White Anglo-Saxon Protestant,” a term commonly used by my interviewees, including when they characterize their own country clubs.
7. Ostrander, *Women of the Upper Class*.
8. Rich, “Compulsory Heterosexuality and Lesbian Existence.”
9. On the “culturally white” concept, see Feagin and O’Brien, *White Men On Race*, chapter 2.
10. All three clubs claim that membership is open to people from every religious, racial, and ethnic group. Each has a few members who personify “diversity,” but all the clubs remain prominently “WASPy” (Oldfamily and Suburban) or Irish Catholic (Rosary). Exact numbers are unavailable: as Domhoff notes, “The carefulness with which new members are selected extends to a guarding of club membership lists, which are usually available only to club members.” Domhoff, *Who Rules America Now*, 51. A journalist reports, “Although few managers will speak publicly on the subject, most agree that clubs that would not or did not admit people from certain racial or ethnic groups in the past now probably do, although not in large enough numbers to affect their profile.” Schumer, “Peek Inside the Country Club.”

11. Huber and Form, *Income and Ideology*. See also Hyde, *Holding Disillusionment at Bay*; Smith and Stone, "Rags, Riches, and Bootstraps," 93.
12. Bonilla-Silva, *Racism Without Racists*.
13. Oliver and Shapiro, *Black Wealth/White Wealth*.
14. Gordon and Lubiano, "Statement of the Black Faculty Caucus."
15. Zweigenhaft and Domhoff, *Diversity in the Power Elite*.
16. Morris and Western, "Inequality in Earnings," 623.
17. See, for example, Hays, *Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood*.
18. The quote is from Schwartz, *Peer Marriage*, 6. See also Blumstein and Schwartz, *American Couples*.
19. Connell, *Gender and Power*, 188.
20. Myers, "Ladies First," 23.
21. Hertz and Reverby, "Gender, Gentility, and Political Protest," 594.
22. *Ibid.*, 602.
23. On masculine displays in public settings, see Zinn, "Chicano Men and Masculinity," 29; Bourgois, *In Search of Respect*; Majors and Billson, *Cool Pose*. For domestic settings, see Brines, "Economic Dependency," 652; Hochschild, *Second Shift*; Anderson, "Gender, Status, and Domestic Violence," 655; McCloskey, "Socioeconomic and Coercive Power," 449; Szinovacz, "Family Power."
24. Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner, "Gender Displays," 214.
25. Messner, "Men as Superordinates," 293.
26. Similar critiques of the displays of powerful men come from Hondagneu-Sotelo and Messner 1994 (quoted in Messner 2003), and also from Pyke, "Class-Based Masculinities," 527.
27. Schwalbe et al., "Generic Processes," 419.
28. Collins, *Fighting Words*, 210.
29. Ostrander, *Women of the Upper Class*; Cose, *Rage of a Privileged Class*.
30. See Collins, *Black Feminist Thought*, for "matrix of oppression"; for "matrix of privilege," see Disch, "General Introduction."

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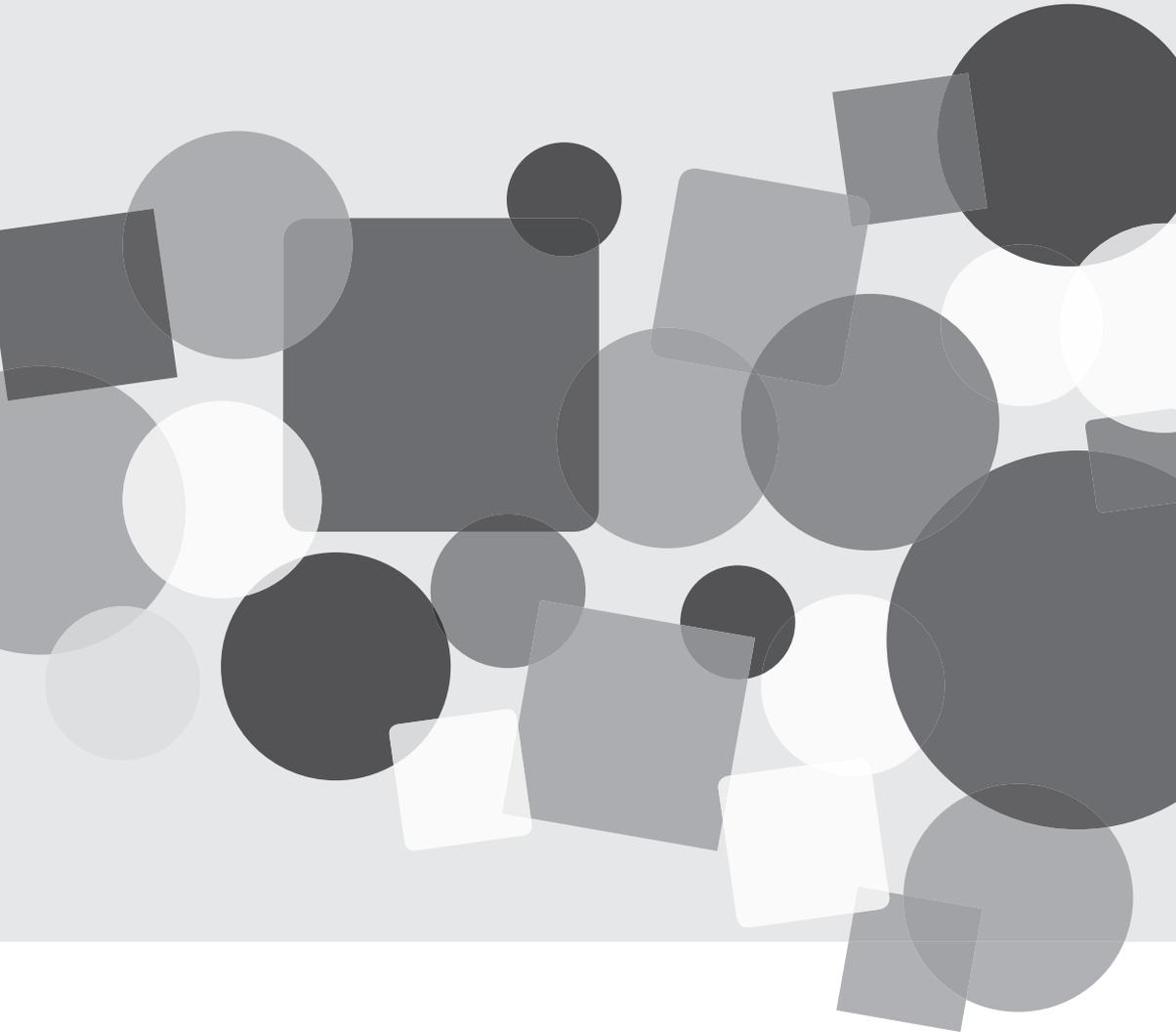
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III

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METHODOLOGICAL INNOVATIONS



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## Imagining a “Feminist Revolution”

### *Can Multiracial Feminism Revolutionize Quantitative Social Science Research?*

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CATHERINE E. HARNOIS

More than twenty years ago Judith Stacey and Barrie Thorne published their now classic article, “The Missing Feminist Revolution in Sociology.” Stacey and Thorne argued that while feminists had “made important contributions to sociology,” as of 1985 they had “yet to transform the basic conceptual frameworks of the field” (301). While feminist sociologists were making marked strides in “correcting sexist biases” and in “creating new topics” that reflect women’s experiences, the dominant sociological paradigm remained largely unaffected. Just as Gerda Lerner, years earlier, called for a “re-evaluation of the assumptions and methodology” in the field of history (1979, 180), Stacey and Thorne called for a feminist revolution in sociology that would result in a “‘gendered’ understanding of all aspects of human culture and relationships” (303, 305). Such a feminist revolution, they suggested, would “take us across disciplines” and would “equally attend to race, class, and sexuality as to gender” (311).

At the 2005 annual meeting of the American Sociological Association, feminist sociologists gathered together in a symposium to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of Stacey and Thorne’s article and to assess the current state of feminism within sociology. Each presenter described the important gains of the past two decades, and each speculated on how feminist sociology could “sustain its critical edge” in the future (Thorne 2006). Christine Williams—the editor of *Gender and Society* at that time—suggested that feminists would do well to reconsider some of the aspects of sociology that Stacey and Thorne had criticized decades earlier, in particular, function-

alism, Marxism, and quantitative methods. Raka Ray (2006, 462) called for a feminism that “pays more attention to the flows of power, ideas, and resources between rich and poor nations of the world,” and Judith Stacey (2006, 481) suggested that feminists should consider the possibility that biology might influence both gender and sexuality. Perhaps most importantly, all of the panelists urged reconsideration of the basic assumptions of Stacey and Thorne’s article: What do we mean by “feminist”? What do we mean by “revolution”? And is it possible for such a revolution to take place *within* sociology?

In this essay I draw from Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill’s work on multiracial feminism to explore what an explicitly “multiracial feminist sociology” might look like. I focus on quantitative sociological research and consider how our practices might change if the insights of multiracial feminism were centralized in our research. The specifics of my analysis concern the factors that lead women to embrace feminism, but the analytical framework I propose is by no means limited to this subject area. In fact, multiracial feminist challenges to hegemonic social science research practices have emerged in many substantive areas and in a variety of disciplines (see, for example, Berger 2004; Cole and Zucker 2007; Simien 2007; and Valentine 2007).

#### WHAT IS MULTIRACIAL FEMINISM?

In “Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism” Zinn and Dill describe “multiracial feminism” as a broad theoretical perspective in which race, along with gender, is understood to be a “basic social division, a structure of power, a focus of political struggle, and hence a fundamental force in shaping women’s and men’s lives” (1996, 324). At the core of multiracial feminism is, first, the recognition that multiple intersecting hierarchies organize our world and, second, a strong commitment to dismantling these hierarchies. In contrast to those feminists who seek to understand gender in isolation from other systems of inequality (or who ignore other systems of inequality altogether), multiracial feminists explicitly locate the social construction of gender (and other systems of stratification) within a broader context of intersecting social hierarchies. These hierarchies are thought to intersect at the individual level, where “people experience race, class, gender, and sexuality differently depending upon their social location in the structures of race, class, gender, and sexuality” (Zinn and Dill 1996, 326–27), but also at the institutional level, where, for example, race, gender, class, and sexuality are built into our political, economic, and cultural institutions.

Though Zinn and Dill describe multiracial feminism as encompassing “wide-ranging methodological approaches” and intellectual approaches (323, 328), the vast majority of quantitative social science research—including research on feminism and gender more generally—remains unaffected by this perspective. As I demonstrate here, however, quantitative research is in many ways compatible with multiracial feminism.<sup>1</sup> As Christine Williams notes, quantitative methods are sometimes “necessary if feminists are to intervene in important political debates” and are sometimes needed “to present a compelling argument, to inspire activism, and to get things changed” (2006, 456). But quantitative research can do more than simply document “real world” inequalities. Quantitative analyses can help us build better theories, both feminist and otherwise, and can be used in conjunction with other types of scholarship to demonstrate empirically the value of multiracial feminist thought for social science research. In what follows, I present one of several possible approaches to centralizing multiracial feminism within quantitative social science research.

#### MULTIRACIAL FEMINISM AND QUANTITATIVE RESEARCH

Whereas multiracial feminism views individuals’ locations in intersecting social hierarchies as relevant to any discussion of human behavior, most quantitative social science research understands race and gender in a comparatively limited way. Again, I use quantitative research on feminism as an example, but the broader patterns of data analysis are by no means limited to this area of research.

In a previous project (Harnois 2005), I argued that, barring a handful of studies that have focused exclusively on the feminism of one racial or ethnic group, most quantitative studies of feminism have incorporated race into their studies of feminism by including it as one of several “control” variables. Though Stacey and Thorne in 1985 critiqued the sociological literature for its reliance on “gender as a variable,” sociologists to this day continue to use both gender and race as variables. While including race and gender in quantitative research in this way can yield important insights about how gender and race operate (e.g., Smock 1994), too often “gender is assumed to be a property of individuals and is conceptualized in terms of sex difference, rather than as a principle of social organization” (Stacey and Thorne 1985, 307). The same holds true for race.

When scholars reduce racial status to something that can be “controlled for,” two potential problems arise. First, when controlling for race only by means of a categorical independent variable, most quantitative models as-

sume that women's individual characteristics (e.g., educational attainment, marital status) and particular experiences (e.g., working in the paid labor force, attending religious services) generally affect women's relationship with feminism in the same way, regardless of women's racial and ethnic statuses.<sup>2</sup> For example, in their analysis of the 1992 National Election Study, Pia Peltola and her coauthors (2004) report that, controlling for race and several other independent variables, women who attend religious services more frequently are significantly less likely to identify as feminist when compared with those who attend less frequently. By controlling for race, the authors imply that this relationship holds true for all women in the United States, regardless of their racial, ethnic, or sexual statuses. While this may be true when examining the U.S. population in general, multiracial feminist scholarship pushes us to consider how this claim might obfuscate important differences among women: Does such a broad claim mask differences among women's experiences with religion and gender? Given the extreme racial and ethnic segregation among religious institutions, communities, and schools (Dougherty 2003; Massey and Denton 1993), might the relationship between religiosity and feminism differ for women of different racial and ethnic groups? Paula Moya writes that

as long as our world is hierarchically organized along enduring relations of domination, people occupying different social locations will tend to experience the world in systematically different ways; . . . not everyone who has the same kind of experience will react in the same way or come to the same conclusions about that experience (2001, 472).

If it is to be compatible with multiracial feminism, social science research (both quantitative and qualitative) requires us to address this possibility explicitly in our analyses.

A second limitation of quantitative studies that rely on the "race-as-a-variable" approach is that they frequently assume that the survey items used to measure social phenomena carry the same meanings across racial-ethnic groups. For example, in quantitative social science research, the general approach to measuring individuals' commitment to feminism or their support for gender equality—and note that these are *not* equivalent—is to select a few "good" indicators (e.g., "feminist self-identification" or "support for the ERA") and to assume that these measures work equally well for the racial and ethnic groups included in the sample.<sup>3</sup> Again, multiracial feminism challenges this assumption.

As early as the 1970s, Chicana and black feminists suggested that, because of their location in the intersecting hierarchies of race, class, ethnicity, and geography, black and Chicana women experienced gender inequality in ways that were qualitatively different from white women and from each other (Cotera 1997; hooks 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983; Nieto-Gomez 1997). Because personal and community experiences help to shape both how individuals understand inequality and their strategies for combating it, multiracial feminism suggests that these, too, vary for women of different racial and ethnic groups. Patricia Hill Collins (2000, 16, 238), for example, has argued that, in contrast to white women's feminism, which tends to focus on gender oppression to the exclusion of other systems of oppression, African American feminism includes a wide range of behaviors, including "actions taken to eliminate discrimination in housing, employment, education, public accommodations, and political representation" and efforts to maintain and expand the social welfare system. Nieto-Gomez suggests that key issues for Chicana feminists include welfare rights, access to affordable and bicultural childcare, and access to employment (as opposed to equality in promotions). Whereas many white women—especially those who are heterosexual, able-bodied, and middle or upper class—may see "feminist" or "women's" issues as separate from those of sexuality, ability, class, race, and ethnicity, multiracial feminist theories broaden feminism to include antiracism and antipoverty work as well (hooks 1984; Lorde 1984; Nieto-Gomez 1997). One need only compare the writings in two classic texts, *This Bridge Called My Back* (1983) and *Sisterhood Is Powerful* (1970), to understand that there are multiple approaches to feminism and that many of the differences result from women's differential locations within intersecting hierarchies of ethnicity, class, and race.

#### RESEARCH DESIGN

In what follows, I present one approach for combining the insights of multiracial feminism with quantitative social science research methods. I begin by employing a technique called multiple group analysis in the statistical program MPlus to create a measurement tool for feminism and that takes into consideration the potential racial and ethnic biases described by multiracial feminist theories. In brief, by comparing the relationship among multiple observed variables, multiple group analysis allows us to determine whether it is reasonable to use the same measurement instrument for people in different groups (e.g., women who are black, white, and Latina). After testing the stability of the measurement tool across these three groups, I then use

this procedure again to explore whether, as multiracial feminism suggests, race and ethnicity shape how particular life experiences affect women's relationship with feminism.

The data analyzed here come from a telephone survey sponsored by Yankelovich Partners, *Time* magazine, and the Cable News Network, conducted in May 1998. While there are important limitations to data collected in this way, this data set is well suited to this project because it is, to my knowledge, the most recent survey that contains multiple indicators of feminism and asks respondents about their racial and ethnic statuses. I note here that the data set is biased in that it includes only respondents who have telephones and who speak English. The total number of men and women surveyed was 1,234, but my analysis includes only the data from 594 women who answered all of the questions concerning their sociodemographic characteristics as well as their feelings toward feminism and who self-identified as being white, black, or Hispanic.

Respondents first were asked, "Are you of Hispanic origin or descent?" and then "What is your race: are you white, black, Asian, or something else?" The thirty-nine women who answered "yes" to the first question or who identified their race as "Hispanic" in the second question are, for purposes of my analysis, included in the group "Latina." I compare this group to two others: (1) women who identified as non-Hispanic and black ( $N = 55$ ) and (2) women who identified as non-Hispanic and white ( $N = 500$ ). Those women who identified as non-Hispanic Asians or some "other" racial group were excluded from my analysis. Though I would have liked to include them in my analysis, the small number of individuals who identified as Asian or "other" prevented me from doing so. As I describe below, the large difference in sample size between whites, on the one hand, and blacks and Latinas, on the other, limits my ability to draw distinctions among these groups; however, despite these limitations, the merits of a multiracial feminist approach still emerge clearly.<sup>4</sup>

To avoid potential racial and ethnic bias in my measure of feminism, I employ three broad indicators of feminism: (1) self-identification as feminist (Respondents were asked, "Do you consider yourself to be a feminist?"); (2) the relevance of feminism to the respondent (Respondents were asked, "Do you think that feminism today is relevant or not relevant to you personally?"); and (3) perceived success of the feminist movement (Respondents were asked, "Overall, do you feel that feminists have been helpful or harmful to women?"). The responses for each question were coded into three

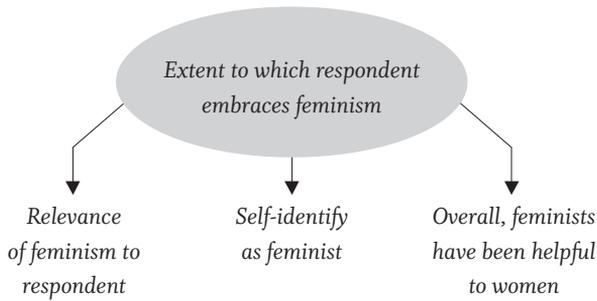


FIGURE 1. Measurement tool for feminism

categories, with higher values indicating a more positive view of feminism and the feminist movement. The first portion of my analysis tests whether in fact this measurement tool is consistent for Latina, black, and white women. When investigating the individual characteristics that are associated with women’s feminism, I include several sociodemographic variables, including total family income, age, educational attainment, marital status, and participation in the paid labor force.<sup>5</sup> While other sociodemographic characteristics (e.g., religiosity, sexual identities, citizenship, and geographic location) surely influence women’s relationship with feminism, information regarding these characteristics was not included in the survey and could not, therefore, be included in this analysis.

#### ANALYSIS

I begin my analysis with a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA), represented in figure 1. The CFA allows us to explore the relationship between a concept, such as feminism, and several measured variables, such as whether a woman identifies as a feminist and her beliefs about gender inequality. As mentioned above, most quantitative studies of feminism simply assume that observed variables such as these are reliable measures of feminism and that they are equally reliable across racial and ethnic groups. The CFA allows us to investigate both of these assumptions. The latent variable, the extent to which respondents embrace feminism, is measured by the three observed variables described above: relevance of feminism to the respondent, self-identification as feminist, and extent to which the respondent believes feminism has helped women (each of which is presented in figure 1). The factor-loading for the first of these variables has been constrained to 1 and is used to scale the other two observed variables.

TABLE 1. Results from Multiple Group Analysis of Women's Embracing of Feminism

	<i>Model A</i>	<i>Model B</i>	<i>Model C</i>
Relevance of feminism to R.	1 <sup>C</sup>	1 <sup>C</sup>	1 <sup>C</sup>
Self-identify as feminist	0.884*** (.116)	0.910 (w)*** (0.124) 0.233 (B) (0.223) 1.014 (L)* (0.543)	0.896*** (0.124)
Overall, feminists have been helpful to women	0.596*** (.076)	0.648 (w)*** (0.083) 0.383 (B)* (0.232) 0.326 (L) (0.218)	0.619***
Mean of latent variable	0 <sup>C</sup>	0 <sup>C</sup>	0 <sup>C</sup>
Variance of latent variable	.768*** (.117)	0.753*** (0.110)	0.766 (w)*** (0.113) 0.305 (B)* (0.177) 0.694 (L)* (0.409)
CFI	.989	1.000	0.991
TLI	.992	1.002	0.992
RMSEA	.041	0.000	0.039
$\chi^2$	16.004	7.480	13.068
d.f.	12	8	10
P-value	0.3382	0.4858	0.2198
$\chi^2$ difference—		8.524	2.936
P-value for $\chi^2$ difference test—		0.074	0.230

Source: Yankelovich Survey, 1998.

Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. N = 594

(500 non-Hispanic white women; 55 non-Hispanic black women; 39 Latina women)

- <sup>C</sup> indicates that parameter is constrained to 0 (w) indicates coefficients for white women  
\* significant at 5 percent (two-tailed) (B) indicates coefficients for black women  
\*\* significant at 1 percent (two-tailed) (L) indicates coefficients for Latina women  
\*\*\* significant at 0.1 percent (two-tailed)

The results from my CFA are presented in table 1. Because many multi-racial feminist scholars have suggested that the relationship among these indicators might differ for women of different racial and ethnic groups (e.g., Collins 2000; Harnois 2005; hooks 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1983), I conduct a multiple group analysis of respondents' embrace of feminism. As mentioned above, the multiple group analysis allows us to see whether, statistically speaking, it is reasonable to assume that the relationships among the observed and latent variables are similar for various groups. In this analysis I am interested in knowing whether the relationship among the observed variables is similar for non-Hispanic black, Latina, and non-Hispanic white women.

Table 1 displays the results for three separate but related models. Model A, the left-most column, is a "universal" model, which assumes that the relationship among the observed and latent variables and the variance of our latent variable are all equivalent for women of different racial and ethnic groups. The fit indices for this model, which "assess the degree of congruence between the model and data" (Hu and Bentler 1995, 81), are listed on the bottom portion of the table. Both the Tucker-Lewis Index (TLI) and Comparative Fit Index (CFI) generally range from 0 to 1, with values above 0.90 indicating a good model fit. The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) also can range from 0 to 1 but is unlike the other two measures in that values of less than 0.05 represent a good model fit. Each of these indices, and the nonsignificant P-value for the  $\chi^2$  test ( $P > 0.05$ ), indicates that Model A fits the data well.

Moving to the right, Model B builds on Model A by relaxing some of the assumptions concerning equality among racial and ethnic groups. While Model A assumes that the factor-loadings for *feminist identity* and *evaluation of feminism* are equal for black, Latina, and white women, Model B allows these factor-loadings to differ. In other words, it allows us to see whether the relationships among *feminist identity*, *evaluation of feminism*, and *R's embrace of feminism* are likely to differ for women of different racial and ethnic groups. Examining the fit indices in this model, we see that the CFI and TLI have increased slightly and both the RMSEA and  $\chi^2$  have decreased. I conducted a  $\chi^2$  difference test in order to determine whether, statistically speaking, Model B represents an improved fit over the "universal" Model A. However, because the P-value for this test (0.074) is higher than our cutoff point of 0.05, the  $\chi^2$  difference test indicates that Model B does not represent a better fit with the data. In other words, there is little evidence to suggest that the relationship between our three observed variables (*feminist identity*,

*relevance of feminism to R*, and *evaluation of feminism*) and our latent variable (*R's embrace of feminism*) differs for non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic white, and Latina women.

Given the results of our  $\chi^2$  difference test, Model C, like Model A, constrains the factor-loadings to be equal across groups. In Model C, I test another potential difference: the variance of the latent variable, *R's embrace of feminism*. The fit indices for Model C are very similar to those for Model A, suggesting again that the model fits the data well. The P-value of the  $\chi^2$  difference test ( $P = 0.230$ , which is greater than our cutoff value of 0.05) again suggests, however, that Model C does not represent a significantly improved fit compared to Model A.

Taken as a whole, the results from table 1 suggest that the model presented in figure 1 does not vary significantly for Latina, white, and black women. While there is certainly individual variation in the relationship between the observed variables and the latent variable, this variation does not seem to be significantly related to women's racial and ethnic identities. Again, this does not mean that non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic white, and Latina women understand feminism in the same way. Rather, the model suggests that the extent to which non-Hispanic black, non-Hispanic white, and Latina women embrace feminism can be measured by using the measurement tool presented in figure 1, and that the relationships among the variables included in this model are similar for these three groups.<sup>6</sup>

The second portion of my analysis, presented in table 2, explores the factors that lead women to embrace feminism. In both models, the dependent variable is the latent variable presented in figure 1 (and in Model A of table 1), and the independent variables are those listed on the left-hand side of the table. Similar to table 1, Model A is the "universal model" that assumes that the life experiences of Latina, non-Hispanic black, and non-Hispanic white women affect their evaluations of feminism in similar ways. It assumes, for example, that increased education will influence the extent to which white women embrace feminism in roughly the same way that it will influence black women's and Latinas' embrace of feminism. As mentioned before, this is an assumption that much of the existing quantitative research on feminism makes and that much of multiracial feminist scholarship challenges.

With CFI and TLI values at above 0.9, the fit indices of Model A suggest that the model fits the data well, though the statistically significant  $\chi^2$  value, combined with the RMSEA above 0.05, suggests that there is room for improvement. If Model A were our final model, we would conclude that education and marital status are statistically significant predictors of women's

TABLE 2. Combined Estimates of Women's Embrace of Feminism on Selected Independent Variables

<i>Independent Variables</i>	MODEL A		MODEL B	
	<i>Combined Estimates</i>	<i>Black Women</i>	<i>Latina Women</i>	<i>White Women</i>
Age	0.013 (0.021)	0.062 (0.046)	-0.038 (0.063)	0.021 (0.026)
Education	0.194*** (0.037)	0.100 (0.074)	0.426*** (0.118)	0.161*** (0.045)
Family income	-0.005 (0.032)	0.067 (0.065)	-0.046 (0.110)	-0.030 (0.041)
Currently in paid labor force	0.001 (0.077)	0.052 (0.184)	-0.426 (0.276)	0.109 (0.109)
<i>Marital status</i> (compared to married/widowed)				
Divorced/separated	0.412*** (0.090)	0.536* (0.245)	-0.412 (0.260)	0.193 (0.137)
Never married	0.317** (0.105)	0.566** (0.194)	0.451 (0.293)	0.273 <sup>+</sup> (0.143)
<i>Dependent Variables</i>				
Relevance of feminism to R.	1 <sup>C</sup>		1 <sup>C</sup>	
Self-identify as feminist	0.954*** (0.097)		1.073*** (0.111)	
Overall, feminists have been helpful to women	0.666*** (0.069)		0.689*** (0.073)	
Residual variance of embracing feminism	0.744*** (0.087)		0.651*** (0.080)	
<i>Fit Indices</i>				
CFI	0.945		0.955	
TLI	0.942		0.941	
RMSEA	0.066		0.067	
X <sup>2</sup>	112.470 (60 d.f.)		90.705 (48 d.f.)	
P-value for X <sup>2</sup> difference test:			0.0402	

Source: Yankelovich Survey, 1998. Note: Numbers in parentheses are standard errors. N=594 (500 non-Hispanic white women; 55 non-Hispanic black women; 39 Latina women)

\* significant at 5 percent (two-tailed)      \*\*\* significant at 0.1 percent (two-tailed)

\*\* significant at 1 percent (two-tailed)      + significant at 5 percent (one-tailed)

feminism. As the coefficient is positive, we would conclude that increased educational attainment is associated with a greater embrace of feminism. Additionally, Model A suggests that women who are either divorced or separated tend to embrace feminism more than those who are married or widowed, as do women who have never been married. As mentioned above, Model A assumes that these relationships are the same for black, white, and Latina women.

Moving to the right, the next three columns (labeled “Black Women,” “Latina Women,” and “White Women”) together represent Model B. Just like it did in table 1, in table 2 Model B relaxes the assumption of invariance across groups. In other words, Model B allows the relationships between the dependent and independent variables to differ for women Latina, black, and white women.

In contrast to those in Model A, the estimates from Model B suggest that marital status is a key predictor of feminism only among black women, with black women who have never married and those who are divorced or separated embracing feminism more than those who are currently married or widowed. Among white women and Latina women, it is education that is a significant predictor of women’s feminism, with increased education associated with a greater embrace of feminism. It is tempting to conclude that education has a greater effect on Latinas’ feminism, as the coefficient is more than twice that for white women (0.426 vs. 0.161). Due to the radically different sample sizes, however, comparing specific coefficients across racial and ethnic groups in this way is unwise.

For purposes of this chapter, what are most important are the fit indices of Model B, presented in the bottom section of the table. In comparison with Model A, most of the fit indices improve in Model B, albeit only slightly. More importantly, though, is the significant P-value associated with the  $\chi^2$  difference test. Recall that in table 1 the two  $\chi^2$  difference tests are non-significant, indicating that the measurement tool for *R’s embrace of feminism* works in the same way for women of different racial and ethnic groups. In this table, however, the significant P-value of the  $\chi^2$  difference test suggests just the opposite. While we might use the same tool to measure the extent to which women embrace feminism, the paths by which black, Latina, and white women come to embrace feminism differ significantly from one another. This finding is in direct contrast to those previous studies that have suggested that race has relatively little to do with one’s feminism (e.g., Schnittker et al. 2003), and it supports the claim of multiracial feminists

that race is “a fundamental force in shaping women’s and men’s lives” (Zinn and Dill 1996, 324).

#### CONCLUSION

By highlighting how racial and ethnic differences shape women’s relationships with feminism, this project contributes to feminist social science research in at least two ways. First, in demonstrating that Latina, black, and white women take different paths to feminism, the substantive results of this project yield new insights into feminism among these racial-ethnic groups. Emily Kane (2000, 436) has argued that “there is a serious need for research using probability samples to address the gender-related attitudes of racial/ethnic groups other than African Americans and whites.” By focusing on Latinas’ paths to feminism and comparing them with the paths of white and black women, this project helps to fill this gap. Though not as nuanced as the theoretical research and personal narratives concerning Latina feminism, the findings from analyses based on probability samples are generalizable in a way that other research is not. Data limitations prevent me from examining every factor that might encourage women to embrace feminism, and so I cannot conclude, for example, that education is *the* best predictor of Latinas’ feminism and marital status *the* best predictor of black women’s feminism. But the results of this study do lend empirical support for what multiracial feminists have long argued: that black, Latina, and white women take qualitatively different routes to feminism.

The second contribution I make here concerns my vision for a “feminist revolution” in sociology and social science research more generally. In *Inessential Woman*, philosopher Elizabeth Spelman writes that, in focusing on women *as women*, “feminist theory has confused the condition of one group of women with the condition of all” (1988, 4). In their analysis of feminism among Chicanas, Beatriz Pesquera and Denise Segura make a similar point: “Without sustained analysis of the diverse feminisms among women and the conditions that motivate them, theoretical formulations and strategies for change will continue to veer away from historically subordinate groups” (1993, 95). The multiracial feminist framework I propose here begins with the premise that our society is organized around historically rooted, intersecting hierarchies of race, gender, ethnicity, and class, and that, consequently, understanding these systems is vital to our understanding of all kinds of social relations (Zinn and Dill 1996, 329). My analysis of feminism illustrates the importance of this theoretical perspective. While I have focused on what

quantitative social scientists might gain by utilizing a multiracial feminist perspective to understand women's relationships with feminism, the methodological framework I propose is limited neither to studies of feminism nor to social science research.

By suggesting that the statistical significance and sign of a few dichotomous variables accurately reflect the significance of race, gender, and ethnicity, the normative practices of quantitative social science obfuscate systems of racial, ethnic, and sexual domination. By bringing these systems of domination to the forefront, multiracial feminist scholarship—in both its quantitative and qualitative forms—challenges these systems.

#### NOTES

1. I acknowledge the tension that has existed and continues to exist between feminist theory and quantitative scholarship but propose that each has something to gain from the other. Ramazanoglu echoes this point when stating, "There is no research method that is consistently or specifically feminist" (2002, 15).

2. This assumption is mitigated when scholars employ interaction terms between racial status and other independent variables, but this is seldom done in practice.

3. See, for example, Conover (1988) or Rhodebeck (1996).

4. The larger number of white women in my analysis makes it comparatively more difficult to obtain statistical significance for black women and Latinas.

5. Age is an ordinal-level variable (18–24, 25–29, 30–34, 35–39, 40–49, 50–64, and 65 and older). Income is defined as total family income before taxes and is coded into the following categories: less than \$20,000; \$20,000–\$34,999; \$35,000–\$49,999; \$50,000–\$74,999; \$75,000–\$99,999; and \$100,000 or more. Education is measured as the last grade of school that the respondent completed and is coded into the following categories: eighth grade or less; some high school; high-school graduate; some college; college graduate; and postgraduate study. Participation in the paid labor force is measured as a dichotomous variable, where working part time or full time are combined to indicate labor-force participation.

6. I have demonstrated elsewhere (Harnois 2005) that the extent to which respondents embrace feminism is *not* equivalent to their support for gender equality. Care should be taken not to conflate these two issues.

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## Repairing a Broken Mirror

### *Intersectional Approaches to Diverse Women's Perceptions of Beauty and Bodies*

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ELIZABETH R. COLE & NATALIE J. SABIK

Many young girls fantasize about playing the part of the beautiful heroines of children's literature, film, and television. But the memoir of Marita Golden (2004), an African American woman, suggests that for some girls this idealized femininity seems painfully remote because cultural messages tell them they cannot resemble the princesses of make-believe. Golden recalls the pleasure she felt gazing at herself in a mirror at ten years old, her head draped in her mother's silk scarves to imitate the appearance and sensation of long hair that "kisses my brown cheeks as I imagine a white girl's hair must brush her skin—with the most awesome feeling of affirmation, beauty, and power. Standing before that mirror I am Snow White. I am Cinderella. My short, has-to-be-straightened-with-a-hot-comb hair has disappeared" (Golden 2004, 4). Golden's early identification with the heroines of children's media, an identification through which she recalls feeling validation and self-esteem, was predicated on the erasure of her own physical features. Considering that these fictional characters are homogeneous, ubiquitous, and defined by appearance, it is not surprising that even young girls can perceive the assumptions about race embedded in these beauty ideals (long flowing hair, snow white skin, etc.), and that their perceptions of their own bodies may be affected (Hurley 2005).

Because these gendered beauty ideals implicitly include normative assumptions about race, as well as age, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and other social categories that define identity, difference, and disadvantage, for many women and girls they represent a broken mirror. This metaphor has two

implications. First, just as a broken mirror cannot render a coherent image, the perceptions and concerns of diverse women may be incomprehensible through the lens of conventional ways of understanding beauty and body ideals. Second, the metaphor suggests that, to the extent that women's experiences of their bodies are mediated through these narrow and biased beauty standards, their self-perceptions may be distorted and inaccurate. To understand these possibilities, in this essay we review the extant literature on body image and beauty ideals through the lens of intersectionality, a theoretical concept developed by feminist theorists to describe analytic approaches that simultaneously consider the meaning and consequences of multiple categories of social group membership (e.g., how women's experiences vary depending on race, class, and sexuality). Such approaches are necessary because failure to consider how social categories depend on one another for meaning renders our knowledge of all categories both incomplete and biased.

Our review focuses on research within the discipline of psychology. In a classic essay, Sherif (1994) argues that research in this field has depended on a limited framework based on specific privileged viewpoints. Her critique still rings true of much social science research. Psychologists generally aim for simplified models, often "controlling for" membership in categories other than the one of interest by holding them constant in statistical analyses. Such approaches tend to overlook the complex processes that create and maintain social categories (Bonilla-Silva 1997). Sherif argued social scientists might help perpetuate inequality through this entrenched form of bias. Intersectional approaches address this limitation by carefully attending to the social categories, processes, and interactions conventional approaches tend to avoid.

In the first section, we discuss the ways that much of the extant research on women's perceptions of bodies and beauty presumes that the form that women's dissatisfaction with their bodies takes is fairly invariant across differences of race, age, and other social categories; we argue that this assumption obscures diversity in women's perceptions and experiences with their bodies and with normative beauty standards. Based on a framework developed by Cole (2009), we then pose three questions researchers can ask in order to employ an intersectional analysis. We provide examples from published studies to demonstrate the complexity and nuance this approach can add to our understanding of how women's experience of gendered beauty standards dialogue with their multiple identities.

Some definitions will help clarify the relationships among our central

concepts. “Body image” is an umbrella term encompassing aspects of how individuals perceive and evaluate their bodies, including but not limited to satisfaction and concern with weight, body shape and size, and appearance, including the value placed on appearance (Thompson et al. 1999). “Beauty ideals” or “beauty norms” refer to cultural standards of beauty that are often unattainable without extreme dieting, surgery, and other cosmetic procedures. A main component of the beauty ideal is a drive for thinness, though this is only one aspect of the image of the ideal woman; other characteristics such as being young, white, able-bodied, and heterosexual are also implied. Feminist scholars also use the terms “thin ideal” and “cult of thinness” to describe the pursuit of a low body weight through monitoring of caloric intake and exercise (Hesse-Biber 2006).

#### MEASURING WOMEN’S BODY IMAGE AND SATISFACTION

Although the literature on body image and satisfaction has mainly focused on the experiences of women who are white and young (typically college aged), research that has included women of diverse racial/ethnic groups generally finds that black/African American women report slightly higher levels of body satisfaction than white, Asian American, and Latina women (Grabe and Hyde 2006). However, little research has examined whether commonly used scales used to measure body image and satisfaction are equivalent and valid across groups. Without this information, it is impossible to know whether a difference in groups’ average scores reflects true differences between the groups or a bias in the way these constructs are measured.

There is good reason for concern that specific questions, or items, from commonly used measures of body satisfaction may bear a different relationship to the underlying construct for diverse women. Ethnographic research has shown that white girls are socialized by their mothers into “fat talk,” informal dialogue in which women denigrate their bodies to others (Nichter 2000), and that such talk is normative among young white women (Britton et al. 2006). The same is not true of black girls (Nichter 2000). In light of these different norms across racial/ethnic groups, we would expect that given two women with the same underlying level of body dissatisfaction, one white and one black, the white woman may be more likely to agree with statements such as “I am preoccupied with the desire to be thinner” and “I think that my thighs are too large” (from the drive for thinness and body dissatisfaction subscales of the Eating Disorders Inventory [Garner, Olmstead, and Polivy 1983]). In this example, the items would not assess body satisfaction in the same way for the two groups. Researchers who study mea-

surement use the term “differential item functioning” to describe a situation such as this in which two groups with the same level of a latent trait differ in their probability of endorsing, or agreeing with, a test item (Smith 2002). This is a form of test bias.

A second way that measures of body image and satisfaction may not function equivalently across groups has to do with item content. Most research has taken a dominant group approach (Weber and Parra-Medina 2003), conceptualizing beauty standards from the standpoint of young white women, which emphasizes the thin ideal. Moreover, these scales generally do not include items concerning physical features thought to distinguish racial groups, such as hair texture and length, skin color, facial features, and body shape (rather than size). To conclude that some groups of women have equivalent or even high body esteem because they do not endorse the same dissatisfactions commonly reported by young, white, middle-class (and presumably heterosexual) women is not warranted; however, the idea that some groups are “buffered” from concern with oppressive beauty standards recurs fairly often in this literature (Poran 2006).

The third way that these measures may not be equivalent across racial/ethnic groups has to do with participants’ interpretations of the test items. Research on racial socialization has found that many black parents aim to instill in their children a sense of group pride through repeating messages to them such as “Be proud of who you are,” “You are connected to a history that goes back to African royalty,” and “Never be ashamed of your color” (Stevenson et al. 2002). Youth who recall receiving messages from their parents that reinforced cultural pride reported higher self-esteem (Constantine and Blackmon 2002). Asking black women about body esteem may be, for some, tantamount to asking about racial pride. Participants may hesitate to endorse items indicating poor body esteem if they interpret such responses as reflecting unfavorably on their racial group. Such items may not hold this valence for groups for whom group identity is not central or for members of groups that do not emphasize the importance of collective self-esteem.

These problems suggest that if we aim to understand diverse women’s perceptions and evaluations of their bodies, simply applying conventional measures to diverse samples can invite bias, or at least error. These measures may not be valid for groups other than those for which they were developed, due to group differences in the association between specific items and the underlying construct the measures assess, specific content of the items (what is covered and what is omitted), and participants’ interpretation of the items. It is important to note that whether a measure is valid for differ-

ent groups cannot be easily ascertained through the face validity of the scale items; however, remarkably little research has investigated validity of such measures across groups (for an exception, see Fernandez et al. 2006).

In contrast, an intersectional approach entails a consideration of the way that gender and other social categories depend on one another for meaning. In other words, a woman's experience of beauty standards depends not solely on gender but also on her other group memberships including race, class, age, sexuality, and disability. But little work has been done to help researchers conceptualize such considerations empirically within the social sciences (Hancock 2007; McCall 2005). In the following sections, we pose three questions based on the concept of intersectionality that can deepen our understanding of diverse gendered experiences of body image and satisfaction: *Whose perspective is represented and whose is left out? What role does power play?* and *Where are there similarities?*

#### WHOSE PERSPECTIVE IS REPRESENTED AND WHOSE IS LEFT OUT?

Although widely held beauty ideals can have negative effects on women, all women are not disadvantaged in the same way. Asking "Whose perspective is represented?" and including the perspectives of neglected groups can help to identify these discrepancies, thus providing a corrective to research that looks only at a single category of identity, difference, or disadvantage. This approach thwarts any tendency to view a category in essentialist terms (Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst 2000), both by illuminating what is overlooked when a social category is assumed to include only certain (usually privileged) subgroups of that category and by representing diverse experiences defined by multiple identities contained within any given category (e.g., the category "lesbians" includes women of different social classes and races). Several examples illustrate what asking this question can reveal.

#### Considering Race/Ethnicity

Research has repeatedly demonstrated the damaging effect the thin ideal may have on body image, eating habits, and feelings of self-worth among young white women (Noll and Fredrickson 1998; Tiggeman and Slater 2001; Tylka and Hill 2004). How would consideration of race/ethnicity change our understanding? Asian American women provide one example. Asian American women have reported levels of body dissatisfaction comparable to those of white women; these results are often interpreted to indicate they

are similarly affected by the same ideals held by white women (Grabe and Hyde 2006).

Research that takes a more nuanced view of Asian American women's attitudes finds important distinctions. An investigation into aspects of the body that different groups prioritized revealed that, unlike white women, Asian American women generally did not desire larger breasts (Atlabé 1998). On the other hand, this group may have some unique concerns. Asian American women interviewed by Kaw (1994) reported a desire for plastic surgery to create a crease in the eyelid, making the eye appear wider and more like Europeans' eyes. Some who wanted surgery felt their racialized features were associated with negative stereotypes of Asians, including a passive and unsociable personality and narrow-minded outlook. Others believed that in the United States, Asians are viewed as innately foreign and unable to be assimilated, and they wanted to distance themselves from this stereotype. Importantly, Kaw's analysis showed that the desire for surgery was not primarily a desire to appear more like Europeans for simple aesthetic reasons.

### Considering Social Class

Similarly, much of the research in this area has focused on college students and thus assumed middle-class status. However, Adair's (2002) work demonstrates how poverty can affect the body—and perceptions of the body—in meaningful ways. Not being able to afford items such as clothing considered appropriate or attractive, or personal hygiene products, may create a sense of shame (Sayer 2005). Rather than striving for thinness, women living in poverty may struggle to meet basic physical needs. Not having access to resources such as supportive shoes and medical and dental care not only constrains the ways one can present the body but also may leave lasting marks upon the body such as scars or missing teeth that “brand” individuals as poor. As Adair (2002) argued, “Poor children are often marked with bodily signs that cannot be forgotten or erased. Their bodies are physically inscribed as ‘other’ and then read as pathological, dangerous and undeserving” (456).

Like Kaw (1994) in her work with Asian American women, Adair suggested that these feelings about the body hinge on how embodied markers of difference are “read” by observers. Lower-class status does not release women from concern with body issues, but the issues experienced may differ in important ways from those with more material privilege (Abell and Richards 1996; Skeggs 2001). Asking whose perspective has been left out draws attention to material differences in women's lives; it also can reveal differences in women's thoughts, feelings, and values. In a large-scale longitudinal

study, McLaren and Kuh (2004) found women with higher social class in young adulthood had *lower* appearance and weight esteem in midlife. This is consistent with the idea that thinness is a marker of social distinction, and thus an ideal that may not be universally embraced. Juxtaposed with the work of Adair (2002) it is clear that this finding does not suggest that poor women are buffered from body-image concerns.

### Including Aging Women

In another version of the buffering hypothesis, some work on aging has assumed that later in life women are freed from body-image concerns because ideals of beauty no longer apply to them (Mangweth-Matzek et al. 2006; Tunaley, Walsh, and Nicolson 1999). However, in interviews, most aging women described their bodies in negative terms and denied that their bodies could be seen as attractive or desirable (Hurd 2000). Aging women did tend to focus more on their health, functioning, and independence than on culturally constructed beauty ideals; nonetheless, they also displayed an internalization of the idea that weight gain is a personal failure, rather than a natural part of aging (Hurd 2000).

Another study indicated that older women, but not men, compartmentalize the body, thinking of it as composed of distinct parts (Halliwell and Dittmar 2003). This reflects self-objectification, the tendency to think of one's body as an object, which has negative effects on younger women's mental health (Grabe, Hyde, and Lindberg 2007). Older women are not protected from internalizing the ideal and espousing negative feelings (Saucier 2004), yet their relationships with their bodies do not fit into existing frameworks for understanding younger women. Aging women have demonstrated a concurrent desire to be thin with a rejection of pressure regarding food and body size (Tunaley, Walsh, and Nicolson 1999). This contradictory and multifaceted relationship may seem difficult to reconcile with the existing literature; the complexity revealed when groups that have been traditionally left out are investigated is further proof that more inclusive research samples and more nuanced ways to conceptualize social categories are needed.

These examples suggest that thinking about which groups' perspectives have been represented in the literature on body image, and which have been left out, can result in a more complex and complete understanding of how social categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage shape women's perceptions and satisfaction with their bodies. These examples highlight how commonly used measures of body esteem assume the perspective of women who are white, middle class, and young. Addressing this topic from the per-

spective of other groups would lead researchers to take a broader approach to the assessment of satisfaction (e.g., inquiring about satisfaction with facial features, or aspects of appearance related to health and grooming). Research that does not rely on conventional paradigms can help to rethink the foundational research based on dominant groups' perspectives. Attention to these groups' experiences also reminds us that women's desire to adhere to beauty norms need not be motivated solely by social conformity, false consciousness, or an investment in superficial appearances (Skeggs 2001). As will be discussed in the following section, women also aspire to beauty as a way to claim status and worthiness in a culture in which these qualities are unmistakably gendered, racialized, and classed.

#### WHAT ROLE DOES POWER PLAY?

Categories such as race, social class, age, and sexuality do not simply describe demographic groups that may be different or similar; these categories reflect historical and continuing relations of legal and material inequality and social stigma. The second question, "What role does power play?" encourages us to consider the ways that multiple-category memberships position individuals and groups in asymmetrical relation to one another, affecting their perceptions, experiences, and outcomes.

Historically and in the present, women's experiences of and in their bodies have been mediated by cultural representations of what it means to be a woman (Conboy, Medina, and Stanbury 1997). Reflecting on this phenomenon, feminist theorists have explained that bodies can be seen as texts, with meaning inscribed on or in them which can be read within a specific cultural framework (Bordo 1993; Martin 1997). As a result, bodies that are closest to that of the dominant group or the ideal are often perceived as imbued with power. Women who change their bodies to be closer to the ideal through surgery, dieting, and other means can be understood as aspiring to possess this power, even if that power is constrained because it is based on a feminine self-presentation, which is associated with less ability, competence, and intelligence (Valian 1999). The choice to claim power through compliance with beauty norms may be particularly available to white women (Hurtado 1989; Wolf 1991).

#### Beauty as Power

Asking "What is the role of power?" can complicate our understanding of body image and beauty. In this light, these ideals are not simply an oppressive force imposed on women. For example, the majority of the research on

body-image disturbance among white women has assumed that women are concerned with weight because the desired or ideal body is thin. Believing that thinness is the only driving force behind some white women's preoccupation with appearance norms constrains our ability to see larger, structural factors that influence women's perceptions and treatment of their bodies. White women may strive toward thinness because they are trying to move closer to the type of body that is most valued and powerful. Feminist theorists often argue there is a link between denying one's body food and desiring power (Bordo 1993; Malson 1998), so women's disordered eating can be understood as agentic in some ways, albeit within the context of oppressive social norms.

This type of power may be unfulfilling, because striving for an ideal that cannot be reached disadvantages women collectively; the current obsession in popular culture about beauty and thinness may be a form of backlash against women and can be seen as a means to keep women and minority-group members from gaining power (Wolf 1991). Trepagnier (1994) argues that Western standards of beauty presume and privilege whiteness, putting women of color at a disadvantage. Asking "What is the role of power?" reveals that white women's privileged position with respect to beauty is premised, in part, on their comparison to women of color, particularly black women (Collins 2000; Trepagnier 1994). White women are simultaneously subordinated and privileged by beauty norms and are in some sense responsible for them. Because white women benefit from their privilege in the domain of beauty, they complicitly participate in the perpetuation of this inequality (Hurtado 1989).

### Beauty Standards as a Justification for Inequality

Beauty is often linked to ideas about goodness and worthiness (Dion, Berscheid, and Walster 1972; Holliday and Sanchez Taylor 2006). Craig (2006) noted dominant groups use claims of beauty to legitimize their subordination of others (including slavery in the United States and anti-Semitism by the Nazi party). Activist Cynthia Rich, cofounder of the Old Women's Project, argues that ageism is similar to other forms of oppression in that each is associated with disgust for the bodies of subordinate group members, including "people of color, the disabled, lesbians and gays, Jews. All marginalized people have heard at one time or another that it's 'natural' for others to find them physically repulsive" (Lipscomb 2006, 5). In response, subordinate groups have claimed their own beauty as a form of resistance. For example, Craig (2006) described the important role of the Afro hairstyle

as a symbol of racial pride during the civil rights movement. Beauty is a “contested symbolic resource” (160) that encapsulates social constructions of difference and worthiness.

Observers rate attractive people as more socially competent, adjusted, and intelligent (Eagly et al. 1991). These positive stereotypes may disadvantage members of groups that are deemed outside consensually held norms for beauty. For example, people with visible disabilities often struggle to challenge the assumption by observers that disability trumps all other identities, both social and personal, to define a person in terms of a single attribute (Asch 1984; Thomson 1997). This form of prejudice against the disabled must be understood as it intersects with other categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage. For example, this may be particularly difficult for women with disabilities, who are often seen as genderless or asexual and thus in some ways beyond feminine beauty. Thomson succinctly captures the way that disability is perceived as both at odds with femininity and devalued in relation to it: “Feminization prompts the gaze; disability prompts the stare” (28).

Women may face devaluation as aging transforms their bodies in ways discrepant with beauty ideals associated with physical markers of youth. These changes can threaten identity and a sense of wholeness (Holstein 2006). Women are expected to devote time and effort to their bodies to minimize the appearance of aging. Women who fail to do this are viewed as “letting [them]selves go” (316), which is equated with a lack or loss of control; Holstein explains that this leads to women being viewed as “moral failures” and “for being complicit in [their] own aging” (316). Given the centrality of appearance to women’s social definition (Saucier 2004), the aging woman faces challenges to retain her gender identity and her visibility as a person. These burdens are distinct from the experiences of men and younger women.

Garner (1999) explained that, until recently, gerontological literature has focused on older people without recognizing gender, despite the fact that gender and age together contribute to give aging women a sense of helplessness and invisibility. Because women are so commonly evaluated in terms of their appearance, women, unlike men, “lose their social value simply by growing old” (4). For example, Bazzini and colleagues (1997) analyzed the content of top-grossing movies to investigate how age and gender are related to representations of characters’ traits. Their findings suggest that aging women are both erased and denigrated in popular films. Fully 80 percent

of characters over age thirty-five were male (the sex ratio was much closer to parity among younger characters). Older characters were depicted more negatively than the younger ones regardless of gender, but this effect was enhanced for older women, who were shown as less friendly, intelligent, good, and, of course, attractive than their male cohorts. Garner (1999) also notes that aging women fare less well than their male counterparts in their financial and physical well-being. Thus, compared to men, aging disadvantages women socially, economically, and bodily.

### Compared to Whom? The Role of Power in Social Comparison

These examples demonstrate how the emphasis on women's appearance as a marker of social worth is complicated by consideration of the other categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage that shape women's lives. Attending to the role of power highlights how these distinctions—between men and women, people with and without disabilities, and the young and the old—are inherently relational and comparative. As individuals evaluate their own bodies, they also make relative, comparative assessments. Social comparison theory proposes that individual differences in the tendency to compare oneself to others account for differing levels of body-image disturbance (Thompson et al. 1999). However, much of the literature in this area has tended to assume that these social comparisons are similar across diverse groups of women, with all women comparing themselves to a common ideal as they seek approval in the eyes of an undifferentiated male gaze (Poran 2002). Attention to the role of power makes clear that this is not the case.

Much of the research on body image and beauty ideals has been based on the premise that women are aware of and seek out a male gaze, imagined or real, to evaluate and value their appearance. Objectification theory (Fredrickson and Roberts 1997) explains that women internalize this stance and come to objectify themselves, losing touch with their internal bodily sensations. This theory presumes that women share a uniform relationship to men and to men's perceptions, yet clearly this is not the case. For example, a test of objectification theory among lesbians did not produce the same results as it did for heterosexual women (Kozee and Tylka 2006). Two studies by Poran (2002, 2006) further complicate objectification theory. Poran (2002) asked ethnically and racially diverse women to describe their views of the dominant cultural beauty standard. Only 6 percent of white women mentioned race in their responses, while half of black women and about 20

percent of Latinas did so. Latinas were also more likely than other groups to discuss the association of beauty standards with materialism and the media. In this study, rather than internalizing beauty standards, black women and Latinas viewed these standards through critical eyes informed by race- and class-consciousness.

In a second study, Poran (2006) found young black women believed that men from different ethnic backgrounds had different preferences for women's body types. They experienced the male gaze as diverse and invoking several mutually exclusive yet equally unattainable beauty standards. Women described their frustration as they felt they had no choice but to be concerned with their looks. Rather than simply self-objectifying and trying to meet men's perceived expectations, the women indicated a variety of responses, including choosing to embrace their own beauty: in the words of one respondent, "You're perfect the way you are because you'll never be perfect" (746). Poran's analysis is premised on recognition that men and women of different races/ethnicities differ in social power in our culture.

These examples illustrate several ways that a consideration of power can productively complicate our understanding of how diverse women's experiences of their bodies are mediated through gendered beauty ideals. Asking "What is the role of power?" highlights the ways that perceptions of beauty are necessarily relational. Ideals of beauty imply a hierarchy in which some women are socially valued more than others and in which the benefits (however constrained) associated with meeting beauty ideals accrue to some women—and some groups of women—at the expense of others (Trepagnier 1994). Moreover, the evaluative gaze that has been theorized to result in women's self-objectification also implies relations of power, both between men and women and between diverse groups of men. For all members of society, categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage—such as race, class, age, and sexuality—locate individuals in unequal and asymmetrical relation to one another, which may influence perceptions and evaluations of their bodies by themselves and others. This is critically important because intersectionality is sometimes construed to be primarily a tool for understanding the lives of marginal groups; however, the construct is equally useful for investigating the multiple identities associated with privilege. Consideration of the role of power may sometimes also reveal that certain groups, although apparently different, share important similarities in their experience of oppression. This leads to the third question that can assist us in intersectional analyses of women's experiences of beauty ideals and body image.

## WHERE ARE THERE SIMILARITIES?

When we think about social categories such as race and gender without an intersectional frame, it is easy to view the categories as defining types of people who are extremely different from each other (as in the popular idea that men and women hail from different planets [see Hyde 2005]) and who are markedly similar to others within the category (Haslam, Rothschild, and Ernst 2000). But the concept of intersectionality reminds us that all social categories are heterogeneous; for example, the group “women” is diverse with respect to race, just as the group “black” is diverse with respect to social class. The third question, “Where are there similarities?” can help us to reassess any presumption that categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage define homogeneous groups by looking for similarities that cut across categories.

For example, in the previous section, we discussed how objectification theory may not describe black women’s and Latina’s reactions to beauty standards. However, this theory may help us to understand some aspects of the experiences of gay men, because gay subculture tends to value physical appearance and this population could be expected to internalize the sexually objectifying gaze of men. Indeed, gay men have been shown to self-objectify more frequently than do heterosexual men and, as a result, experience more body shame, body dissatisfaction, drive for thinness, and restrained eating (Martins, Tiggemann, and Kirkbride 2007). White women and gay men may share this similarity because of similar acceptance of beauty standards and relationship to the male gaze. Although this should not be construed to mean that the experience of white women and gay men are in any way equivalent or identical (see Wood 2004), an intersectional approach can help us attend to important similarities that may not be obvious if we assume that social categories mark boundaries between groups that are deeply and essentially different.

### The Myth of Bodily Perfection

One similarity across diverse groups concerns the idea that everyone ought to strive to achieve a particular physical ideal and that, to the extent we fall short, we are personally flawed, what Stone (1995) named the “myth of bodily perfection.” This belief supports the assumption that individuals labeled “disabled” are different, separate, and inferior to those who are presumed to be “not disabled.” But all physical bodies are limited in some ways, even if these limitations aren’t easily visible. Stone noted that physical

abilities represent a form of human diversity; people differ in terms of their physical abilities, and cultures vary in the types of abilities that are deemed necessary to be a productive member. The belief in bodily perfection makes it difficult to acknowledge or accept one's physical limitations and imperfections, thus simultaneously making this diversity invisible and serving to estrange all people from their bodies in some ways (Stone 1995).

Beauty standards can be understood as one aspect of the myth (indeed, Stone argues one of its sources is the classical Greek ideal of physical beauty). Like this myth, beauty standards are oppressive toward all, because both alienate us from our bodies' natural limitations and appearance. Just as it may be difficult to resist the notion that all bodily ills can and should be repaired, many women (and men) approach beauty in the same manner, resorting to sometimes extreme measures to "fix" the "problems" with their bodies (Wolf 1991). The dominant beauty ideal also masks diverse forms of beauty. As we have argued, "perfection" may be thought of differently by groups defined by multiple dimensions of identity, difference, and disadvantage; however, the third question, "Where are there similarities?" encourages us to consider how different groups might be similarly affected by the myth of bodily perfection.

### Similarities as Sites for Resistance

Asking "Where are there similarities?" can also reveal useful sites for political mobilization, coalition building, and social change (Cohen 2004). Activist Cynthia Rich (Lipscomb 2006) described the importance of working in coalition for the Old Women's Project. Taking a fundamentally intersectional approach, she observed, "We focus on people on the bottom—and that means we're always working with women—whether they're low-wage home health care workers and janitors or those in need of low-cost housing. We show that these are old women's issues. As we say, 'no living wage equals homeless old age.' It's essential that whatever group we identify with, we hold firm to that identity, but we must also make connections to other issues, not out of the goodness of our hearts, but because the connections are real" (10). A case in point for the potential of drawing on similarities as a mobilizing tactic concerns the medicalization of appearance issues. Fat acceptance activists challenge popular framings of the "obesity epidemic" as a public-health issue by questioning whether heavy weight is a disease rather than a risk factor for disease. They argue that defining fat as a disease (rather than a form of human body diversity) and locating its cause in flawed personal choices stigmatizes heavy people and supports prejudice against them,

especially among healthcare providers. Activists claim that obesity has been framed as a public-health issue in an attempt to secure funding from medical insurers for treatments, regardless of whether these treatments are safe or effective in the long term (Saguy and Riley 2005).

This analysis suggests fat-acceptance activists share commonalities with other groups. These arguments are consistent with Cynthia Rich's (Lipscomb 2006) observation that media fueling women's fears of aging—and of aging women's bodies—profits the medical industry while stripping aging women of social power. Similarly, because African and Mexican Americans are more likely to be categorized as obese, prejudice against fat individuals may support the legitimacy of racial/ethnic inequality (Saguy and Almeling 2008). These examples demonstrate how an intersectional analysis attending to neglected groups, issues of power, and commonalities across difference can reveal new ways to collectively address women's oppression, while being mindful of the nuanced ways that differences among women may shape their experiences of oppression.

#### CONCLUSIONS

To the extent that women's experiences and perceptions of beauty standards and their perceptions and evaluations of their bodies are mediated through ideals defined by race, class, age, sexuality, able-bodiedness, and other social categories, these narrow beauty standards distort their perceptions. Perhaps less obviously, because these same biases toward the perspective of women who are young, white, middle class, and presumably heterosexual are reflected in the scholarly literature addressing women's perceptions of body and beauty, this literature cannot accurately reflect the perceptions and experiences of women who lack any of these dimensions of privilege. In these two ways, conventional beauty standards represent a broken mirror.

To understand the ways these beauty ideals are created and represented as well as how they proliferate, we must explore how the social construction of each of these categories depends on that of the others for meaning and how their intersection is associated with varied experiences for women. Little of the work on women's perceptions of beauty and their bodies has incorporated an intersectional framework, and as a result findings related to differences in body satisfaction among racial and ethnic minorities must be reassessed. Moreover, experiences of dominant group members must be reconceptualized as specific and contextualized, rather than as reflecting a universal experience. In other words, much of what we think we have learned about women's body-image concerns may be properly understood as

knowledge about women who are young, white, heterosexual, able-bodied, and affluent.

To bring an intersectional analysis to these issues, we ask researchers to reflect on the three questions posed here: to consider which perspectives are represented and to include those that have been left out; to attend to the ways power functions in relation to the body; and to look not only for differences across groups but also to seek sites of commonality. These questions can be considered layers of intersectional inquiry. Each takes us further from conventional approaches in which categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage are either ignored or assumed to define types of people who are essentially and deeply different from each other. Obviously beauty standards may be harmful to all people because they are reductive and define beauty very narrowly; however, these three questions reveal the complex and nuanced ways women perceive and experience these ideals. Intersectional analyses may make varied and multiple forms of beauty visible and uncover new sites for resistance. Finally, looking for similarities across groups commonly perceived as deeply different provides the potential for diverse groups to find common ground and to organize politically to instigate change.

Intersectionality helps us understand those who have been left out of the mainstream discourse, particularly women of color, aging women, disabled women, and women who do not identify as heterosexual. But this type of analysis is of much broader utility. An intersectional approach is necessary to do high-quality research because it is impossible to understand *any* group without explicitly thinking about diversity within the group and how multiple categories of identity, difference, and disadvantage simultaneously shape experience. As Spelman (1988) observed, “It is theoretically significant . . . if statements that appear to be true about ‘men and women’ clearly are not true when we specify that we are talking about men and women of different classes or races” (80). Our hope is that the three questions posed here will assist researchers in adopting this analytic strategy and research framework. Only then can social science hold up a mirror that represents all people in an accurate, grounded, and nuanced way.

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## Interesting Intersections?

### *Researching Class, Gender, and Sexuality*

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YVETTE TAYLOR

I was a bit guarded in mentioning my intentions to write this essay on the intersections between class, sexuality, and gender to colleagues, sniffing out the authoritative academic air and considering whether such a piece would carry or fall flat, whether it would be an addition or a repetition within women's studies. Some praised this move as an insightful carving out of a research niche, while others were more skeptical of such a move, feeling *intersectionality* had been introduced, debated, and solved: the debates had been rehearsed and quite frankly, as senior faculty, they'd heard it all before. What have I to add with my research on working-class lesbians' lives? (And when was I going to put that particular project to rest, to get on with something more new and interesting, if not intersectional?) Intersections were variously cast as embellishments or deletions, the component parts of class + gender + sexuality to be added or scored out in furthering sociological and gender-studies agendas. Gender studies has arguably moved from the margins to the mainstream of sociological agendas, somewhat displacing and renaming the previous focus on women's lives through women's studies (Hey 2001).

Such shifting disciplinary boundaries themselves also highlight which intersections are seen as current and useful. In this essay I offer some methodological and theoretical issues—in terms of access, motivation, and analysis—raised by researching social class, gender, and sexuality across three research projects. I will use this approach in an attempt to explore dimensions of intersectional location, as examples that matter, even as they are not necessarily representative, coherent, or completed.

In the United Kingdom (UK), class has been a forerunner in sociological debate, now displaced by increasing attention to other social divisions. Even defining class has become difficult in a climate of supposed “classlessness,” where class inequalities are thought of as increasingly complex or nonexistent. Like others who propose a return to class analysis, I look beyond economic positioning alone, to include disidentifications, lifestyles, and experiences, interfacing the material, subjective, and embodied aspects of class positionings (Skeggs 1997).

Class dynamics within the United States are also “disappeared” by the (stronger) rhetoric of “equal opportunity” and classlessness, even with the rich, ethnographic accounts of the continued effect of social class in the United States (Bettie 2003; Kefalas 2003; Lareau 2003; Reese 2005; Zweig 2000). While recognizing that embodied signifiers such as accent, and spatially specific experiences such as the location of “good” housing and schools, are different across the UK and the United States, I am reluctant to “disappear” class further by portraying it as a spatially contained phenomenon, or something “particularly British.”

Amidst the relative weightings and UK-U.S. shifts in naming, researching, and theorizing social divisions, it seems that some have been more fully investigated than others, and while “intersection” is now a common trope in discussions of social dynamics and identities (Anthias 2001, 2002), in the case of class and sexuality these intersections are often gestured toward without being fully interrogated or fleshed out (Berger 2004; Skeggs 1997; Taylor 2007). This forces an awareness of the social divisions that are thought of as new, still relevant, and even cutting edge, as against those that are seen as simply old and settled, points debated within feminism, which has long struggled with issues of inequality, identity, and difference (Richardson, McLaughlin, and Casey 2006; Yuval-Davis 2006).

While it is relatively easy to paint a picture of myself as a mere observer of these debates, such a portrayal both ignores and highlights my own professional and personal positioning and implicatedness within this. The intersections that I chart in my research are also personal passions and pains. Hey (2001) highlights women’s studies’ precarious positioning within the academy where the demands of a professional identity can erase the political and personal elements of identity (such as being a feminist). Feminists are then seen to occupy an insider/outsider position, often mapped out and connected by affiliations and contradictions; just as these are gendered they are also “classed.” Nevertheless, echoing McCall (2005), I, too, expect more from women’s studies, seeking to hold it to a higher standard while remain-

ing aware of the regimes of knowledge production, distribution, and control that even feminist scholars struggle with as we conduct our research.

This essay draws mostly upon my research on working-class lesbian lives, based on interviews with fifty-three self-identified working-class lesbians across a range of localities in the UK (Yorkshire, Manchester, the Highlands, Glasgow, and Edinburgh) (Taylor 2007). This research continues to inform my interests, carried over into “What Would the Parents Say? Lesbian and Gay Parents’ Social and Educational Capitals,” a project based upon sixty in-depth interviews in the UK. It investigates the ways that working- and middle-class lesbian and gay parents provide for and protect their children against educational and social disadvantages. Theoretically and methodologically, it utilizes an intersectional framework in interrogating the interconnection between class and sexuality in the transmission of dis/advantage. The “families of choice” literature continues to have widespread salience, framing much of the research on lesbian and gay parenting (Stacey 2006; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001; Weston 1991); where there has been some attention to issues of gendered dynamics and constraints, these have neglected class as a crucial component of parental “choice” and experience (Agigian 2004). The third research project that I draw on here is “From the Coal Face to the Car Park: The Intersection of Class and Gender in Women’s Lives in the North East of England,” based on ninety-seven interviews with working and middle-class women. It explores women’s lives in the context of postindustrialization and the transition to a service sector and leisure-based economy, and investigates what has hitherto been underresearched when compared with the attention that has focused on boys’ and men’s experiences of these social processes (Nayak 2003; Walkerdine, Lucey, and Melody 2001).

I write from the position of having found my research samples, thus perhaps “solving” the dilemma of access. Yet issues of access, motivation, and analysis have been experienced quite differently and difficultly across these projects. From accessing hard-to-reach groups, exploring potentially sensitive issues, through to analyzing and presenting research findings, intersections of class, gender, and sexuality were always present and I hope to make some of these visible here. I will first “set the scene” on researching intersections of class, gender, and sexuality, before moving on to a case study of one respondent, Lynn, from my working-class lesbian life project. Her story resonates and differs from many others across my research and is intended only as an example from many which can be represented, albeit briefly, here. There are multiple approaches and methods for exploring intersectionality,

but both Valentine (2007) and McCall (2005) highlight the use of the case-study approach, which seeks to take an individual's experience and then extrapolate to the broader social location embodied by the individual. Intersectionality is then illustrated as a politically urgent lived experience where the connections between categories are both transparent and troubled.

SETTING THE "SCENE": INTERSECTIONALITY  
AS A METHOD

From the Inside? Difference and Sameness

The particular difficulties in researching lesbian lives have been outlined by many—but these problems are compounded by social class, given that working-class women are often excluded from support networks and commercialized lesbian and gay venues, typically known as “scene spaces,” as well as from research agendas (Kitzinger 1987). The erasure of class from lesbian existence is evident in recent empirical investigations of lesbian lives (Dunne 1997; Weeks, Heaphy, and Donovan 2001), and several researchers have discussed the limitations of research, which tends to rely on fairly privileged, homogenous samples (e.g., white, middle-class, urban dwellers). It would be flattering to believe that all members of lesbian and gay communities have, by definition, vast disposable incomes—though this is hard to believe. It is far more likely that, like society in general, “the community” consists of a great variety of people with differing backgrounds, incomes, interests, and abilities.

I believe that my own identifications enabled me to understand where working-class lesbians may be, or rather, that I would have to look beyond the commercialized scene spaces. Such a well-used strategy tends to find only those who (confidently) self-identify as lesbian and are involved in the community in some way (Browne, Lim, and Brown 2007). “Working-class” is not a category around which lesbian groups form and organize, and rather than meeting a preexisting group of potential respondents, I was often meeting disparate individuals who only occasionally, and often disappointedly, attended lesbian venues and networks, mostly because of material, emotional, and geographical constraints.

I did venture into scene spaces, distributing research requests on flyers and posters, distributing them in cafes, bars, and community spaces in Edinburgh, Glasgow, the Highlands, York, and Manchester. Some places seemed rather cut off, perhaps as a result of where they tend to be situated, thus ensuring that only “insiders” know of their whereabouts.<sup>1</sup> I did worry about

the effectiveness of (and possible arrogance in) placing research requests on walls, claiming space for myself. But one women's space had a lesbian event only once a month, which led me to question the extent of available spaces to be claimed. While I had initially been anxious about the problems of "coming-out" on large A4-sized research requests, I then came out all over the place, returning to the very spaces I had left as a teenager and venturing into new places as an academic.

Identification with research participants is generally seen as positive, providing an insider status, where the spaces for lesbians to speak about their lives are often limited. Identifications were made by interviewees (and myself), on the basis of "sameness," including sexuality and class, as well as location, age, and accent. For example, Angela's (age forty-two) desire to participate was influenced by our shared location; "It's important to me to help you, particularly when you said you were from Glasgow!" In Scotland, where I come from was cited often as evidence of my working classness; yet, in England my locatedness was often not always recognized or equated in the same way, and the subtleties of accent as a class signifier were also perhaps lost. Such identifications were motivations to participate, and these came to light in the research process as well as in recruiting. I imagine both respondents and myself were using our stories to "check each other out," in terms of sameness as well as difference.

There were sometimes difficulties in communicating even with the commonality of shared location. Becky (age twenty-two) also came from Glasgow and it was difficult to talk about the specific social and economic meanings of that space when so much of our conversation was punctuated with "I know what you mean," where the assumption of meaning, even identity, was mutually presumed from our shared locale. Interviewees also offered challenges to the meaning of my classed location, which provoked (unstated) defenses within myself. Here, Sharon's statement about "staying put" changes in response to knowing where I am from:

SHARON (age forty-seven, Glasgow): I think we should try and stay in a working-class area to try and bring, to keep the standards up, you know.

Try and keep it . . . I don't know what area in Glasgow you come from?

YVETTE: Drumchapel.

SHARON: Within Glasgow there's very much pockets of deprivation. As soon as people get the chance to move out they should move out.

My sense of being somewhat misplaced during the research process was also evident in my attempts to utilize preexisting lesbian and gay infrastruc-

tures and support groups. While some groups had an explicit welfare (rights) agenda, others were more implicit, being connected to support groups while remaining primarily social in their function; in these groups, I was looking for individuals who inhabited a different kind of scene space other than commercialized venues. But, to my disappointment, generally the confused response when contacting specific groups was that they did not think they “had any working-class lesbians.” Groups with clearly inclusive agendas still seemed to be classed through the absence of working-class participants, and if anything this strengthened my motivation to find them.

Over time, meeting certain gatekeepers with political and personal empathies was beneficial. Margaret, the organizer of the Rural Lesbian Group, indicates the difficulties of conducting research into a sensitive issue with a hard-to-reach group. The group’s venue, in a small, affluent town center, was chosen as a location to be free from homophobic violence, but safety and comfort in this environment were not felt by all; instead classed discomforts were generated in this “posh” setting. Margaret believed that location and environment contributed to the absence of working-class lesbians from the monthly meetings of the group:

The venue for our monthly meetings has been described as “posh.” It’s also safe, which is the main thing, but it can be a bit of a culture shock. . . . I am concerned about working-class lesbians in [the Highlands]. I know there have been homophobic assaults on them and I have heard that some women are getting into prostitution, but some working-class lesbians are scared to come out in their lives and to the group.

Margaret highlights not only the difficulty in reaching certain people but also the near impossibility of doing so when there are no apparent spaces in which to come out: the situation described by Margaret is a very difficult one. When presented with the idea of taking part in my research, via Margaret, many women in the group were reluctant, leading Margaret to be concerned about the usefulness of such a meeting:

There were nine women at the meeting last month, and they didn’t say very much about the idea of having a working-class lesbian focus group. Four of them are very new to the group. Someone else was asking how are you defining working-class. . . . I don’t want you to have a wasted journey.

My research experience was a labor-intensive one consisting of numerous

phone calls, hours of conversations and meetings, hanging around in likely places, chasing dead ends, and getting lost in “wasted journeys.” Alongside my flyers, which ultimately rely upon self-selection—a method which I feel attracts more middle-class respondents—I repeatedly visited these spaces as a customer, a volunteer, and a researcher, also shaping notions of sameness and difference in relation to participants.

### Classing Presences and Absences

In my research so far, I have benefited from personal connections, drawing upon my own social networks. Yet, there is a potential tension when confidence gained via personal empathy is then exploited for the sake of recruitment; there is also the danger of reproducing my own networks and embeddedness at the expense of those most excluded and hard to reach. In relation to researching women’s lives in the North East, one contact talked about women in poorer areas feeling overconsulted by local government about the area’s issues and therefore being suspicious of institutions and researchers. They also feared opening up too much about their lives while feeling under constant surveillance. The feeling of being monitored was very real for these women; indeed the numerous CCTV cameras on working-class estates<sup>2</sup> were spoken of not as security but as a penalty focusing on their comings and goings. The vulnerability and overresearching of different groups was differently demonstrated and negotiated across samples, ranging from a lack of viable presence in or avoidance of community groups to differently constituted needs, identities, and entitlements. The resonances of living on the geographical fringes, facing a (gendered and classed) monitoring of their lives because of their “suspect, excessive sexualities” resulting from their lesbian and/or single-mother statuses, were also apparent.

That said, in dealing with “official” professional gatekeepers such as the local authority, concerns about access and confidentiality were almost absent from my research on women’s lives in the North East of England: there are a range of well-established and funded groups, from resident’s associations to youth and community groups, which I approached with few tensions or suspicions. In focusing upon specific classed locales in the North East, I was able to approach a range of groups in these areas, attend community events, and advertise in general newsletters and newspapers, all of which yielded responses. As a resident of the North East—and a researcher at an institution in the North East—my intentions were rarely questioned and never refused, contrasting with my experience of lesbian and gay groups. In using these spaces, the only criteria was often that I simply “give something

back”: in working-class women’s groups this tended to be food and childcare costs (as requested), while in groups attracting middle-class women I was asked to give more information regarding my studies—and myself. There were palpable classed differences to the responses received, ranging from complete surprise that I could be interested in their lives (a much repeated “Why us?”) through to a sense that respondents were humoring, even scorning me, for my curiosity, to a sense that I *should* be attracted to and aware of their politically engaged activities. For example, one women’s group was used to being consulted and listened to, having managed to successfully challenge the local authority on residents’ parking and late-night drinking licenses, and receiving media coverage as a result of their success.

One resident’s association, in the most affluent area, was particularly interested in my *academic* credentials and abilities: how long had I held my position at the university and how did I come to be there? This was never so explicit in the poorer areas, though I’m sure I was still being checked out, albeit rather differently if not measured, and my Scottishness and local status seemed to signal a sameness in relation to a class-inflected “Geordie” (North East England) positioning. Feeling myself to be classed in this way was interesting and awkward: sometimes seen as a comrade, a fellow professional, or alternatively recognized as simply “young” (therefore naïve and in need of stories and facts). In meeting and spending time with middle-class women I often felt an intense gaze upon me and, at times, even a muted disdain—who was I, a working-class girl (I use “girl” purposely) with a betraying accent, to talk to these professional/retired women about gender and class? There were occasions when I felt (middle-class) participants exerted a professional, “classing” control over the interview. While I had felt a passionate—if frustrated and fractured—sense of entitlement in accessing working-class lesbians, my initial encounters in both spaces reminded me of the efforts still needed and my own changing positioning, from working-class lesbian to “neutral” academic, as I went about researching different women’s lives (Berger 2004; Skeggs 1997; Taylor 2007).

“ORDINARILY OUT”: COMING FORWARD AS  
“ONE OF THEM”

In starting out research for “What Would the Parents Say?” widely established lesbian and gay parental groups could be approached fairly easily, yet some concerns about confidentiality also appeared. Many of these groups had a longstanding political presence and many of their members had been key campaigners in the UK Civil Partnership Act (2005) and the Adoption

Act (2006). Like Margaret, Nigel, who participated in the lesbian and gay parenting project, spoke of being self-consciously aware of the classed composition of the gay dads' network which he was part of:

Interestingly, the diversity stops at the class barrier. It's definitely middle class and up, and what I mean by that is someone who might be a white-collar worker. I've never seen what I would term a working-class guy there. Again, just to clarify that without being . . . Possibly a builder or someone who has got a certain income level.  
(Nigel, age forty-three)

Gender was another salient factor in the composition, duration, and success of parental groups, with different historical legacies, finances, and contemporary constitutions. These ranged from ongoing lesbian feminist politics/practice, in the case of many lesbian mothers' groups still stratified by race and classed exclusions, to a more sexual-health agenda of gay men's groups, expanded in relation to parenting capacities.

My sample included parents with partners, parents in variously combined households, stepfamilies, and single mums and dads, ranging from eighteen to sixty-three years old: their routes to parenting also varied. Most participants had children through previous heterosexual relationships (some interviewees had instrumentally resorted to "heterosex"); those who had pursued other routes to parenting, such as adoption or in vitro fertilization (IVF), were mostly from middle-class backgrounds. As a result, class mediated sexuality in accessing IVF clinics, in participation with lesbian and gay support groups advising of "alternative" routes and strategies into parenting, and in the community more generally. Interviewees ranged in their relative "outness"; three male interviewees identified as gay dads while continuing to live in heterosexual family units, and their interviews were conducted in "nonscene" places where respondents felt they wouldn't be "found out."

Interviewees discussed their pathways to parenting, viewed as suspicious from varying perspectives (including from within the lesbian and gay community). The controversies aroused here demonstrate the gap between creating families of choice as against criticisms of "selling-out" to nuclear family norms (Stacey 2006). Many middle-class interviewees spoke of actively choosing the planning of their routes to parenthood, foregrounding their own sense of responsibility against that which "just happens" all too easily for some of the working-class respondents. The fact of things just happening, including parental status, was, however, told time and again by working-class respondents: this tale of active choice where children are "really

planned” and “really wanted” perhaps relies on and reactivates the idea of the irresponsible, classed *other*. It made sense for (middle-class) respondents to frame their choices as good, solid, sensible ones, feeling an intense societal gaze upon them. However, in equating gay parenting with thoughtful planning, a contrast existed between those who told of their transitions into parenting in quite different and, I would argue, classed ways, where things “just sort of happened,” and also intersecting with coming-out tales and educational/employment transitions. Thus, intersections of class, gender, and sexuality were pertinent not only methodologically but also in the stories that emerged thereafter and in the dis/identifications which interviewees made in coming out across these (parental) positionings.

Many key gatekeepers knew of my previous research and my insider status and were accordingly willing to pass on potential contacts and let me use their mailing lists and even their venues: my “authority” once challenged was then reinstated and sexuality became a point of connection, where it had disappeared as irrelevant in meeting women’s groups for “From the Coal Face to the Car Park.” However, this professional authorization is context specific and was absent in other encounters, including during an interview with one working-class lesbian parent conducted in the supermarket while she did her daily shopping. Nonetheless, my lack of children was often commented upon and questioned; how could I possibly be interested in parenting when I wasn’t “one of them” and didn’t ever intend to be? Possible points of identification were ruptured, where parental status superseded sexuality as an insider/outsider position, to be replaced by a telling to me what I did not, or never would, know.

My search for lesbian and gay parents continued by regularly advertising in the lesbian and gay press and through local community groups. As well as using national UK media, local newsletters and organizations were also contacted. In using e-mail discussion groups, lesbian and gay respondents questioned and vouched for my insider status and trustworthiness, and I was able to “snowball” participants. Again this was experienced differently from using mailing lists not based on sexuality in the women’s groups in the North East research, where that particular personal credential was deliberately omitted.

This raises another significant issue, that of getting respondents to come out about sexuality *and* class. Of course, there will always be those who remain excluded. A painful part of my research has been in coming across a (perhaps) permanently excluded, lost sample. One woman wrote,

As a working-class lesbian in my teens I didn't realize that such a thing existed. I'm now in my thirties and it's taken me that long to get to grips with the idea. At school we all knew about gay men, but gay women, I mean, it was never discussed unless in terms of disgust . . . I married and had three children, just as a nice working-class girl does, and now I'm a nice working-class woman with a husband and a lonely heart." (E-mail correspondence)

My research requests have required identification with lesbian, gay and working-class; however, these are not straightforward, unproblematic categories and are often used as an insult and a stigma, both in the dominant culture and (in the case of the working class) in lesbian and gay spaces (Taylor 2008). Many researchers have outlined the difficulties surrounding issues of class identification, suggesting that to accept a working-class identity is increasingly to accept a "spoilt identity" (Bettie 2003; Skeggs 1997). How can you talk to "them" when "they" won't say who they are? Mandy (age twenty-two, Yorkshire) speaks of the difficulties in coming forward as "one of them":

When I seen the advert for working-class lesbians I actually didn't think, I actually thought I'd be the only person . . . like I'm so obviously working class, but I don't know, maybe people hide it better than me (*laughs*). I do notice people's appearances but it's not something I judge them on 'cause I wouldn't like to be judged on myself because I can often look rough.

For Mandy, being working class is something she "obviously" is, something that she embodies and signifies, yet it is also a characteristic that she may want to hide and that she has to manage. The reluctance to name class features among middle-class respondents, who avoid the slur by naming themselves as just ordinary and average, perhaps subverted my attempts to "out" them. Liz identifies a problem of how to express emotions attached to class and sexual identity, illustrating that, for her, these are not just words on paper but are felt and struggled over:

I don't know how useful my answers have been. I think it's more a subconscious thing, a subconscious way of identifying. It's kinda so much ingrained up here it's difficult to verbalize, it's hard to make what you feel into words that make sense. (Liz, age twenty-three, Manchester)

For Liz, discussing class and sexuality is something which is felt, something

known and experienced at an emotional level, yet at the same time it is hard to communicate, precisely because of its obviousness, something which “just is.” Discussion is also difficult if you speak in fear of bad-mouthing yourself or of being unable to offer an ordinary status, and there is a higher risk here for some than others, whose “right” jobs, education, and locations offer a degree of certainty that they are indeed ordinary and normal.

Lesbian and gay researchers have reported the willingness and eagerness with which participants tell their stories, given that the spaces for lesbians to speak about themselves are often very limited (Dunne 1997). But are such opportunities, spaces, and conversations ultimately classed? While in my comparative research projects middle-class women have taken up more of my research time, in arranging interviews and talking and questioning more in interviews, I think there is an underestimation of the willingness of working-class women to be out about class; often their voices don’t appear as they’ve simply not been asked, deemed too hard to reach and thus remaining fairly absent from feminist research.

In my research on working-class lesbians, interviewees highlight the difficulties and pleasures in growing up working class, often in poverty, and in working-class, declining, even (emotionally and materially) “depressing” communities. Many women witnessed firsthand the consequences of postindustrial decline and the effects of existing in the wrong place, in peripheral housing estates, and attending the wrong, failing schools. For many, postschool transitions were characterized by unemployment and, in several cases, homelessness. Fifteen women were mothers and ten women were single parents, which impacted their material circumstances. All interviewees spoke of the classed, gendered, and heterosexualized expectations upon them, while they fought to resist and continued to negotiate these expectations.

I now turn to Lynn, an interviewee from the working-class lesbians’ lives project, mapping out the salience, erasure, and endurance of identities and inequalities, embodied across time and place in her life. Like myself, Lynn is from Glasgow; she grew up in a council estate where she continued to live (unlike me). There were commonalities and differences between us, apparent as we sat and talked one evening in Glasgow Women’s Library, underfunded and out of sight. Lynn was part of the Older Lesbian’s Group (over forty-five years), whose participants had taken part in a focus group for my research. Lynn preferred to be interviewed individually, feeling that class differences were too difficult to broach in a shared conversation and threatening to further remove her from an already precarious sense of belonging

on the basis of shared sexuality. Lynn and I were a generation apart: at the time of the interview I was twenty-three and Lynn was forty-four. Hers is a story of sadness and humor; the tears produced, in sadness and laughter, during her recollections, ongoing battles, and captivating victories initially made me hesitate and search for a tissue. But I was aware then, as I am now, that this is not really enough in terms of feminist attention; a shared experience either wiped clean or repeated in common should be carried beyond one or two individuals. Lynn's story offers an insight into issues of access, as Lynn's motivation was framed by her disappointment and exclusion from her local lesbian group. Further, her account offers an example of transitions and tensions across time, and the intersecting material, emotional, spatial, and embodied aspects of class and sexuality.

#### LIVING INTERSECTIONS: A CASE STUDY

Lynn's story goes something like this. Growing up in the East End of Glasgow, Lynn was very conscious of the sectarian divide, characteristic of the area, manifest in the playground, the park, and the street (especially during football matches). In her local area it was widely known on what side of the divide people were positioned and who your peers or enemies were. Working-class communities have never been internally cohesive or welcoming to all, despite the frequent romanticization of them as such, as against wholesale condemnation of difference (Stacey 2006). A more fragmented and contradictory picture emerges through Lynn's awareness of herself as a Catholic within a predominantly Protestant close.<sup>3</sup> Neighbors were in the same boat, relying on one another; over time these reliances became strained and embittered.

Amusingly, Lynn spoke of the irony in borrowing a pair of shoes from her Protestant neighbors to take her first Holy Communion, adding that these were white shoes and couldn't be worn outside—by neither the owner nor borrower. The distinctions evident in her close also existed within her family, and Lynn spoke of the “narrow and limited” expectations that her parents and school had of her and the ways she was reminded to take care of, yet be deferential toward, her younger and older brothers. These rules and reminders are articulated as a form of “brainwashing”:

I was brought up, working class, very working class, East End of Glasgow, six out of ten children, very Roman Catholic. So brainwashed, it worked a treat totally, very difficult not to take that on as a child. I mean it was in the home, it was in school, I was at church three times a week. There

were good things about it but I think for women it was particularly shite because by the time you get married or grow up you know exactly what the rules are, you know what's expected of you. . . . I felt that very strongly as a child growing up, my brothers were allowed so much scope and our wings were clipped. We wirnae allowed oot the back yard, we wirnae allowed to do this, to do that, we weren't encouraged to have adventures.

Lynn speaks of enforced rules and hierarchies and seems to have quickly realized as a child what her "best place" could be; what had been put forward and what was most hoped for was a hard-working husband with a stable job and a family. Lynn experienced all this, working in a factory after leaving school at fifteen, and declared her pride in this achievement, recognized by her parents and siblings as the success they'd wished for. However, this ideal was shattered when Lynn broke up with her husband and came out to her family as a lesbian in her thirties: the respectability that her family maintained was viewed as damaged and trodden upon and Lynn was, to some extent, cast aside, while her brother tried to persuade Lynn to go back to church.

Others were convinced Lynn was mentally ill and made accusations about her inability to parent and the danger she was supposedly putting herself and her children in. With little money and with two children to care for (her parental status being questioned morally but still obliged materially), Lynn struggled as a mother, a single parent, and a lesbian to find a place in which to belong. Speaking of the "abhorrence" of lesbian motherhood, outside and inside lesbian community spaces: "It's tied up with mother, very much with mother, woman, mother, heterosexual. And there's almost an abhorrence out there of woman, lesbian, mother, definitely, definitely I feel that."

Lynn lived in a working-class area where she felt it would be unwise to be out about her sexuality; she is careful to note that, of course, prejudices exist in the middle classes just as in the working classes and may in fact come with their own particular branding, and masking, under a "liberal tolerance." Lynn expressed resentment in the fact that she cannot move away from her locality; she is fixed in that space and has no opportunity to relocate to a more friendly, tolerant cosmopolitan space. The journey into and distance from the lesbian group in the city center, which Lynn partially participated in, is both a material and emotional effort and she speaks of coming out and concealing class and sexuality, noting the different classed "performances" within the lesbian group, as classed claims and comforts are made and

negated. Here Lynn felt simultaneously misread as middle class, making a confident if fraught performance at belonging in this space, while remaining unentitled and nervous as working class:

There were a couple of women totally lacking confidence so much so that you couldnae make out what they were saying 'cause they probably went too fast when they talked, you know that way, that nervous way that I could relate to. . . . I think a lot of people came and didnae come back and that's why 'cause recently there's no been the numbers and it's the same group of women. I think other people didn't feel comfortable and vice versa, it goes two ways. 'Cause there's the inverted snobbery where the people who are working class then think "Aw no, auch fuck, wish they hidnae came!" and I've equally felt like that. I know what it's like to be on each side of the fence.

Lynn's comments could be seen to reflect an enduring strand of the priorities, misfit, and refusals among lesbian and feminist agendas and spaces, where working-class women's voices and presence have been negated (Davis and Kennedy 1993). Again, the embodied dimensions of such negotiations and negations are revealed, with Lynn refusing, and conversely being refused, a classed-based respectable "nice woman" status:

I felt again people were putting me in a wee box. Mary [her partner] and I were "nice" women, I *hate* that, I don't want to be fucking nice! But I tell you this, it's better being put in that box than being put in that one 'cause that's no nice when you've no got the confidence. When people actually say things to demean you or you just pick up by their body language or their tone, or what they talk about that they're . . . they're putting you somewhere, that you're *worthless*. I'm getting emotional here because it's a horrible, horrible feeling.

Lynn's negotiation of different "wee boxes" across time and place is repeated throughout her account, moving from family and community spaces, to school and work placements, to commercialized and community scene spaces. Her story exists between and beyond the intersections of class, gender, and sexuality—to which many other important social divisions and differentiations could be added.

Theoretically and methodologically, this essay has sought to explore the empirical intersection and methodological dilemmas in researching sexuality and class across three projects. Issues of access have been differently and often uneasily negotiated in my research, with the respective influences

of class, gender, and sexuality seemingly working to create hard-to-reach groups as against well-established, visible, and easy-to-reach participants. Accessing respondents is, nonetheless, only the first step, and I aimed to show the continuation of class and sexuality in gaining or indeed losing legitimacy and academic authority, as well as my own uneasiness within this. While the concept of intersection deployed within academia, and particularly within women's studies, often works to highlight multiple axes of disadvantage and displacement, it has not yet been fully utilized to speak to, theorize, and research intersections of class, gender, and sexuality. Intersectionality offers an analytical framework that allows for a more complex consideration of relationships between sexuality and other identity formations and experiences but there often remains a tension between the theoretical abstractions of intersectionality and the research application of this. There are different, even competing, definitions of intersectionality, and my purpose here was to explore how class, gender, and sexuality figure in empirical research. In attempting to fill this gap, I have explored my own intersecting and changing disidentifications as I attempt to put intersectionality into research practice.

#### NOTES

1. Location is constrained by finances and concerns about visibility and safety—as voiced by Glasgow Women's Library, which at the time of the research was situated in an asbestos-ridden, back-alley building.
2. Estates are areas of council housing provided and maintained by the local authority; in Scotland these are typically called “schemes.”
3. A close is the shared space, including stairway and front and back door, in tenement flats, typical of the area that Lynn comes from.

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## The “Burden and Blessing” of Being a Black Woman

### *Engaging Intersectionality through an Anthropology of Pregnancy and Motherhood among African American Women*

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KAAREN HALDEMAN

*I'm a black woman. I mean I'm black, and then I'm a woman and that's the way it is.  
And I wouldn't want to give up one or the other . . . I see the world through that set of eyes.  
I mean that's my identity and that imposes upon me obligations different and special and  
that's a burden and a blessing and I don't see any sense in pussyfooting around with that.*

—HELENE, in a 2002 interview

#### WHERE IS THE INTERSECTIONALITY IN ANTHROPOLOGY?

Intersectionality has been a familiar theoretical approach in black feminist studies and over time has been applied more broadly across academic disciplines. With its unique colonial past and historical relationship with black scholars, anthropology has lagged behind other social sciences in its adoption of this black feminist perspective. Anthropology's history as a tool of imperial oppression cast the discipline in an unfavorable light that discouraged black scholars from engaging in its study. Historical exclusion and de facto erasure of black scholarly contributions to anthropology well into the 1960s further alienated African Americans from its ranks.<sup>1</sup> However, this is not to say that anthropology has neglected to explore “the interconnectedness of ideas and the social structures in which they occur, and the intersecting hierarchies of gender, race, economic class, sexuality and ethnicity” (Collins 1998, 263).<sup>2</sup> Rather, anthropologists have neglected to engage such theoretical perspectives as they relate to African American women's lived experiences. Lived intersections of race, class, and gender are highlighted

in my work with pregnant African American women. A central thesis of my work is that the *totality* of burdensome life experiences, due wholly or in part to one's remembered experiences of being an African American woman and her related experiences of class, can impact the physiology of pregnancy in adverse ways.

African American anthropology and feminist scholarship have been described as “awkward companions” (Bolles 2001, 32). Although there is abundant anthropological work devoted to understanding cross-cultural and U.S.-based ideologies of race, class, and gender (Baker 1998; Ginsburg and Tsing 1990; Ortner 1991), black scholarship in general has historically been excluded or rarely acknowledged. Feminist anthropology of the 1970s reflected the overall exclusion of black women from the feminist movement, and now, despite the prolific writings of black feminist anthropologists, “Black women remain invisible and silenced where it counts” (Bolles 2001, 33). Despite anthropology's devotion to understanding and analyzing both lived experiences and power relations that inform those experiences, intersectionality has not been popularized as a theoretical construct in the discipline. The exclusion of black women scholars from legitimized channels of academic recognition contributes to the dearth of scholarship on intersectionality in anthropology, and black women's lived experiences of intersectionality have not been a common subject for anthropologists of any cultural experience to explore.<sup>3</sup>

This may be a good place for me to acknowledge that I am not a black woman. Although this ethnography foregrounds the voices of African American women, the analyses and perspective are mine. I believe my research on pregnancy and motherhood among African American women adds a dimension to understanding intersectionality from the perspective of a cultural “outsider.”<sup>4</sup> It is an important and multivocal study that adds to the anthropological literature on black women's lives and, more broadly, to an antiracist and feminist discourse that engages intersectionality at its core.

#### WHY PREGNANCY AND MOTHERHOOD?

Following my own interests in health and an anthropology engaged in social justice, I decided to explore the social and cultural causes of the nearly two-and-a-half-fold higher national infant mortality rate among African American women when compared with European American women (e.g., 15.1 versus 6.2 in North Carolina, 2001–04).<sup>5</sup> This disparity persists despite a woman's access to excellent prenatal care or her class position as defined by income and education.<sup>6</sup> I drew from the larger public-health literature

on racism and health and the abundance of related work on social factors that may affect preterm birth and low birth weight—leading contributors to infant mortality.<sup>7</sup> I designed a study that would explore social themes in women’s lives within the parameters of African American heritage, racism, female gender, and class and how these experiences might come to bear on pregnancy and motherhood. I engaged in conversations about *felt experiences* of pregnancy and motherhood within the contexts of being an African American woman and related experiences of social class.

Sociologists have also addressed pregnancy, motherhood, and other life-course issues relative to race and ethnicity.<sup>8</sup> In her review of the highly controversial and influential Moynihan Report of 1965 and its television counterpart in 1986, Patricia Hill Collins (1989) discusses the moral devaluation of black family life in the U.S. public consciousness. She describes the connections made between “cultural deficiency” of black communities and female-headed households and the racist and sexist ideologies that support such views.<sup>9</sup>

Pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood have long been topics of study in anthropology, but again African American women are underrepresented.<sup>10</sup> There have been only two anthropological studies whose central focus is infant mortality among African American women. Boone’s (1989) heavily quantitative ethnography of infant mortality among economically disadvantaged African Americans in Washington, D.C., examines the specific problems of preterm labor and delivery, low birth weight, and infant mortality. In their extensive study of the social context of reproduction in Harlem, Mullings and Wali (2001) studied women of varying economic backgrounds in order to analyze stress as a social process and its role in racializing health disparities.

My essay here adds to the anthropological literature on pregnancy and motherhood with attention to African American women’s *lived experiences*. The anthropological lens offers in-depth insight into how women’s experiences of race, class, and gender intersect to inform everyday cultural and biological life.

#### ETHNOGRAPHY — A METHODOLOGY THAT “BLEEDS INTO DAILY LIFE”

Cultural anthropology’s methodology, known as ethnography, or a methodology that “bleeds into daily life,”<sup>11</sup> fuses sociocultural theoretical frameworks with intense fieldwork over an extended period of time. Open-ended and in-depth interviews give way to subsequent interview themes and further

insight into the everyday lives of our consultants—people with whom we study and from whom we hope to gain firsthand knowledge of their lives.<sup>12</sup> We build relationships with our consultants over months and often years as we invite each other into homes, families, workplaces, houses of worship, and other spaces of social and cultural life. In this way, anthropologists hope to participate in ways that deepen our own understandings of our consultants' lived experiences and, in turn, of how their lived experiences affect us as anthropologists and as human beings.

In the fall of 2001, I met with an obstetrician who was well connected with local OB-GYN practices in central North Carolina and whose interests included social dimensions of health and illness. As I described my goal to interview at least fifty African American women of all economic backgrounds, she did not hesitate to recommend a practice that was owned and operated by two African American physicians and that served a predominantly African American clientele. After an initial meeting with the health providers, I was granted permission to observe the daily life of the practice and recruit women into the study at each of the two offices.

From April 2002 through July 2003 I interviewed sixty-two African American women who were pregnant at the time or had recently (within one year) delivered a baby. Although all were initially interviewed before or after their prenatal appointments, second and third interviews often took place in cafés, the women's homes, or workplaces. A large part of my research consisted of recording life histories from six women selected from the larger group who reflected a range of class experiences and with whom I developed long-term social relationships. I am frequently asked how I chose the six women for life history interviews. These women were willing to devote hours of time outside of their work and home lives to speak with me about their histories. At the time of the research, they were between the ages of twenty-eight and thirty-five and all but one were married. Three women had bachelor's degrees or higher and two were working on undergraduate degrees. Their occupations varied widely and included an attorney, a cosmetologist, a medical-supply buyer, a quality-control specialist and Navy reservist, a medical technician, and a clinical-trials project manager. At the time of our first interviews, all of the women worked outside the home.

Pregnancy narratives provided me with multidimensional perspectives on *lived experiences*. I developed initial interview questions with attention to specific experiences of race, gender, class, pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood, but the interview process was dialectical in nature. As questions were asked and responses heard, several themes began to emerge. As new

themes were explored, each woman inspired new formulations based upon where she directed our conversations and what she felt to be most relevant in her life story. As such, questions for life-history interviews were tailored to each woman's narrative. All life-history interviews were transcribed verbatim or uploaded for analysis as MP3 files in Atlas.ti™ 5.0 software.

I explored pregnancy as a life process *and* a unique physiological event in order to understand the full range of life experiences that can come to bear on a woman's pregnancy. Following Ford-Ahmed (1999), I emphasized a phenomenological approach, or women's *lived* and *felt experiences* in my work. I engaged philosophies of *perception* and *embodiment* in order to explore bodily feelings and their connections with subjective lived experiences in their social worlds. In the phenomenological sense, perceptions speak as loudly about our lives as actions, words, and ideas, because perceptions encompass all of those experiences.<sup>13</sup>

By focusing on how women experienced pregnancy and motherhood, as articulated in their own life narratives, I could not only explore and understand more fully their *lived* intersections of race, class, and gender but also critically examine these categories and rupture the assumed boundaries that divide such experiences. My analysis provides clues as to how many pregnant African American women experience particular dimensions of race, class, and gender that often specifically relate to the pregnancy itself.

In the following sections, you will meet five of the women who completed life histories for the study and who specifically address the intersecting experiences of race, class, and gender. First, you will meet Helene, who speaks candidly about being “the stronger sex” in her cultural community. She then expands on her experiences of race that she perceives as inseparable from her experiences of gender. Second, Tisha explains her own lived experiences of class, especially as a pregnant black woman in the workplace. Zakiyyah relates how she experienced lower-class status as a pregnant African American mother. Next, Sheri voices her frustrations with being identified as a “welfare mother,” and her narrative reveals the power of racialized stereotypes in everyday settings. Eva follows with a discussion about the struggles of highly educated African American women in the context of marriage and directly addresses her lived experiences of class and gender. Finally, Helene and Sheri speak about experiencing *male* gender during pregnancy as they discuss carrying and raising an African American male. The final section is an analysis of how ethnography may be used to both engage and critically examine intersectionality theory.

RACE AND GENDER: HELENE AND THE  
“BURDEN AND BLESSING” OF BEING BLACK AND FEMALE

Even at five feet tall on a good day, Helene has an imposing presence. She describes herself as always being a “big girl” whom people either “really like” or “wish I would get hit by a big truck!” As we settled into our first interview, there was genuine concern in Helene’s voice when she spoke about the child she was carrying and her fears that the burdensome events in her life would affect her unborn child. Her work as a criminal defense attorney whose primary clients were young African American men deeply affected how she experienced this second pregnancy. Immediately, Helene described the “burden and blessing” of being a black woman:<sup>14</sup>

I also do think it’s a burden to have the stereotype whether it’s true or not that the woman is the stronger portion of the gender. I think that that is a *burden* in a lot of ways. . . . Black women are expected to be stronger. They’re *supposed* to work two jobs. They’re supposed to work *three* jobs, if that’s what’s supposed to happen. They’re supposed to, you know, be able to raise children with their feet and drive the car with their arms. . . you know what I mean? They’re . . . that’s just what you do. If you’re a sister, you do whatever you have to do to make it, period . . . failure just is not an option, you know, you don’t have any choice but to keep up.

Helene felt that the expectation placed on African American women to be the “stronger” sex was unique to African American culture. She repeated this observation throughout our interviews. She felt that, in “her culture,” women sacrifice some sense of their femininity because they have had to shoulder so much during their lives. Helene sees “that part” of herself as valueless and describes herself as male or androgynous “between the ears.” Despite this, she takes great joy in being an African American woman, “and the blessing of it is obvious. . . . I just think it’s very empowering to have withstood as much as we have as a people and still be in the fight! I think that’s amazing.”

Helene and the Intimate Ties between Gender and Race

Helene’s discussions about being an African American woman always included two aspects of herself—African American and female. She rarely used the term “race,” but she often referred to “my people” or “black people”

rather than universalizing and perhaps contributing to an uncritical use of the word “race.” Intersections between race and gender became clear throughout Helene’s narratives as she discussed her feelings about calling herself a “feminist” and her concern that to identify herself as such would be evidence of an “imbalance” in her that she feels is undesirable: “I can improve the lot of women all day long and I’m still gonna have to deal with racism. I don’t really think of myself in terms of being a feminist or not because it shifts the balance of power if you even have to start thinking of yourself in those kinds of terms. I think it’s recognizing an imbalance that shouldn’t be, so I don’t even give it that kind of weight in my thinking.”

Rather, Helene saw her female gender and African American heritage and culture as inseparable: “I think it’s my left eye and my right eye. I’m not interested in giving up my woman-ness or my femininity any more than I’m interested in giving up my blackness. I would not want to be male. And I would not want to be white. It’s like choosing between your left eye or your right eye. . . . One works just as well as the other.”

#### CLASS AND RACE AND GENDER: TISHA AND EXPERIENCES OF RACIALIZED LABOR

The first thing I noticed about Tisha was her bright smile. As she would later tell me, she and her husband had tried to conceive for two years and, until this pregnancy, had been unsuccessful in their attempts. Tisha was bursting with happiness about this pregnancy and her face radiated joy.

When we first met, Tisha was in the second trimester of her first pregnancy and worked as a medical technician in a local dermatology practice. We began to meet weekly when she was prescribed bed rest at thirty-three weeks due to preterm labor contractions. During one of our visits, she elaborated on why she felt her work experience was different as a pregnant African American woman. She felt that she needed to prove herself capable of performing her job well even while experiencing a painful pregnancy: “I really think that the demands are different in a sense. . . . I felt obligated to work there [to] stay with them and felt like I had something to prove . . . regardless. Because I remember the day that I went into labor early, I was in a surgery with my doctor, and I kept cramping really bad and I told her I don’t feel well. She said, ‘Yeah I see you bent over. You want to sit down?’ And instead of me saying yes, I said, ‘No, I’ll finish this up,’ because I didn’t want you to sit back and say, ‘Well, you couldn’t do your job.’ So I *stayed* and I think . . . it got progressively worse.”

I noted in my conversations with Tisha that she had worked hard to prove

to her boss and coworkers that she did not embody or otherwise affirm negative stereotypes of African American women; however, she physically overworked herself in the process. In this way, she found herself agitated and frustrated by the perceived negative ways coworkers looked at or acted toward her while simultaneously trying to manage a painful pregnancy. Tisha experienced a kind of *racialized labor*<sup>15</sup>—experiences in the workplace as a pregnant woman that were produced by a silent but felt discourse around who she was expected to be as mother and worker and that revolved around prevailing ideas of African American productive and reproductive labor.<sup>16</sup>

For Tisha, her experiences of pregnancy and motherhood collided with experiences of class in and out of the workplace: “I was often aggravated when people said, well are you on Medicare?<sup>17</sup> No I ain’t on Medicare! Why, do I look like it? You know, why do you think that, you know? It’s just the perception of white people have this certain class, black people have this certain class. . . . A lot of it is really just thinking that I’m on welfare, I’m in the system. And that really does peeve me. . . . I work really hard not to fall into that statistic.”

Tisha found it difficult to deal with people who thought she was “in the system” and on welfare. She explained that she worked hard to disrupt the racialized stereotypes of African American people. Tisha perceived her physiological experiences of pregnancy as entwined with coworkers’ negative perceptions of her race and class. As a result, Tisha *negatively felt* experiences of a lower-class status while pregnant regardless of her income or educational level.<sup>18</sup>

#### CLASS AND RACE AND GENDER: ZAKIYYAH AND EXPERIENCES OF MOTHERHOOD

Major themes in Zakiyyah’s life often centered on her own violent past and experiences of mothering two chronically ill daughters. With her easy and radiant presence, I would not have guessed that Zakiyyah had endured such a torrent of violence in her life. During the time of the research, she was experiencing both intense difficulties at work and marital troubles over the course of a pregnancy that was unplanned and difficult to bear, knowing she was carrying a second daughter with sickle cell disease.

At the time of our first interviews, Zakiyyah worked as a quality analyst for Medicaid. She also participated in the navy reserves and was called to active duty during the study. Zakiyyah explained that during her first pregnancy, much like Tisha, she felt that in public spaces she would be viewed as a welfare mother: “During my first pregnancy, I remember being self-

conscious about not being able to fit my wedding ring. I didn't want people to think I was another single African American pregnant woman. In our society, there's a lot of negativity associated with this. I guess people think you'll turn out to be another welfare recipient living off the government, which means their tax dollars would be used to help take care of me and my child."

Like many of my consultants, Zakiyyah's experiences of her first pregnancy spoke loudly to how some African American women experience lower-class status while pregnant. Her perceptions about how the world viewed her as a pregnant African American woman translated into negatively felt experiences of hurt and discouragement. She felt the gaze of a society that looked with disdain on her as the child within her became more visible.<sup>19</sup>

These perceived subtle experiences of discrimination and disdain are tied to public ideologies and histories of race-based oppression and racialized stereotypes and have very real and *felt* consequences for many of the women in this study, including Zakiyyah.

#### CROSSROADS OF RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER: SHERI

Sheri's almost perpetual smile would fool an observer into thinking her life was filled only with happiness, whereas her large brown eyes spoke more about her hidden sadness and experiences of grief and loss. Sheri was expecting her second child when we first met. She had delivered her stillborn daughter one year prior and was experiencing an intensely complicated pregnancy. Of all the women who participated in the life-history project, Sheri spoke most candidly about the intersecting hierarchies of race, class, and gender in her own life. Sheri felt that "older" white people looked at her differently when she became visibly pregnant. Although no one ever said anything to Sheri, she felt these "looks" were based on racialized class assumptions about welfare mothers: "Oh here's another one . . . welfare . . . child or . . . is she gonna be able to take care of her child, or, you know, look at her . . . I see those looks. . . . Yeah [they're mostly white folks]. . . . It's like they're like looking through you sometimes, you know. . . . I mean you can tell when somebody *looks* at you like, out of disgust or that they don't like you. Like you're in their space and they just look at you like, why is she here? And I can't describe it."

Class experiences for Sheri, Tisha, and Zakiyyah were often felt in perceived negative gazes at their pregnant bodies. Sheri in particular intensely absorbed those perceptions. The negative feelings she perceived that others held about her caused a great deal of pain—emotionally and physically.

These could have been part of the reason for Sheri's multiple experiences of pain and the medical complications she endured over the course of her pregnancy.

These *negatively felt perceptions* operated intensely in Sheri's life. In her pregnancy narratives, she perceived that others viewed her as "in the system," "another statistic," or "on welfare" when she became visibly pregnant. Moral overtones were cast in disapproving looks, compelling her to instinctively reveal a wedding band. Regardless of Sheri's income, education, or marital status, *felt experiences* of lower-class status permeated her everyday life. In turn, she felt irritated, distressed, disappointed, and concerned that others viewed her in this way.<sup>20</sup>

#### CLASS AND GENDER: EVA AND EXPERIENCES OF MARRIAGE

Eva graduated from a prestigious university with a degree in chemistry and worked as a clinical-trials manager at a local pharmaceutical research center. A tall woman with sad and weary eyes, she was expecting her second child—an unplanned pregnancy. Eva's work involved frequent travel, and she was keenly aware that she was given no special treatment as a result of her pregnancy. She was overwhelmed and exhausted by mothering an active toddler and often asked why no one told her "the whole story" of motherhood.

Eva's marriage was rocky when we met. Marital tension centered on the unequal education and income between husband and wife. Her life history was filled with experiences of disappointment in her marriage and husband—emotions that became intensified as her pregnancy progressed: "I think he's always focused on the fact that I have a four-year degree from a really good university and a pretty rough major. And he's compared that with his . . . and I think that's why a lot of times he gives me the comments, 'Miss Psychotherapist, you think you know everything.' I was commenting to a friend of mine that I almost have to be nothing for him to be something. Like with my job, I have to not be working for him to feel like . . . he can take care of his family. Or if I go into a store and I see something I like . . . he has to be the man and I have to really appear to be the weaker person."

Greatly contributing to the stress of their relationship was the gap in education that distanced Eva from her husband. He believed she felt superior to him, and Eva thought this encouraged him to attempt to maintain financial and authoritative power over her. Although Eva described feeling like "nothing" in order for him to feel like "something," she believed he was not treating her this way "on purpose." Inequalities in income generated inequali-

ties in experiences of economic and educational class for Eva's husband. He turned on his more educated partner and demanded power in other areas of home and social life.<sup>21</sup>

GENDER AND RACE: EXPERIENCING MALE GENDER  
DURING PREGNANCY

Finally, and most surprising to me, several women revealed a deep uneasiness and in some cases fear of bearing sons. Helene and Sheri were both concerned that not only would they be bearing a child whom they felt society would punish simply because of his skin color and sex but also that it would be very difficult to raise a black male.

SHERI: It's scary . . . to bring a black man into this . . . into society because it's a cross between punishment and . . . what's the other word . . . enjoyment for my family because there was no other boys, you know? You don't know who you're looking at and how they're thinking of you. That's scary. You never know who's looking at you to plot something against you because you're black. So that's what I think of when, you know, a son. How do you teach that to your child? And at the same time, teach not to be prejudiced? That's hard.

HELENE: I'm particularly concerned if this is a male child . . . on how I am going to protect it, and teach it to protect itself. But at the same time maintaining humanity. Very, very, very challenging because really what you are trying to teach someone, even in a little, small person, is to not treat people the way they treat you. And at the same time not let how it is they *treat you change* you. And . . . I don't see that as being consistent with human nature. Especially not in little ones.

For Helene and Sheri, fears were generated around past negative experiences with men—particularly fathers and boyfriends—and images of black men as “thugs” that are projected into mainstream culture by television, movies, and news media.<sup>22</sup> As a criminal defender, Helene had the added burden of seeing stereotypes of young black men fulfilled in court. For Helene and Sheri, pregnancy itself became a *state of suspension* where imagined gendered fetuses produced a palpable fear that they would bear sons who were not “responsible” or who would suffer the violence of a society that did not want them.<sup>23</sup> In other words, lived realities of pregnancy were in a sense *suspended* as these women played out in vivid detail a future of mothering a grown son.

THE VALUE OF AN INTERSECTIONAL  
ETHNOGRAPHIC LENS AND AN ANTHROPOLOGIST'S  
CRITIQUE OF INTERSECTIONALITY

As I have previously described, ethnography as a methodology implies a deep social and empathetic relationship with consultants so as to understand their lives and cultural worlds in the fullest ways possible. It also creates space for discussions of history, memory, and relations of power that impinge on daily life when we approach people about their lived experiences.

Although most of my consultants did not immediately comment on my own cultural heritage, some later revealed that they were “surprised” or “tickled” when we met for the first time. Some wondered why “a sister” wasn’t doing the research but were pleased that anyone was interested in listening to their narratives. My own experiences of pregnancy and motherhood often overrode initial misgivings about a white woman conducting the study. Women would engage me in conversations about physical aspects of pregnancy, feelings that I did or did not experience as a new mother, and what postpartum life and motherhood was like for me. My own experiences of race, class, and gender articulated with those of my consultants in specific ways during interviews and when we were together in social spaces like church or birthday parties. Although I was considered a cultural “outsider,” I was perhaps more importantly considered an *experiential insider*.<sup>24</sup> In other words, I could connect with my consultants in ways that challenged a racial divide and that formed the basis of a more inclusive formulation of gender based on lived experience.

There are *specific* felt experiences during the nine-month biological event that constitute, produce, and otherwise inform understandings of one’s lived worlds of being African American and female. Although the study did not support direct connections between perceived stressful life experiences and preterm birth, low birth weight, or infant mortality, it did bring to light many of the lived complexities of pregnancy and motherhood for African American women.

From these narratives, it became clear that the nature of being an African American woman is fluid and ever shifting and that each experience (i.e., being African American and being female) carries a different valence for each woman. I noted that experiences of female gender rarely stood as unconnected to cultural experiences of being African American for Helene, Zakiyyah, Tisha, and Sheri, whose senses of self included more salient narratives of being African American. Helene, for example, would consistently

articulate being black in terms of being a black woman. As indicated in her quotation in the beginning of this essay, she sees the world “through that set of eyes.” Experiencing African American descent and female gender in this way denies a collective African American experience often perpetuated by Afrocentrist models of social activism (hooks 2000) and highlights unique experiences of African American women.

Challenging ideas of a collective gendered African American consciousness, women such as Eva expressed that female gender operated independently of being African American and was most often *negatively felt* in the context of male-female relations with her spouse. She experienced her female gender as oppressive in the demands of work and home life and gave these experiences a greater value than African American heritage. This is not to say that Eva was not conscious of a racially stratified society or of race-based social inequalities, but her *lived experiences* of being an African American woman spoke to a more complex interplay between “race” and “gender.”

As recounted in their pregnancy and motherhood narratives, women experienced being African American both positively and negatively (and neutrally, for Eva). Understanding the processes that promote *positively felt* experiences of being African American may guide future efforts to ameliorate or counterbalance those experiences that are negatively felt. Experiences of pregnancy and motherhood brought into relief lived realities of being African American and female and a fluid nature of class as they intersected with one another in myriad ways to promote ways of *being in the world*. Intersecting experiences of race, class, and gender informed how these women viewed themselves in particular ways in relation to the world around them.

These narratives, constructed over the course of one year, illustrate the diversity of lived experiences among a group of African American women and the opportunity to understand the relational, experiential, and existential dimensions of race, class, and gender. I propose that race does not solely mean skin color, class not only income and education, and gender not a strict male-female division but rather are all relational and experiential ways of living and being in the world.

Ethnography informed by intersectionality offers a lens through which we can appreciate and critically examine the multilayered and interconnected relationships around race, class, and gender and how those relationships are lived. I recommend that intersectional approaches acknowledge that these interlocking categories of experience require deconstruction and critical examination in order to more fully understand them. For example,

when exploring these experiences for African American women, I came to appreciate that each category is informed by and hangs in the balance with its presumed opposite—male gender, nonblack, and the many experiences of class that are unrelated to income and education. I propose understanding class experience as a constellation of relations that are not solely economic but are *felt*. This work examines felt class experiences within African American cultural communities and recognizes intracultural differences in such experiences.

The strengths of an intersectional perspective lie in the attention to multiple and interlocking hierarchical systems that impinge on daily lives of African American women, but the frame must place further emphasis on personal, lived experiences of these systems. For example, objective assumptions about class as intimately tied to income and education limit our understandings of class as feeling. In addition, as discussed above, experiences of gender must expand to include *felt male gender* oppression in a woman who fears she will bear a son. Finally, assuming that female gender and an uncritical examination of race operate only as oppressive systems denies the positively felt experiences of being African American and female. These systems create experiences replete with meanings that are not necessarily always coincident with oppression but rather reveal a complex landscape of lived worlds. Helene poignantly reminds us of this:

I always knew I was black. I never thought I was anything other than a black girl but I thought that was a fan-fucking-tastic thing to BE! Both my woman-ness and my blackness were always celebrated from the first. It was never anything to be concerned about, and my mother would have been ashamed if I wanted to be anything different. And I never wanted to be anything different. I knew I was black and I knew I was a girl and I knew that those were very, very special things to be and that the lucky people were female and the really, really fortunate were black females. . . . I've never wanted to be homogenized. I never wanted to assimilate. That's not where it is for me. I *love* being a black woman. Love it. *Love* it, love it, love it!

Ultimately, ethnography invites an exploration of intersectionality that is in-depth, meaning centered, and as a way of being in the world. In this experience-centered ethnography of African American women, anthropological practice and its twenty-first-century emphasis on coauthorship of life narratives brings to light the lived connections rather than divisions between race, class, and gender that are germane to understanding how inter-

sectionality operates in everyday life. A valuable contribution of this work is a fuller understanding of imposed constructs of race, class, and gender from experiential perspectives. This may support or challenge assumptions in U.S. society about these experiences for African American women and contribute to understanding powerful global ideologies that sustain race-, class-, and gender-based oppression. It is my hope that anthropologists of all cultural experiences embrace this framework not only to advance scholarly work but also to value the lives of African American women within a more inclusive anthropological tradition.

#### NOTES

1. Historically, black women tended to matriculate in graduate programs of sociology or social work rather than anthropology. For a full review of the history of black women in anthropology, see Bolles (2001). For a genealogy of African American scholars in anthropology, see Harrison and Harrison (1998).

2. Poststructuralist anthropologists examine those power relations embedded in such hierarchies.

3. Black women anthropologists are still discouraged from studying themselves (Bolles 2001).

4. See Patricia Hill Collins (1986) for an understanding of the term “outsider.” See K. Haldeman (2006) for a discussion on the shifting and blurry boundaries of “outsiderness.”

5. “Infant mortality” is defined as the death of an infant prior to one year of age. It is usually expressed as the infant mortality rate (IMR), or number of infant deaths prior to one year of age per 1,000 live births. (See the official website of the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation.)

6. The disparity has been shown to be even greater at upper-class levels (see Schoendorf et al. 1992).

7. “Preterm birth” refers to delivery prior to thirty-seven weeks gestation. Low birth weight is defined medically as less than 5 lbs. 8 oz. See Krieger et al. (1993, 1999, 2000) for reviews of social epidemiological work that addresses intersections of race, racism, and health. See Krieger et al. (2000) for specific reference to low birth weight.

8. See Hummer et al. (1999) for sociological work on race and ethnicity and infant mortality.

9. See also Roberta Coles (2006) for a more recent analysis of family structure as related to race and ethnicity in the United States and Arlie Hochschild (2003) for a review of current challenges in family life of dual-income married couples.

10. See Jenkins and Inhorn (2003) for a recent review of anthropological studies of reproduction. See Stack (1974, 1996) for seminal and current anthropologies of African American family life.

11. From Rayna Rapp, *Testing Women, Testing the Fetus: The Social Impact of Amniocentesis in America*, 1.

12. I use the term “consultants” to convey a shared sense of participation between myself and the women I interviewed in the construction of this ethnography.

13. See Merleau-Ponty (1962) for in-depth phenomenological understandings of perception. See Csordas (1994) for a discussion of embodiment as it relates to lived experience.

14. See also this essay’s beginning quotation.

15. I use the term “racialized labor” to convey that Tisha perceived her work life in terms of being African American. According to Tisha’s narratives, her coworkers participated in a process of racializing her work through public comment or “looks.” See Goldberg (1993) for an in-depth discussion of the process of racialization. Labor, in this sense, refers not only to her work life but also to Tisha’s labor to maintain her pregnancy.

16. I do not separate productive and reproductive labor except to indicate that Tisha’s difficult work experiences were heavily informed by her pregnancy. For a review of productive and reproductive labor, see Ginsburg and Rapp (1991).

17. It was my impression that Tisha meant to say “Medicaid.”

18. It is important to note that this anthropological focus on *lived experiences* varies from other social-science perspectives on class. Sociologists have tended to explore class in one of two ways: *distributional*, or as functions of income or occupational prestige, and *relational*, or as immersed in interclass social relations of power and subordination (Lucal 1994). See Garbin and Bates (1966) for early formulations of occupational prestige. See Glenn’s (1963) work on education as a primary marker of prestige among African Americans. See anthropologist John Jackson’s (2001) *Harlemworld* for contemporary analyses of class as “lived.”

19. Social scientists have addressed this “type” of racial prejudice both at the macrostructural level (Bonilla-Silva 1997; Virtanen and Huddy 1998) and the micro-psychological level (Bobo and Fox 2003). Both formulations examine a “symbolic racism” whereby racist ideologies are manifested in covert rather than “old-fashioned” overt ways. See Kinder and Sears (1981) for a discussion of “symbolic racism” and McConahay (1986) for a description of how social psychologists measure this type of racism. Rather than measuring people’s responses to questions about prejudice, ethnography engages in lengthy and open-ended discussions for a richer portrait of how racism operates in people’s daily lives.

20. Mullings (1995) asserts that this class “instability” is unique to African American women because of the complex articulation of being an African American woman and experiences of class.

21. Eva’s husband attempted to control her reproductive life by insisting she not use birth control. Eva responded by having an IUD implanted without his knowledge.

22. Zakiyyah and Sheri specifically used the term “thug” when speaking about young men who dressed a particular way (wore baggy pants) and wore their hair in braids. Other women in the study also commented on “thugs” and blamed news media for reinforcing the negative stereotypes of black men.

23. Ideas of “responsibility” were intimately tied to ideas of “masculinity” that included fatherhood.

24. See Haldeman (2006) for an in-depth discussion of the fluid boundaries of insider/outsider status and a discussion of “experiential insiderness.”

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# Exploring Occupational Stereotyping in the New Economy

*The Intersectional Tradition Meets  
Mixed Methods Research*

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GARY K. PERRY

The tradition of intersectionality is rooted in a historical legacy of struggle against hegemonic, normative structures. The lived experiences of black women have facilitated levels of sociopolitical consciousness that are, on the one hand, attuned to the interconnectedness or interlocking nature of multiple systems of oppression and, on the other, central in what Roderick Ferguson (2004) conceptualizes as the genealogy of women-of-color feminism (see also Bonita Roth's [2004] discussion of black feminism as the vanguard center). At this juncture in the tradition of intersectionality, a movement is afoot to translate the core assumptions of theories of intersectionality into a methodological tradition that is applicable to investigating the complexities and contradictions of power, privilege, and difference across time and space (Hancock 2007).

Within most mainstream sociological discourse in the United States, theories of intersectionality often occupy a contradictory position as having broad appeal while also being misappropriated. Theories of intersectionality by some scholars seem to resist the mandate to embody many of the characteristics of contemporary sociological theorizing. To begin with, contemporary social theorizing is an extension of (classical) theory, a revision to

(classical) theory, a critique of (classical) theory, or a combination of the aforementioned.<sup>1</sup>

Second, most theories of intersectionality are less concerned with defending either a microanalysis or a macroanalysis than they are with highlighting and exploring how the lived experiences of social groups are defined by and in constant struggle with multiple systems of oppression and privilege. As a result, a number of theories of intersectionality are removed from what sociologists have come to frame as the micro-macro theoretical debate (see Alexander et al. 1987). Theories of intersectionality challenge this often abstract and imagined binary. Unlike other contemporary theories, theories of intersectionality are more fluid with regard to how they interpret the relationship between the social structure and individuals.

Finally, the absence of most theories of intersectionality from the mainstream canon of social science theorizing is correlated to the reality that women of color are the primary practitioners and focus of this theoretical tradition. While it is true that the discipline of sociology has evolved in its recognition of scholarship by sociologists from historically disadvantaged groups, it is also the case that the discipline often intentionally and unintentionally devalues and de-legitimizes the intellectual property of minorities—especially women of color.

Within the subfield of social stratification, of which the study of occupational stereotyping can be found, core theories and research engaging systems and patterns of inequality and privilege are largely devoid of a substantive intersectional framework. Even with the growing presence of scholarship and research that employs this framework (see, for example, Amott and Matthaei 1991; Brewer 1989; Chow et al. 1996; Mullings 1997; Zinn and Dill 1994), the leading methods for studying systems and patterns of social stratification largely ignore the interlocking and intersecting nature of social inequalities. An intersectional perspective, as both a theoretical and a methodological framework, allows for research in the area of social stratification to develop more holistic, humane, and justice-oriented engagement with power and oppression.

Given the rich and robust theoretical and grounded insights of the intersectional tradition, how do we translate the motivations and assumptions of intersectional theorizing into an applied process of empirical and naturalist modes of inquiry? This question has become a central issue for intersectional theorists over the last decade (Hancock 2007). Across various disciplines, attempts have been made to develop intersectional methods of research analysis.

CONSTRUCTING A TRADITION OF  
INTERSECTIONAL RESEARCH

Over the last twenty years there has been a growing body of social science, political, and cultural studies scholarship that has earnestly attempted to articulate an intersectional framework in the analysis of inequality faced by women. Given her work as a sociologist on women and the labor market, Leslie McCall (2001, 2005) has attempted to construct a language for assessing the complexities of systems of oppression. As previously noted, sociologists have generally lacked the theoretical insights and the methodological tools necessary to engage in an intersectional analysis of social stratification more broadly and the study of labor markets as it relates to McCall's field of inquiry. More troubling than this absence of a cohesive methodology for intersectional analyses within sociology is that the growth in intersectional scholarship has resulted in a misinterpretation of the analytical tenets of intersectionality by sociologists engaged in intersectional research. As both a corrective of such errors and an attempt to formulate a language for intersectional analysis, McCall (2005) outlines three approaches for moving us toward an intersectional analysis of complex or intersectional inequalities: (a) anticategorical complexity, (b) intercategory complexity, and (c) intracategory complexity.

Like the broader feminist research tradition (see, for example, Reinharz 1992), the tradition of intersectionality is focused on deconstructing, or at least decentralizing, hegemonic structures of classification and social ordering. McCall (2005) interprets this tradition as part of an anticategorical methodological approach from which the theory of intersectionality may draw its analytical roots. The aim to undermine structural hierarchies or master statuses is viewed as a means to achieving social justice.

McCall positions the role of feminists of color in the formation of the tradition of intersectionality as it relates to the intracategory methodological approach. This approach forces us to recognize the points at which singular and multiple identities intersect and differently position us and vary our lived experiences. To that end, McCall notes that women's narratives or the qualitative research tradition has been at the heart of intersectional scholars' ability to understand the complexities of multiple and overlapping spaces of intersectionality.

For McCall (2005, 1784), the intercategory methodological approach to assessing the complexities of intersectionality "permits an examination of substantive issues that are far less prominent in women's studies than

they are in the social science disciplines and in contemporary society more generally.” This approach pushes back against the intentions of the anticategorical approach by stating that inequalities exist between diverse social categories—regardless of how imperfect and fluid these categories may be—and that these inequalities between diverse social categories or social groups must be positioned as the center of any intersectional analysis. In further distinguishing the intercategorical or categorical approach from the aforementioned approaches, McCall (2005, 1785) argues that “to empirically chart the changing relationships among multiple social groups defines the goal, rather than the premise only, of the categorical approach.” Because the use of aggregate social categories in social science research is primarily grounded in universal or structural assumptions about the meaning and function of groups, the intercategorical or categorical approach is often resisted by intersectional scholars. McCall, however, argues that this approach should not be rejected wholesale but rather embraced by scholars as a means for empirically informing an intersectional understanding of complex inequalities while not violating core assumptions that multiple and overlapping inequalities intersect both across and within social groups or categories.

Similar to Leslie McCall, I view the increasing efforts by scholars to translate the intersectional tradition into a research framework or into its own research methodology as taking multiple courses of action. While often highly situated within their respective academic disciplines, intersectional scholars have engaged with and at times transformed an interdisciplinary collection of research methods as they seek to formulate an intersectional framework. When we review existing intersectional research, it is apparent that the development of an intersectional research tradition has generally grounded itself in three methodological traditions: (1) the historical-comparative tradition, (2) the naturalist tradition, and (3) the positivist tradition. I now turn to a summary discussion of three seminal texts, wherein the intersectional research practices reflect both an explicit and an intentional application of the core themes of the intersectional tradition applied to inequality and oppression faced by women in the United States.

Teresa Amott and Julie Matthaei’s *Race, Gender, and Work: A Multicultural Economic History of Women in the United States* (1991) was one of the first and most ambitious attempts at developing an intersectional analysis of a cross-section of women’s labor force participation by race and nationality in the United States. Amott and Matthaei engage in a comparative-historical analysis whereby they compare and contrast demographic data on women’s

labor both within and across distinct historical episodes in the growth of the U.S. economic system.

Amott and Matthaei's intersectional analysis of the segmented nature of the U.S. labor market may be summarized into three overarching themes. First, in order to fully comprehend the complex ways in which diverse populations of workers are unequally positioned across sectors of the U.S. labor market, researchers must develop longitudinal analyses that highlight trends in labor market inequalities and that capture the intersections of race, class, and gender expectations for women. It is also the case that the intersections of these systems of oppression operate within specific historical and geographical contexts that are central to understanding the diverse ways in which women's labor is exploited within the paid and unpaid labor force. Finally, analyses of inequalities within the U.S. labor market must also examine the collective struggle by diverse populations of women for economic and social justice. In short, Amott and Matthaei's intersectional approach allows for a more nuanced and multifaceted examination of the trends, shifts, and changes in a U.S. labor market that has historically been segmented and stratified at the intersection of race, class, and gender.

Judith Rollins's approach to intersectional research is best illustrated by her book *Between Women: Domestic and Their Employers* (1985). Situated in Boston, Massachusetts, Rollins engaged in an ethnographic analysis of the relationships between a research sample of female domestics, who were largely black and working class, and their often white, middle-class female employers. This use of a naturalistic or qualitative tradition allowed Rollins to disentangle an array of sociopolitical, economic, and cultural aspects of this inequitable workplace arrangement.

Through Rollins's willingness to participate in her own research as a black female domestic, her subject position boldly places the lived realities of a black female domestic at the center of her research process and at the core of her data analysis. Rollins's insider perspective also allowed her to forge relationships with fellow domestics and, to some extent, various female employers of these domestics. As a result of these bonds, Rollins was able to amass a quality of data that speaks to the nuanced and intersectional complexities of this social arrangement through participatory observations, in-depth interviews, and self-reflections on her experiences.

While it is apparent that Rollins's use of field research is well-established among feminist scholars within various social sciences and to some extent in the humanities (Reinharz 1992), it is important that we do not minimize the epistemological politics surrounding Rollins's use and framing of this

research tradition. Rollins's text comes out of her dissertation work in the discipline of sociology. With that being said, the courage and the will demonstrated by this researcher to go against deeply rooted disciplinary trends regarding what constitutes legitimate scholarship came with a risk to Rollins's professional advancement and with a chance of devaluation as a "legitimate" scholar. From the conception of Rollins's research, there was always a clear and unequivocal understanding that in order to comprehend the lived realities of domestics, intellectual space had to be created for these women of color to speak for themselves (i.e., through their own voices and through their own everyday struggles as domestics). More than anything else it is Rollins's positioning of these female domestics of color as both the subjects and authorities of her research, and not as mere objects of her interpretations, that distinguishes her research agenda from most naturalistic research practices. Given Rollins's clear articulation and actualization of the central intersectional idea that women of color must be centered in our analyses of power, privilege, and difference, her application of qualitative methods goes beyond what is often seen as the ultimate goal of interpreting social context and lived experiences. In other words, her intersectional analysis illuminates the interplay between the lived experiences of domestics and the forces of historical and interlocking systems of oppression.

Leslie McCall, in her book *Complex Inequality: Gender, Class and Race in the New Economy* (2001), also contributes to the emergence of intersectional research from a positivistic or quantitative tradition. McCall maps for us the ways in which quantitative methods should be used when addressing how complex systems of oppression and privilege function in the lives of women of color in various regional labor markets. McCall engages with the tradition of intersectionality through her concept of "configurations of inequality." It is McCall's argument that contemporary trends in U.S. labor market inequalities—within the new economy—do require a spatial analysis of how labor markets are configured or structured relative to broader economic, political, and cultural shifts in the last half of the twentieth century.

While McCall's concept of configurations of inequality is connected to the intersectional legacy of problematizing normative and one-dimensional conceptualizations of inequality, it is also the case that this concept goes beyond a discourse of identity politics. McCall's aim in assessing complex inequalities is less concerned with uncovering the narratives associated with the lived experiences of women of color than with interrogating regional labor markets as economic, sociopolitical, and cultural spaces wherein complex inequalities are rooted. It is without question that McCall is engaged in

the development of empirical—while not completely positivistic-centered—measures for assessing intersecting inequalities (see also Browne 1999; Browne and Misra 2003).

Even with these advancements in the construction of an intersectional methodology, I am hesitant to draw the conclusion that an intersectional methodology demands epistemological, ontological, and analytical practices that are exclusive to an intersectional tradition. The richness of intersectional research is seen through its ability to adopt and transform existing research methodologies based on the core tenets of the tradition of intersectionality. What has been less visible in intersectional scholarship is the implementation of a mixed methods research paradigm. At this juncture, I explore the possibilities for intersectional scholars to (re)center our scholarship in the emerging field of mixed methods research. To that end, I reflect on my dissertation research when evaluating the effectiveness of using a mixed methods research design and when exploring the process of occupational (sex) stereotyping from an intersectional perspective.

#### BUILDING ON COMMON GROUND: INTERSECTIONALITY AND MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

The traditions of intersectionality and mixed methods research have a shared commitment to holistic inquiry. As stated earlier, a defining characteristic of the tradition of intersectionality is its embodiment of women of color's legacy of critiquing and resisting one-dimensional, universal categories of analysis. Likewise, the campaign for a more integrated and multimethod approach to analyzing the complexities of social and behavioral phenomena has been inspired by mixed methodologists' desire to resolve the various philosophical and paradigmatic debates regarding the legitimate construction of knowledge in the social and behavioral sciences (Creswell, Goodchild, and Turner 1996; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). Such debates have been sustained by methodological purists whose approach to social and behavioral research is beholden to *either* positivistic *or* constructionist methods (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998).

In addition to this shared pursuit of holistic or integrated inquiry, the traditions of intersectionality and mixed methods research are equally committed to assessing the interplay between human agency and systemic structures. For intersectional scholars, especially feminists of color, the day-to-day struggles of women of color within a matrix of domination is not only confined to their individual lives but also is manifested through a shared consciousness or reality among women of color within their particular socio-

historical locations or standpoints. Capturing the multilevel or hegemonic nature of lived experiences is another methodological objective of mixed methods research. This objective is in opposition to the assumptions of those scholars who are invested in the idea that microlevel and macrolevel analyses of phenomena cannot be studied simultaneously (Alexander et al. 1987). This view of social and behavioral science research prohibits any single study from using or mixing multiple research methods—research methods, more specifically, that operate from analytical and philosophical premises that are conceived as dialectical and by extension antithetical.

Finally, the traditions of intersectionality and mixed methods research center the tensions and contradictions of our lived experiences in their assessment of social and behavioral realities. Because most social and behavioral phenomena are rooted in such complexity and multiplicity, mixed methods research also operates from a variety of philosophical and epistemological arguments that critique the vast monomethodological approaches of most traditional social and behavioral science research (Greene, Benjamin, and Goodyear 2001; Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). Greene and Caracelli (1997) outline two methodological assumptions that highlight the multivocality of mixed methods analyses. The pragmatic position, on the one hand, argues that multiple research methods, even with their competing and unique philosophical premises, “can be mixed and matched . . . to achieve the combination most appropriate for a given inquiry problem” (Greene and Caracelli 1997, 8). On the other hand, the dialectical position posits that “social issues are vastly complex and thus require both an *analytic* and a *systematic* approach to inquiry . . . for a more complete understanding” (Greene and Caracelli 1997, 8). Both positions, in short, acknowledge the importance of designing a research protocol with the specificity to address the primary research questions but also diverse enough to illuminate the complexity of the social phenomenon under study.

Given the shared vision of the traditions of intersectionality and mixed methods research, it may be argued that these two traditions emerge from similar epistemological philosophical contexts. Up to this point, I have delineated this shared vision by highlighting the common ground upon which the core assumptions of the traditions of intersectionality and mixed methods research are rooted: holistic inquiry, the interplay between human agency and systemic structure, and the centering of contradictions and tensions. To further illustrate these commonalities, table 1 provides a synthesis of these complementary traditions. The quotations found in table 1 are intended to

TABLE 1. Shared Assumptions between the Traditions of Intersectionality and Mixed Methods Research

THEORY OF INTERSECTIONALITY

MIXED METHODS RESEARCH

*Holistic Inquiry*

The theory of intersectionality is characterized “by an analytical shift away from the dichotomous, binary thinking about power” (Symington 2004, 3).

“The pragmatist point of view rejects the forced choice between positivism and constructivism with regard to methods, logic, and epistemology. . . . Pragmatism rejects the either-or of the incompatibility thesis and embraces both points of view” (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998, 22–23).

*Centering Contradictions and Tensions*

“Intersectional analysis helps us to visualize the convergence of different types of discrimination—as points of intersection or overlap. . . . It helps us to understand and assess the impact of these converging identities on opportunities and access to rights” (Symington 2004, 2).

“Mixed methods research is . . . an approach to knowledge [construction] that attempts to consider multiple viewpoints, perspectives, positions, and standpoints” (Johnson et al. 2007, 113).

Additive approaches to analyzing inequality overlook the fact that “something unique is produced at the intersection point of different types of discrimination” (Symington 2004, 3).

“Mixed method inquiry is an approach to investigating the social world that involves more . . . than one way of knowing, along with more than one kind of technique for . . . representing human phenomena” (Greene 2007, 119).

*Interplay between Agency and Structure*

“Using intersectionality in our work requires that we think differently about identity, equality and power. It requires that we focus on points of intersection, complexity, dynamic processes, and the structures that define our access to rights and opportunities, rather than on defined categories or isolated issue areas” (Symington 2004, 5).

“Mixed methods research . . . is the use of qualitative and quantitative methods that allow for the collection of data about historical and contextual factors, with special emphasis on issues of power that can influence the achievement of social justice and avoidance of oppression” (Johnson et al. 2007, 120).

illustrate the similarities between the fundamental positions of the intersectional and the mixed methods traditions.

PROBLEMATIZING OUR UNDERSTANDING OF  
OCCUPATIONAL STEREOTYPING

Social and behavioral scientists have long been interested in how individuals perceive and interact with and within their social environments. Research in the area of occupational stereotyping has acknowledged that members of many privileged social groups enter the workforce and occupy positions of power and authority with a host of unquestioned or unchallenged sociocultural stereotypes. Such attitudes and beliefs often result in the reproduction of labor market practices and policies that allow for discriminatory hiring practices; unfair evaluations of workers, especially workers in atypical-gender occupations; and the segmentation and segregation of workers along gender, race, or socioeconomic class statuses.

Early scholars in the area of occupational stereotyping uncovered how various human characteristics and personality traits become associated with various types of occupations. It was not until the middle of the twentieth century that most scholars of occupational stereotyping began to investigate the impact that sex roles and an occupation's sex-ratio composition have on how work and workers become stereotyped. Overall, research in the area of occupational stereotyping has generally reached the conclusion that individuals perceive certain types of workers as being either more or less suitable to work in certain types of occupations. These perceptions have largely been constructed by what theorists of occupational stereotyping have articulated as the "sexual division of labor" (Hartmann 1976, 137).

Many scholars have argued that cultural norms and societal expectations underlying sex roles and gender have established a sexual division of labor. Their arguments assume that the segmented and stratified distribution of men and women in the paid labor force reflects those cultural beliefs and attitudes that distinguish between men's and women's appropriate sex and gender roles. Based on this line of reasoning, the sexual division of labor is two-dimensional: the notion of women's work, on the one hand, is perceived as that which is generally performed by and associated with women or aspects of femininity, while men's work, on the other hand, is defined as that which is primarily done by and linked to men or ideals of masculinity. Across various sociohistorical periods, geographical spaces, and cultural groups, the notion of men's and women's work takes on different meanings. What remains constant, nonetheless, is the fact that a society's cultural norms and

expectations about male and female sex roles—at a given historical juncture—are the major determinants in conceptualizing the sexual division of labor.

Although cultural norms and societal expectations influence the sexual division of labor, some scholars have also argued that occupations are stereotyped and divided for the purpose of maintaining and reproducing socioeconomic systems of inequality. Heidi Hartmann (1976) is among the earliest feminist scholars to acknowledge that the stratified and segmented structure of the labor market is the result of a sexual division of labor both within and outside of the paid labor market. Hartmann (1976) was quite effective in unmasking the interrelationship between the capitalist economic system and the discriminatory system of patriarchy, as it relates to the sexual division of labor. Differentiating between men's and women's work, for Hartmann (1976), is not a static or a solely cultural phenomenon. Rather, the various shifts and changes in the capitalist economic structure (especially changes in the supply of and the demand for exploitable, female labor) have a significant impact on the occupations and jobs that women and men are channeled into. For Hartmann (1976, 147), sex segregation by jobs and occupations “is the primary mechanism in capitalist society that maintains the superiority of men over women.” This position highlights how capitalism, through its connections to patriarchy, maintains and produces a sexual division of labor, a position, moreover, that goes beyond seeing sex roles as being solely defined by biological or cultural expectations. As Hartmann (1976) argues, the sexual division of labor is not a static and coincidental socioeconomic phenomenon but rather a deliberative attempt by those in power to maintain a socioeconomic system of sexual and gender inequality.

While the research in the area of occupational stereotyping is interdisciplinary and broad in its scope, it is not without its shortcomings. When viewing this body of scholarship from an intersectional framework, one must conclude that the existing body of scholarship has overwhelmingly defined and assessed occupational stereotyping as a social-psychological process marked solely by gender and sex-role stereotypes. Scholars of occupational stereotyping have generally relied on “either/or” theories and methodologies when analyzing the process of occupational (sex) stereotyping. They have constructed and employed a language of dualities when comprehending the rationales behind how individuals stereotype work and workers. Even though this body of scholarship has advanced both our theoretical understanding of the process of occupational stereotyping and our ability to empirically assess trends and patterns associated with this social psychological process, its core findings and leading assumptions remain limited in their ability to capture

and explain the multifaceted nature of occupational stereotyping from an intersectional perspective.

AN INTERSECTIONAL, MIXED METHODS ANALYSIS OF  
OCCUPATIONAL STEREOTYPING

Intersectional scholars have made significant strides in interrogating the socioeconomic sphere through intersectional analyses of varying rates of labor force participation across social groups (Amott and Matthaei 1991), the segregation and segmentation of diverse groups of workers within the labor market (Amott and Matthaei 1991; Browne 1999; Zinn and Dill 1994), and the unequal distribution of wages across various groups of workers (Amott and Matthaei 1991; McCall 2001; Tomaskovic-Devey 1993a). Although the tradition of intersectionality has enriched and transformed social science analyses of the aforementioned socioeconomic phenomena, the over fifty years of scholarship in the area of occupational (sex) stereotyping, however, lacks a pronounced intersectional analysis.

When asked to infer a potential job candidate's occupational status, to what extent do we operate from occupational stereotypes that are scripted by the intersection of racist, sexist, and class-based stereotypes and shaped by our interactions within regional labor markets that are hierarchically and horizontally stratified along markers of gender, race, and class? This question was at the center of a mixed methods dissertation I conducted with a representative sample of over 800 college undergraduates at a large mid-western university in the United States. I was interested in understanding how these undergraduates—a population preparing to enter into positions of authority and influence within the “new economy” (Alcaly 2003)—would engage in the process of occupational stereotyping when presented with a pool of fictional job candidates, wherein each candidate (six total) differed in her or his gender-race-class profile or social status.

In my efforts to integrate a more intersectional perspective into the area of occupational stereotyping, I devised a three-phased “sequential explanatory mixed methods research design” (Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998). Phase one of this multiphased research design involved a questionnaire or survey method that required the undergraduates to rank or hierarchically arrange a list of formal, civilian occupations based on their perceptions of each occupations' social prestige. Phase two also involved the survey questionnaire and required the undergraduates to assign each job candidate to the occupation that they believed to be most suitable, while only knowing each job candidate's gender, race, and socioeconomic class background. The under-

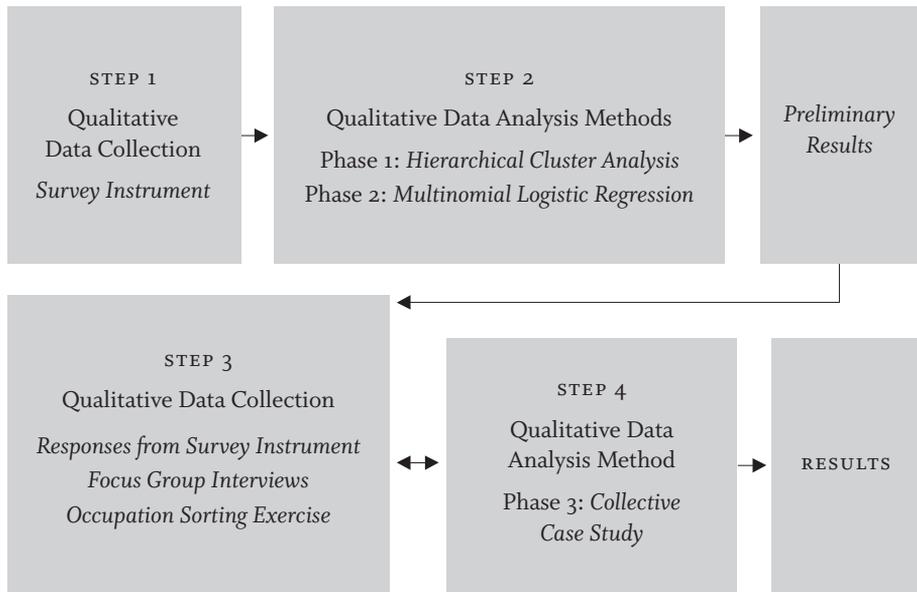


FIGURE 1. Flow Chart of Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods for Sequential, Explanatory Mixed Methods Analysis. From the author's unpublished doctoral dissertation, "Whose Job Is It? A Mixed Methods Analysis of Occupational Stereotyping and Occupational Prestige Ranking in the New Economy" (University of Nebraska–Lincoln, 2005).

graduates' knowledge of each fictional job candidate was communicated through a series of vignettes I designed on the race, gender, and class differences of these candidates. Phase three involved a qualitative case study, which included in-depth interviews with a culturally diverse subsample of the undergraduates who completed the survey questionnaire, to better understand how they engaged in the process of occupational stereotyping and to what extent their stereotypes were constructed from or informed by the intersections of gender, race, and social class assumptions about work and workers.

Like all mixed methods research, the effectiveness of one's analysis is highly contingent upon the meticulous and nuanced ideas that inform the research design. As a means of further illustrating both my use of sequential explanatory mixed methods design and my attempts at developing a holistic analysis rooted in a tradition of intersectionality, a review of figure 1 may prove instructional and informative. The complexities of the issues and the populations that intersectional scholars study warrant research methodologies that allow for a range of methodological techniques, modes of data col-

lection, research communities and contexts, systems for analyzing and interpreting data, and processes of accountability if not reciprocity to the broader struggles against interlocking systems of oppression.

While it is beyond the scope of this essay to discuss detailed findings from this mixed methods analysis, in short, the research findings do illustrate that the process of occupational stereotyping by these undergraduates defies one-dimensional approaches to social stereotyping. Unlike the prevailing wisdom within the field of occupational (sex) stereotyping, these undergraduates were often less likely to engage in gender stereotypes without acknowledging through their interview responses how the potential job candidate's race and/or social class background intersected with gender to form varying stereotypes of workers. The undergraduates who participated in the qualitative case study provided a deeper understanding of the sociocultural schemata that each applied when discussing their process of stereotyping potential job candidates. These undergraduates were more inclined to cite a potential job candidate's social class background as a core decision-making factor when attempting to decide which candidate was most or least likely to be employed in a given occupation. Nonetheless, the undergraduates also developed rationales for their occupational stereotypes that were rooted in intersecting assumptions regarding gender and race. Although less frequent, these undergraduates would engage in rationales for their occupational stereotypes that involved a combination of gender, race, and social class stereotypes about each candidate's employability in a specific occupational niche.

These research findings allow us to reconsider our commonly held assumptions with regard to the process of occupational (sex) stereotyping. As noted earlier, the existing literature on the process of occupational (sex) stereotyping is deeply rooted in a gendered analysis of occupational stereotypes. This one-dimensional reasoning becomes problematic, or incomplete at the least, when we employ an intersectional framework. Occupational stereotyping is a dynamic process and, therefore, ignoring its fluidity prevents scholars from engaging in a more complex and multidimensional analysis of how work and workers become stereotyped and hierarchically arranged within occupations and various labor markets. In other words, the positioning of workers into either men's or women's work is governed by factors that go beyond, but are not inseparable from, gender. Further, this process derives both its legitimacy and its direction from contextual, or cultural, frameworks that have (re)defined "whose job it is" relative to a racialized and gendered occupational structure.

## Mixing Methods as an Intersectional Methodology

When the traditions of intersectionality and mixed methods research are integrated into analyses of occupational stereotyping, scholars must focus their attention on the often overlooked processes by which the formal labor market (re)produces inequality. When assessing these findings from an intersectional framework it is apparent that the process of occupational stereotyping is structured by overlapping assumptions about gender, race, and social class. In summary, scholarship in the area of occupational stereotyping must allow researchers to (1) assess how the intersections of an individual's multiple social statuses result in different lived experiences and, therefore, differentially impact how he or she engages in the processes of occupational stereotyping, and (2) devise new methodologies for examining how potential job candidates with varying gender, race, and social class statuses are assumed to occupy the socially appropriate or culturally acceptable niches within a stratified occupational system.

At this juncture, applying theories of intersectionality to analyze various socioeconomic inequalities may benefit from analyses of occupational stereotyping. First, an intersectional perspective will help to uncover how individuals, based on their race, class, and gender statuses, may operate from differing and distinct sociocultural perceptions of male and female sex roles. Second, a variety of intersectional analyses of the U.S. labor market have highlighted how groups of workers (relative to their race and gender) are unequally distributed across and within labor sectors. Therefore, it is important that analyses of occupational stereotyping move beyond solely identifying how the sex-ratio composition of occupations influences an individual's perception of the labor market and begin to inquire into how the race, gender, and possibly class ratio of an occupation's workforce can potentially shape one's occupational stereotypes. Finally, an intersectional perspective regarding the stereotyping of occupations would require that scholars be attentive to how individuals' multiple social statuses influence their complex perceptions of work and workers. As noted earlier, our diverse lived realities and life experiences may influence the diverse standpoints from which we evaluate and rate the desirability of an occupation.

### NOTE

1. Within the discipline of U.S. sociology, classical sociological theory is generally that which has been published before the Second World War.

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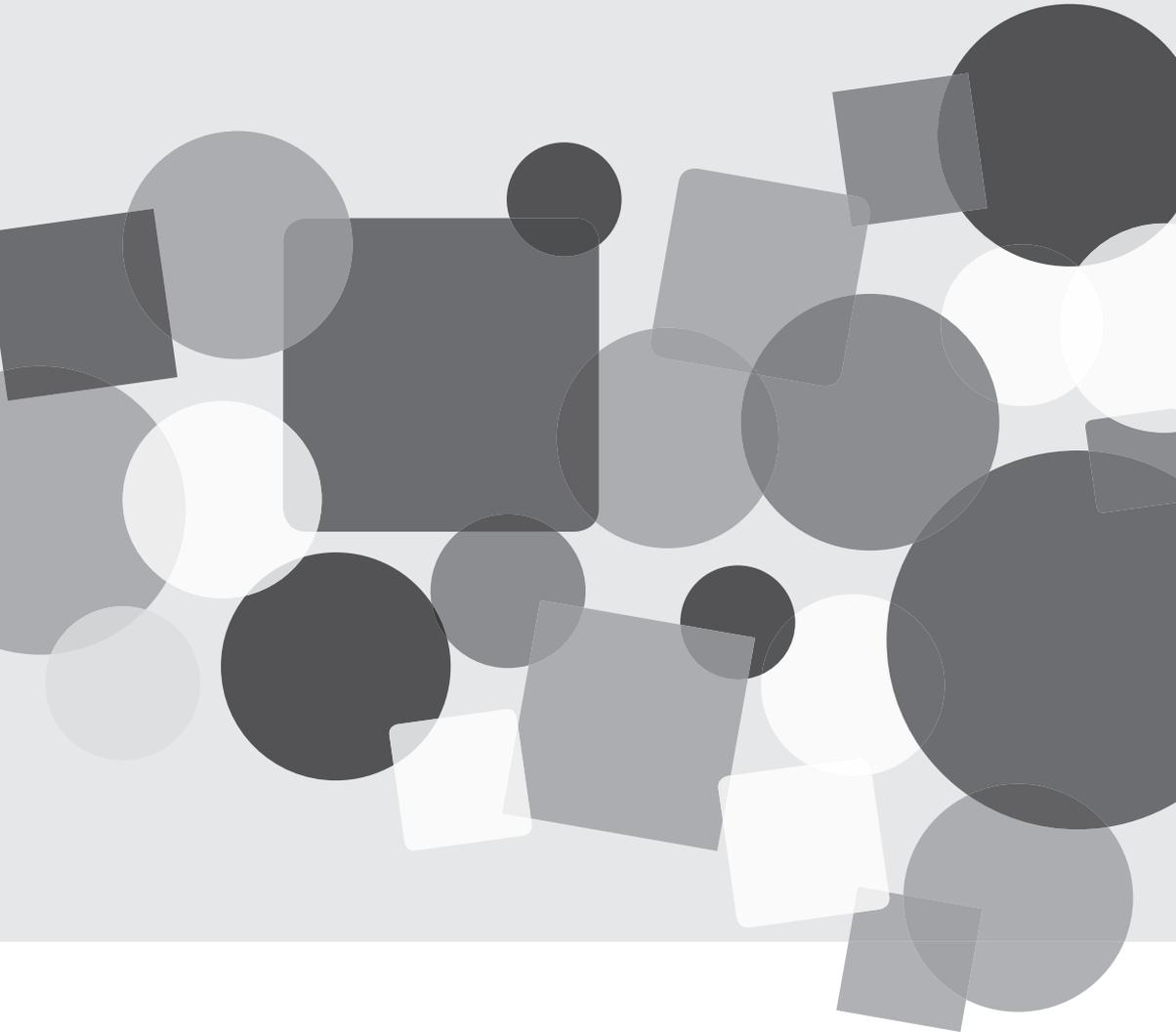
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IV

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BRIDGING THEORY AND PRAXIS



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Institutionalizing Intersectionality  
*Reflections on the Structure of Women's Studies  
Departments and Programs*

.....

MAKO FITTS

Within thirty years, women's studies in academia has evolved from being a space of intellectual and pedagogical support for marginalized faculty (primarily women) into a respected discipline with undergraduate and graduate degrees and a generation of faculty who identify as women's studies scholars. Sociologist Barrie Thorne (2000, 1183) asserts that women's studies, as a movement within the academy, had a "two-pronged vision: to create interdisciplinary knowledge and spaces and to change the content of existing disciplines." This essay introduces the concept of *institutionalizing intersectionality*, which involves the praxis of integrating diverse feminist standpoints, lived experience, and reflexivity within structures and institutions. My examination of trends in the structure of women's studies departments and programs draws from the recent literature on the administration of women's studies as well as my own experience in a women's studies department and a program at both research-intensive and comprehensive universities. I argue that it is through the development of autonomous women's studies departments that faculty are empowered and provided university leverage to facilitate the process of institutionalizing intersectionality.

INSTITUTIONALIZING INTERSECTIONALITY

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1995, 358–360) defined intersectionality as both structural—"how patterns of subordination intersect in women's lives"—and political—how "subordinated groups . . . frequently pursue conflicting agendas." Crenshaw's conceptualization is particularly salient

in understanding the role of identity politics in restructuring locations of power and authority and how intersectionality is institutionalized within women's studies departments and programs in academia. The practice of institutionalizing intersectionality highlights a distinct set of power dynamics. First, the process of diversifying intellectual perspectives that consider the nuances of integrating social categories requires the concomitant diversification of faculty bodies within academia. Institutionalizing intersectionality within women's studies means that the expertise and standpoints of faculty must reflect intellectual developments within the discipline. Second, as new bodies and perspectives enter the field, course offerings that reflect this change are often "ghettoized" as elective courses outside the core curriculum. To assess institutional intersectionality within women's studies, one must examine the material conditions of the structures (women's studies departments and programs) through which the discipline is maintained (by faculty) and delivered (to students).

Vivian May suggests that faculty engaged in the administration of women's studies departments and programs must engage feminist scholarship "as a resource for structural decisions and policy building" (2002, 136). In 1997, *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* published a series of essays examining the state of women's studies and the extent to which feminist theories transitioned into feminist praxis in the institutionalization of departments and programs. Contributors, including May, Wendy Brown, Shirley J. Yee, Beverly Guy-Sheftall, and Evelyn Hammonds, critiqued the lack of race, ethnic, class, and sexuality differences within women's studies programs, which directly affects the quality of teaching from diverse feminist standpoints. Moreover, as Guy-Sheftall and Hammond (1997) point out, there is a system of publishing and teaching within the discipline where a critical mass of women-of-color scholars are left out. In order to successfully institutionalize intersectionality, women's studies departments must incorporate differently situated subjectivities into their faculty, department leadership, and educational programming, reflecting the praxis of intersectionality as a conceptual framework.

A 2002 survey of women's studies departments and programs in the western United States shows that there is an increase in the development of a core women's studies curriculum and in the number of multicultural and global feminist courses (Salley et al. 2004). The study also shows that there was a 40 percent increase in the number of women's studies directors and chairs in salaried positions (63 percent in 2002 compared to 23 percent in 1988). Yet, there was no mention of the racial, ethnic, and sexual orienta-

tion demographics of faculty, which suggests that this demographic information was left out of the survey. In the 1996 National Women's Studies Association–sponsored study of the organization of women's studies in U.S. higher education, Diana Scully found that 93 percent of administrators were white, 2 percent Mexican or Latino/a, and 1 percent black. Fifteen percent of administrators held joint appointments with women's studies and another discipline, and only 8 percent had appointments solely in women's studies. Given the increase in multicultural and global perspective courses, women's studies administrators must ask whether the integration of intersectionality in the curriculum is reflected in the makeup of the faculty, which impacts curriculum development and student learning. In a transdisciplinary field, faculty of color cannot be ghettoized into ethnic-specific courses, which is common among traditional disciplines.

The existence of autonomous women's studies departments is where institutionalizing intersectionality must be examined, questioning the extent to which scholars administering and teaching in women's studies programs are contributing to the discipline and are reflexive about their own standpoints. As Laura Gillman points out, the “double discourse” of white feminist articulations of intersectionality neglects their institutional power and racial privilege within the academy where women's studies operates as a “privileged site of white power” (2007, 121). Faculty must acknowledge which standpoints are not represented at the level of department and program leadership and disciplinary contributions, and create systems to increase their presence.

#### CHALLENGES TO INSTITUTIONALIZING INTERSECTIONALITY

Where women's studies academic units are situated within the academic institution determines the level of autonomy that a department or program has (Burghardt and Colbeck 2005; Guy-Sheftall and Health 1995; Scully 1996; Scully and Currier 1997). While women's studies programs have been in existence since 1970, and while currently there are well over 700 departments and programs around the world, the structure of the programs range from self-governing academic departments to small programs composed of faculty across disciplines. In the case of the former, decisions around resource distribution, faculty hiring, tenure and promotion, assessment, and curricular design rest within the purview of faculty whose lines are housed within women's studies. There is a greater sense of autonomy and an institutional commitment (in the form of faculty lines, budgets, and representa-

tion on college- and university-wide decision-making bodies), at least on the surface, to the growth of women's studies.

In the case of the latter, faculty lines are housed within the traditional disciplines where department chairs have license to farm out (or not) their faculty to teach women's studies courses. Women's studies programs have often relied on the generosity of well-intentioned department chairs who are also committed to the study of women and gender in society. Yet, under this system, there are no institutionally secure mechanisms in place to protect the longevity of the program. Moreover, institutions execute formal (Pfeffer 1981) and informal (Blau and Scott 1962; Scott 1998) authority over faculty through the hierarchical organization of power that is negotiated among the many actors within the system (administrators, deans, chairs, tenured faculty, tenure-track faculty, and adjunct faculty).

One of the unrecognized challenges to institutionalizing intersectionality is the integration of traditionally trained scholars into women's studies. In a qualitative study of women who teach within women's studies programs and as affiliate faculty, Burghardt and Colbeck (2005) devised the categories "Disciplinary Scholars" and "Interdisciplinary Scholars" to outline the divide between scholars who are more influenced by the scholarship of their traditional discipline (with moderate involvement in women's studies programs) and those who identify as interdisciplinary thinkers and social-justice advocates. This divide is present primarily among colleges and universities where women's studies is positioned as a program with few to no faculty lines, and where the priority for affiliated faculty is in securing tenure and promotion that meet the standards of their home department. Interdisciplinary-trained scholars track into traditional disciplines where they may adopt the Disciplinary Scholar identity, which does not afford an authentic, women's studies consciousness, one that emerges out of an intellectual tradition that is truly interdisciplinary. Scholars become socialized within the norms and expectations of the traditional disciplines and, at best, develop a multidisciplinary identity and body of work (McCall 2005).

The Burghardt and Colbeck model suggests that faculty who have a closer institutional connection to women's studies departments and programs (i.e., their lines are within a women's studies department or they serve as directors of women's studies programs) develop a stronger women's studies consciousness. There is an increasing demand for secure women's studies academic units as more students seek women's studies as a major area of study. Women's studies departments serve as the space to further institutionalize intersectionality through the hiring of women of color and the integration

of our perspectives into the core curriculum, which solidifies institutional credibility.

Faculty members teaching in women's studies are saddled with the dual commitment to their disciplinary home and women's studies, which creates a push-pull effect. Faculty are pushed in the direction of teaching and service within women's studies while simultaneously pulled by tenure and promotion commitments determined solely by their home departments. Moreover, the feminist intellectual identity of scholars whose primary responsibility is to their home discipline is often compromised or stifled. Burghardt and Colbeck found that faculty who were more involved within women's studies programs tend to be more interdisciplinary in their intellectual approaches and in how they identify as scholars, or what they refer to as the Interdisciplinary Scholar (Burghardt and Colbeck 2005, 304). By contrast, Disciplinary Scholars who occasionally teach in women's studies operate within the boundaries of their home discipline, and may identify with a women's studies consciousness but not as a scholar within that specific discipline (Burghardt and Colbeck 2005, 304).

Women's studies programs with predominantly Disciplinary Scholars face the challenge of engaging second-generation interdisciplinary-trained faculty who often came to women's studies out of the early intellectual consciousness of what Rosaldo calls "safe houses" created within colleges and universities (Rosaldo 1989, xi). How does the Disciplinary Scholar who has acquired status and prestige via tenure and promotion work alongside the junior scholar who is trained in women's studies and is fully integrated into the discipline (i.e., attends discipline-specific conferences, publishes in women's studies journals, and is engaged with colleagues around the world positioned in women's studies departments) and thus may have a higher level of intellectual capital within the field? It is only through "institutional authority" that divergent perspectives are normalized and where students understand the value and prestige of these disciplines (Rosaldo 1989, xi). Faculty (namely, tenured faculty) and administrators who are committed to the longevity of new departments and programs must create systems that firmly secure the place of these units within the academic institution, under their own terms.

#### COMPARING DIFFERENTLY SITUATED WOMEN'S STUDIES ACADEMIC UNITS

Examinations of intersectionality call for the feminist scholar to be self-reflexive of her or his standpoint as it relates to research inquiry. I use

my own experience within women's studies departments and programs to position my narrative, as a second-generation, African American scholar trained within women's studies at the undergraduate level (as a major) and the graduate level (as a supplement to my training in the interdisciplinary field of justice studies). My current faculty line resides in sociology within a multidisciplinary department that includes majors in sociology, anthropology, and social work. Given my training and research, I identify as an Interdisciplinary Scholar who is invested in the field of women's studies through my scholarship and pedagogy. I am also invested in the development of the women's studies program on my campus through my position on both the faculty advisory board, the program steering committee, and as affiliate teaching faculty. I want to juxtapose my current institutional condition with that of another women's studies department I worked in during my graduate years at Arizona State University.

How curricula are developed within the context of an autonomous women's studies department is different than that of a program staffed with faculty on loan. The Women Studies Program at Seattle University established an undergraduate minor in 1992. The founding faculty of the program represented varying academic disciplines. Many expressed the need for a safe house within the university, where women faculty could come together to share their research but more importantly to share "war stories" of crisis, alienation, and exclusion experienced in their departments, to validate the multiple layers of gender oppression operating within a private, Jesuit academic institution. Twenty-six of the twenty-eight Jesuit colleges and universities in the United States have women's and gender studies programs, of which three are departments.

Over the past fifteen years, the program has expanded structurally and programmatically in terms of developing a major and expanding course offerings. As mentioned earlier in this essay, programs typically do not own the courses they offer. The director utilizes formal and informal social networks of power within the university to leverage fiscal resources for the program that provide better bargaining power to guarantee that the courses needed to fulfill the minor would be offered by other departments. In recent years, the program has received external grants and increased resources from the university that fund special topics seminars in women's leadership development and bring dynamic speakers to campus.

Seventy-nine percent of the courses in the women's studies program are housed in another department, and there are thirty-two affiliated faculty members who teach in the program. The program has one-and-a-half fac-

ulty appointments in the program, one program director and one core joint-appointed faculty line. The program steering committee (which includes the director, core faculty, and three affiliated faculty) is composed primarily of women of color (U.S. domestic and international). Many of the affiliated faculty members fall into the Disciplinary Scholar category, where they are highly engaged in their respective fields of study with a strong emphasis on the study of women and gender. The program has been able to maintain longevity and develop an undergraduate major by utilizing existing scarce resources, establishing strong formal and informal networks with department chairs, and seeking outside funding support.

Joint appointments of faculty hired into traditional disciplines have also been a way for programs to garner faculty lines. Salley and others (2004) revealed in their survey that while 63 percent of women's studies departments and programs surveyed have salaried faculty positions, 42 percent have faculty on release-time salary from other departments, 39 percent are joint appointments, and the rest account for full-time program directors. As more faculty affiliated with the program are tenured, particularly the new generation of junior faculty who identify as Interdisciplinary Scholars, there is a greater likelihood that more faculty will demand structural placement within the program not only as a marker of disciplinary prestige but also to further a women's studies consciousness and identity on campus.

My experience working within women's studies departments at major research institutions is vastly different. Academic units positioned within the university as departments often create a more affirmed women's studies consciousness among their faculties because they are structurally insular, which provides opportunities for faculty to develop a women's studies scholarly identity. In addition, faculty exhibit the traits of the Interdisciplinary Scholar because the material relations of power and department organization afford a space where the discipline is affirmed as independent from other academic units and, most importantly, department chairs can leverage faculty lines that create a higher level of institutional stability.

As a graduate student at Arizona State University, I worked as a teaching assistant within the Women and Gender Studies Department, whose faculty comprised the majority of my dissertation committee. There are thirteen core faculty in the department who represent a cross-section of humanities and social science disciplines, yet most position their scholarship within not only their respective disciplines but also within the field of women's studies. The department owns the majority of its courses, which provides a level of security and autonomy in deciding when and by whom those courses are

taught. This presents a unique environment where undergraduate and graduate students are exposed to an amalgam of disciplinary perspectives under the premise of forging a distinct women's studies theoretical and methodological framework, while also promoting a women's studies consciousness. Returning to the Burghardt and Colbeck conceptualization, this is a necessary component to the socialization of burgeoning scholars within women's studies who identify as Interdisciplinary Scholars.

Faculty worked from the model that intersectionality is not "add difference then stir," a play on Charlotte Bunch's (1987) "add women and stir" approach. In order to educate students about the totality of women's experiences, marginalized women's experiences were centered as women's studies canon. For example, the department recently instituted a doctoral degree in women and gender studies where one of the required courses is entitled "Mapping the Intersections of Gender." The course presents theoretical and methodological perspectives that teach *difference* using an intersectional framework. This embodies the spirit of truly integrating differently situated bodies into the canon of the discipline and reinforces that intersectionality is a staple of women's studies education. There is a critical mass of women-of-color faculty within the department (31 percent of core faculty) who teach both required and elective courses.

#### CONCLUSION

The examples of institutionalizing intersectionality presented highlight the importance of fusing differently situated women into the structure of academic units. Methodologically, the concept of institutionalizing intersectionality calls upon scholars to examine the extent to which institutions reflect difference and are self-reflexive about how that difference (or lack thereof) impacts their deliverables. In the case of women's studies departments and programs, those deliverables include faculty recruitment, promotion, and tenure, as well as learning outcomes that expose students to the complexities and ambiguities of gendered realities that are central to the contemporary women's studies program. The second-generation dilemma of incorporating trained interdisciplinary scholars into women's studies departments and programs stacked with first-generation, traditionally trained faculty presents a new and intriguing challenge for the discipline. Creating an environment where faculty, particularly women-of-color faculty, can develop institutionally rewarded women's studies scholarly identities reflects the praxis of doing intersectionality in the twenty-first century.

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## Teaching Opera in Prison

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NAOMI ANDRÉ

When I was first asked if I was interested in teaching in a women's prison, I immediately answered, "Yes." Organized by the Criminal Justice Program through the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), I would be team teaching a course that covered an introduction to topics in women's studies. Though there had been courses in the women's prisons in the past, they had been cut by the former governor. After a period of not having classes in the women's prisons (the classes in the men's prisons had not been discontinued), AFSC was eager to rebuild the program. As a newly tenured professor in women's studies, when I heard about the program I knew I wanted to be involved.

Though at that time I was recently budgeted in women's studies, I was really, by discipline and training, a musicologist who focused on gender in opera. What did I know about topics such as "violence against women," "reproductive health," or "global feminisms"? As I imagined standing in front of the class, all I could see was myself as a fraud—someone completely unqualified to be there. What could I possibly teach them, and who would want to learn about opera?

Looking back, I am not even sure why I agreed, but somehow I just knew I wanted to do it. Being the semester right after I received tenure, I liked the idea of getting involved with a project that focused on something besides me. I think I thought that this would be altruistic. While teaching opera in prison did connect me to something larger than my regular academic world, it hardly ended up making me feel altruistic or helping me "escape myself" as I had naively anticipated. Instead, it made me think a whole lot about myself; it brought into sharp focus the complex angles of my identity as a black woman who is an opera scholar. For a teacher who thinks about how

race-class-gender is articulated among my students, this experience helped me attend to how my own presence as an African American woman brings these themes to the surface in both the university and prison classrooms and how I am perceived.

#### MY FIRST DAY IN PRISON

My first day in prison was terrifying—not because of anything that actually happened, but because of my expectations of what I had thought might have happened. As it turned out, the most frightening part of that first day was entering the prison and getting to the classroom where we would teach the students. Besides the volunteer training the week before, I had never been inside a prison—not even just to visit someone. In fact, out of my current friends and acquaintances at that time, I did not know anyone who was in prison or, to my knowledge, had ever been in prison.

The list of regulations governing what you can bring into a penitentiary, as well as the number of locked gates you need to cross, is daunting. In our post 9/11 world today, searches at airports are commonplace. Yet the body search to get in the prison is quite a few notches above those at even the most vigilant airports. In addition to being patted down (arms, legs, chest, and waist) and taking your shoes off, you need to show the bottoms of your feet (for items that might be glued on) and have the inside of your mouth checked (absolutely no food may be brought in or out of the prison; this includes gum and cough drops). All of the materials we brought in for teaching needed to be approved ahead of time and then recorded on the “Manifest” (a written list of what you bring in with you, which is also checked carefully when you exit to make sure you do not accidentally leave anything inside). The types of things we could not bring in took some getting used to: we were not allowed to bring in paper clips or spiral notebooks (because of the wire), or regular pens—our pens needed to have clear barrels (so we would not replace the ink with something illegal). While we were going through what would become the ritual of “getting in” that first day, the whole prison thing suddenly felt like a brand new experience that I might want to reconsider.

Once inside the prison, I envisioned that it would be like a scene from television crime dramas, such as *Law and Order* or *Oz*, where everyone was yelling, making noise, and throwing things. I thought someone might pull out a switchblade to threaten or—in my wildest imagination—hurt me. What I quickly learned was that the prison classroom is one of the most disciplined teaching environments I would ever encounter. Having their personal liberties closely monitored in prison made these women quiet and attentive

in the classroom; they raised their hands for all comments and questions. Unlike my university students who had over-programmed schedules and suffered from burnout once past midterms, these women were excited to have an academic liberal arts class (most of their classes were prison-sponsored cosmetology and auto shop classes, or religious Bible instruction taught by local church volunteers). But all of that was something I had yet to learn that first day.

#### CHOOSING CARMEN

When I decided to teach opera in the prison it was not because I had some elaborate plan for how opera could exemplify themes in women's studies and the humanities. I decided to teach opera because it was what I knew. As a musicologist and opera specialist, I have spent a lot of time in my own research focusing on the characterization of women in nineteenth-century opera. The course in prison was meant to be an introduction to women's studies, and I thought that I could talk about the representation of gender in the arts with opera as a case study. My initial plan was to choose a series of different depictions of women in opera and talk about how text, music, and drama intersected. I thought I would be able to get them to fall in love with the sound of the singing voice and we could discuss the machinations of the various plots and what they said about different portrayals of women.

Debates in musicology have been concerned with how the norm for women in nineteenth-century Romantic opera is to die by the final curtain: women meet their untimely deaths as they are sacrificed for their love of the tenor-hero. However, not all women in these operas die and, even when some of them do, my scholarship has explored how their voices still can embody power and authority in opera. Much of my work focuses on the Italian repertory in which a female character's agency can be seen not only as a product of defeat but also as a form of triumph that reflects newer aesthetics of heroism in the context of the *Risorgimento* (the nineteenth-century Italian unification movement), where dying for one's beliefs signaled a noble valor.<sup>1</sup> Though I was not planning to introduce the women in prison to the details of opera criticism, I was interested in how their opinions played into the themes about women and defeat after facing seemingly impossible situations.

My decision to teach Bizet's opera *Carmen* (1875) was multifaceted. It is an opera that has very popular tunes, and I wanted something that would be aurally accessible and easy to hum and remember. Musicological scholarship

also has given some attention to *Carmen*; Susan McClary, a leading feminist musicologist, has written about *Carmen* and the context of race, class, and gender in Bizet's nineteenth-century Paris.<sup>2</sup> McClary's essay would give me a context for examining the complicated social issues and get us beyond the technical musical scope of harmonic analysis of the music. Besides, and not an inconsequential issue during my first class in prison, in the opera *Carmen* herself goes to jail—or at least is supposed to go to jail (she ends up seducing her way out of it—far from the current reality). With a combination of catchy tunes, feminist criticism about this opera, and an unusual heroine who goes to jail, I was pretty confident that *Carmen* would be a bold subject that could generate a provocative discussion.

Georges Bizet's *Carmen*, based on Prosper Mérimée's novella of the same name from the mid-1840s, presents a woman who is twice an *outsider* to the original audiences that attended the first performances. She is outside the nationality of the French operagoers, and she is part of a lower social class strata. Portrayed by a French man to the French public, the opera is based in Seville, Spain, and takes advantage of the dual view of Spain as belonging to Western Europe while also having the exoticized southern region function as an entrance into Africa. As a gypsy, *Carmen* is a person who falls outside of respectable French and Spanish culture. Of all the female characters in mainstream opera, *Carmen* is one who stands out for her bold actions and nery attitude. She has the gall to fall in and out of love with whomever she pleases. She does not follow the code of her time as a typical Romantic heroine who only loves the hero, suffers, and then dies for him at the end. Despite my lack of experience teaching in a prison, even I knew that such a clichéd Romantic plot line would feel artificial to women who, rightly or wrongly, had been found guilty and were living with the negative social consequences. I needed an opera with a story that highlights a reality with a wide range of human experiences.

The women in prison had different experiences from those of the people I usually teach in university settings. In fact, many of the incarcerated women had lived lives that were closer to the character of *Carmen* than anyone I had known. A large number of the women I taught in prison were born into families that were economically and socially marginalized, and upward mobility was nearly impossible. Most had been raised in situations where their home environment was not safe; physical and sexual abuses were shared experiences for many of them. Although they were not Bizet's gypsies, like *Carmen*, they lived outside the success of attaining the nineteenth (and pres-

ent) century's middle-class dream of acceptability into societal norms with financial stability and security.

Teaching in a women's prison expanded my vision of how the "universal" themes of opera (love, jealousy, betrayal, integrity, etc.) can relate differently to varied, nontraditional audiences. As opposed to my university students and opera audiences to whom I give preconcert talks, I notice different reactions from the incarcerated women to the operas we view in the prison classroom. My university students, even those new to opera, quickly learn how to accept the conventions of opera and feel the emotion in the musical and textual narratives. Though they recognize their distance from nineteenth-century expectations of womanhood, they understand the limitations put on Carmen and how her character would have been both simultaneously titillating for the French bourgeoisie audience as well as dangerous and contrary to the type of woman a respectable man would bring home to meet the family as a potential spouse. My college students find Carmen to be a model of early feminist energy combined with a complicated mix of sexual freedom. Though they all support her desire to follow her own passions, some of them admire her unbridled libido while a good number of them seem uncomfortable with how quickly and thoroughly she is able to reject her former lover and move on to someone new.

The women in prison also are able to quickly accept operatic conventions. Like many of the university students, this is their first exposure to opera; similarly, once I explain some of the basic patterns, they open up to the new experience. But there is a big difference between my college and prison students. Most of the prison women are not accustomed to the intellectual distance typically engaged in the classroom. The discourse of Carmen's embodiment of a hypersexualized, feminized, and exoticized "Other" that takes over my university classrooms is replaced by a different sensibility and relationship to the opera. Instead of putting Carmen in her place in the nineteenth century, they put themselves in the opera and identify with Carmen. This leap is instantaneous; each time I have taught *Carmen* in prison, the women relate their own experiences to Carmen's behavior from her very first entrance in act 1. As Carmen sings her famous "Habanera," her manifesto on love—"If you do not love me, I love you; if I love you, watch out!"—the women laugh and start talking about people they have known who have acted the same way.<sup>3</sup> Each time, the mood in the room immediately lifts, and it is as if the polite attention they had given the opera thus far moves to an engagement with what is happening. Here is a character who knows how life works; Carmen presents a voice that can be embraced and trusted.

A basic premise of intersectionality is that looking at gender in isolation is not the best way to understand social phenomena. What provides a more helpful picture is to look at how gender interacts—intersects—with other people, situations, and social positions. The most common points of intersection that scholars have focused on are race and class; however, most theorists using intersectional paradigms would agree that race and class are not the only important factors and are frequently complemented by sexuality, geography, nationality, (dis)ability, and others.<sup>4</sup> In fact, one of the most attractive aspects of intersectionality is the ability to expand the parameters for research and theory. Similar to the move in anthropology pioneered by Clifford Geertz and others to explore “thick” description with many layers of meaning steeped in the context in which it happens, intersectional analysis is interested in how gender presents meaning in the context of other constructed identities.<sup>5</sup>

My home academic discipline of historical musicology is a field that is not well integrated in terms of race and ethnicity—both regarding ways in which these themes inform the theoretical approaches to the music scholarship and in the racial and ethnic identity of the people working in the academy. Throughout my graduate training, I was accustomed to being the only person of color, besides the janitors, who came into the department. I was one of the only African Americans to ever get a PhD from my graduate program (there was one black man in the previous decade), and I was the first black woman, as far as any one can remember. At musicology conferences, I am sometimes mistaken for the hired help, despite my suit and official name tag. I also have grown familiar with the surprise on people’s faces when I say that my field of specialty is nineteenth-century Italian opera.

In my first weeks of graduate school, I was denigrated when I did not know who Shirley Caesar, a renowned gospel singer, was; “But you’re black!” a professor immediately exclaimed in shock. He did not ask me if I knew who Marian Anderson, Leontyne Price, Barbara Hendricks, or Shirley Verrett were. I wanted to tell him that I had heard Harolyn Blackwell, Kathleen Battle, Leona Mitchell, Martina Arroyo, and Grace Bumbry in person at the Metropolitan Opera during my undergraduate days in New York City during the late 1980s.<sup>6</sup> Instead, I was quickly punished as being deficient for knowing the “wrong” things (though nobody ever asked me if I knew about the aforementioned black opera divas). My crime was not to know the appropriate things for who they thought I was.

In the university setting, I am accustomed to encountering dazed expressions at the beginning of semesters when I enter a classroom and begin to teach art forms strongly situated in the European musical canon. As a black woman who stands in front of a university class or at a conference presentation, my qualifications are the unspoken question at stake. How have I come to acquire this knowledge? Why did I choose to work on opera?

Given this uncomfortable, yet familiar, scenario when I stand in front of a class, I was pleasantly surprised when I first realized that my race and gender seemed to enhance my credibility to the black and nonblack women in prison. I think they found it easier to see a little of themselves in me as a black woman and be willing to trust me as I led them into this new art form. It was no longer an elitist art form in a foreign language only for white people; it became something they were also allowed to enjoy. Part of the teaching process is for students to be able to mirror the teacher's behavior as they get used to the new vocabulary and norms of the given topic. Because race and class are so frequently intertwined, my black and nonblack prison students who are intimidated by the highbrow reputation of opera are able to see me as an ally in their understanding of this new genre.

As the combination of my gender-race-class complicates my acceptance in university settings, this same identity facilitates my efficacy in teaching opera in a women's prison. Though these intersections (of race, class, and gender) are present in both populations, they are also configured in multiple ways that involve who I am and whom I am teaching. While it is difficult and risky to make such generalizations about these students, how they process the material is, at least, partially shaped by how each group views themselves and me in both spaces. The issues are not that my university students are overly uptight or that the women in the prison classroom are academically naive, but that both settings and groups of students bring vital approaches to the discussion. I now encourage my university students to jump into the plot and operatic characters a little less guardedly, and I ask the women in prison to help me reframe their experiences using the feminist theory we are analyzing.

My experiences teaching these different populations highlight the benefits of implementing a nimble approach to intersectionality; hence, my position as a musicologist is enhanced when a wider lens is used. Rather than reinforce race and class differences among the different populations of students I teach, I have begun to recognize how my presence in both the prison and university classrooms is shaped by who I am teaching and simultaneously affects my students' understanding of opera. Given my same

knowledge and background, in one classroom, my right to be there can be challenged; yet in another classroom, who I am helps the students feel that they are entitled to be there, too.

#### POSTLUDE

One of the women in my teaching team for the introduction to women's studies class developed another course, "Art as Narrative," for the women's prison and invited me to give a guest lecture on music. I accepted and was excited to link music with the visual arts—a connection she wanted to pursue. When she introduced me to her class, one of the women asked me, "Are you the Opera Lady?" Taken a bit aback, I admitted to being the person who had taught opera in that prison before. A few other women smiled, and another woman said, "Oh good, we have heard about you and we really want to learn about opera."

One of the best comments I have received from the women students is that during the time when they are listening to and learning about opera they feel like they are not in prison. I tell them that I feel that way, too.

#### NOTES

1. André, *Voicing Gender*.
2. McClary, "Images of Race."
3. The refrain to Carmen's entrance aria, translated from the French: "Si tu ne m'aime pas, je t'aime; si je t'aime, prends garde à toi!"
4. The interdisciplinary areas that use intersectional paradigms are growing. A few articles that extend the intersectional approach beyond gender-race-class are Sengupta, "I/Me/Mine-Intersectional Identities"; Wallace, "Autonomous 'I'"; and Gerschick, "Toward a Theory of Disability and Gender."
5. Geertz, "Thick Description."
6. Marian Anderson, Leontyne Price, Barbara Hendricks, Shirley Verrett, and Grace Bumbry are in the first generation of black opera singers who sang in the major houses of the world; Marian Anderson was the first black person to sing in an opera at the Metropolitan Opera in New York (as Ulrica in Verdi's *Un Ballo in Maschera* in 1955). Harolyn Blackwell, Kathleen Battle, Leona Mitchell, and Martina Arroyo are all black female singers who continued the presence of black opera singers performing in the most prestigious opera houses.

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## Intersections of Scholar-Activism in Feminist Fieldwork

*Reflections on Nepal and South Africa*

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JENNIFER FISH & JENNIFER ROTHCHILD

As feminist women scholars conducting research on women in developing countries, we have found our work continually shaped by a veritable “push-pull” that conflated experiences of vulnerability and privilege while working among women in both Nepal and South Africa. Negotiating the boundaries between power and disadvantage on a daily basis, we felt, at times, very connected to participants within our research communities, and, at other times, substantially distanced from the daily challenges central to the lives of the women we studied. These realities deepened our understanding of intersectionality, particularly as we asserted specific scholar-activist measures to conduct research and “give back” to the communities from which we drew knowledge.<sup>1</sup> Conducting research within geographic spaces often defined by conflict and sharp inequalities, we approached our projects with the intent to lessen power differentials by working *with* local populations and responding to locally defined needs.<sup>2</sup>

As we implemented projects that attempted to redress social power differentials, we drew from our knowledge of intersectionality to frame our negotiation of the often contradictory power dynamics central to each phase of feminist field research. In this essay, we discuss our experiences as part of an overall effort to encourage reflections of and dialogue about the central nature of intersectionality in conducting feminist fieldwork.<sup>3</sup> The following questions guide our analysis: *How do the complexities of intersecting identities affect the data? How do our reflections on those struggles connect to applied feminist methodologies?* We situate specific examples from our fieldwork in rural

Nepal and urban South Africa within the broader ideological discussion of intersectionality. Our goal is to bridge the theories of intersectionality with their applied practice in fieldwork settings in order to advance this critical body of literature through new junctures of analysis.

We focus our inquiry on gender inequalities in these particular contexts by using intersectionality as both a theoretical framework and a reflective tool to analyze and work within social power divisions. Our ongoing projects remain committed to the *practice* of feminism, not only for the outcome of our research, but also throughout the multilayered processes of working at the applied intersections of social hierarchies. In our respective guiding ideologies, “feminism as praxis” values scholarship that redresses social power inequalities and contributes to the actualization of gender equality. Supporting women—as well as the acquisition of knowledge that is centered on women’s experiences—remains a formative component of our work, as we draw from the core underpinnings of feminist research methodology (Collins 1991; DeVault 1999; Naples 2003; Reinharz 1992; Sprague 2005; Wolf 1996). Because we interacted so closely with our research populations, we experienced a deeper connection to the ways in which intersections define social life. We found that the same power differentials we attempted to redress in our respective projects connected to our own daily interactions with the women in the communities we studied. To explore these interlocking micro-macro intersectional relationships, we first offer a brief overview of our respective work in Nepal and South Africa.

Rothchild’s research examined the complexities of gender inequality within schools in a rural village of Nepal. Much of the literature argues that equal numbers of girls and boys in schools will remedy many social and economic problems. Through interviews, participant observation, and other ethnographic approaches, Rothchild’s (2006) research and current projects address both the theory and practice of reproducing gender inequalities by focusing on the social constructions of gender within the gendered contexts of the home and school.<sup>4</sup>

Fish’s research focused upon women’s labor in the context of South Africa’s transition to democracy. The institution of paid domestic work in the postapartheid setting illustrates the dialectic nature of deeply embedded race-, gender-, and class-based divisions within the context of transformative social change—thereby encapsulating the tensions of democratization in South Africa. Fish, like Rothchild, initially conducted nine months of qualitative, in-depth narrative research among participants from a wide variety of social locations, including domestic workers, employers of domestic work-

ers, parliamentary decision makers, union activists, and human-rights organizers throughout urban Cape Town. She has continued longitudinal work in this setting, focusing on the connections between gender and postconflict nation building.<sup>5</sup>

Our research projects do not stand in isolation from the identities we bring to these projects, which remain central to our data analysis and ongoing interactions with the communities of women in both Nepal and South Africa. As white American women with social class and educational privilege, we brought particular intentions to our projects, and the women within our field research populations held distinct expectations of us. For example, having been socialized in a context where domestic labor was considered a luxury, Fish carried a notion that domestic work remained in sharp contradiction to the democratic, human-rights values of the “New South Africa.” Yet white women in South Africa, positioned as employers of domestic workers, held much different assumptions about the nature of women’s paid labor in the household. As a result, Fish’s collection and later analysis of interview data among employers often presented distinct contradictions, because many employers presumed that Fish, as a white woman, shared the same social position as they have. This resulted in disclosures that assumed a mutual attitude toward the “natural” social-stratification processes embedded in the institution of paid domestic labor, which underscore the layers of complexity that emerge as intersectionality plays out in social research methods.

Rothchild’s work in Nepal similarly reflected how participants’ expectations shape the data as a result of a researcher’s social location. Rothchild lived in a rural village with her husband who “troubled gender” (Butler 1990) by performing household labor. This gave the women in Rothchild’s study models of more egalitarian patterns of family work and also shaped the interview data collected. Although Rothchild experienced elevated status through her marital identity, the daily performance of gender enacted by her partner disrupted normative assumptions and thereby influenced both the relationship Rothchild shared with members of the local community as well as with the data.<sup>6</sup> These processes illustrate the dialectic nature of researchers’ identity in relationship to the collection of data within the communities in which we work. Moreover, we enrich our understanding of social identity when we integrate intersectionality to examine how these nuanced layers of social location simultaneously impact one another and become central to every aspect of social research.

Although many feminist scholars carefully situate their own social identi-

ties within their work, these disclosures rarely connect the theoretical notion of intersectionality with the data analysis. Rather, the movement to acknowledge identity and power differentials in isolation from an examination of how intersections impact the ultimate production of knowledge precludes researchers from pursuing richer complexities within the research process, particularly when research is carried out by women attempting to understand the oppression of other women. To explore how the vantage point of intersectionality is central to all phases of feminist research projects, we move to an examination of two particular areas of our work: (1) negotiating power dynamics across intersections of social location and (2) bridging intersections of scholar-activism.

#### NEGOTIATING POWER DYNAMICS ACROSS INTERSECTIONS

Intersections of social power operate as a web of countless connections, embodying a dialectic of privilege and vulnerability—a “push-pull”—depending on location and research circumstances. For us, this dialectic often emerged from the intentional shifting of identities within the field—a strategic manipulation of those aspects of ourselves that we could alter as a result of our privilege. As our reflections on our fieldwork experiences illuminate, intersectionality hinges upon social power asymmetries at two levels—that which is visible identity (such as gender and race) and that which we can shift and blur (such as class status).

Social power differentials necessitate the constant negotiation of day-to-day interactions. In our respective settings, we continually worked at the blurred boundary of those aspects of ourselves that we could shift in different social contexts. For example, accessing graduate education afforded us a luxury unavailable to the majority of our research participants. At the same time, we were perceived as “young” because most people we encountered equated “student” with youth. Sometimes we wanted to be perceived as students—it afforded us the liberty to ask naïve questions. At other times, we aspired to overcome the vulnerability of our younger age status and create perceptions that we were more established professionals, particularly in working with formal governmental processes to negotiate research within our settings. In these instances, working at the mutual boundaries of shifting class and educational identities, we were more often “conducting research for a doctoral thesis.”

As we led independent field projects outside of our own national contexts, we experienced our “outside” Western identity as one that remained

rather fixed and continually visible to the research populations in both South Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Working from a framework of intersectionality, we needed to acknowledge that our Western perspectives integrally shaped the research process.<sup>7</sup> While we wanted to respect local customs regarding dress, food, and hygiene, we had the privilege of deciding how we dressed, what we ate, how clean we wanted to be, and where we would sleep at night. In essence, we had control over our space and our physical bodies in ways that immediately positioned us as “Western” and, thereby, as separate from the communities we studied. Furthermore, these aspects of separateness worked together simultaneously to build a composite of our identities for local populations—visitors who could afford private bedrooms, rented cars, and imported goods (such as cotton swabs and specialty foods) and who could connect with the outside world through the use of personal computers. In the eyes of local populations, each of these aspects of our daily lives was integrally connected to our race, nation, class, and gender. These perceptions shaped the nature of the data collected because the communities in which we lived had already situated a picture of our identity based upon these mutually interlocking aspects of self, evident throughout daily life.

These multiple layers of intersectionality disrupt any notion of universally shared experiences as women. While we worked continually to connect with the women in our study on the basis of a shared sense of gender, asymmetrical power relations in other spheres—such as class, race, and nationality—presented distinct differentials in our experiences with the women in our studies. Diane Wolf observes that feminist researchers are particularly challenged when the focus is on women in developing countries, which “entails ‘studying down,’ that is, studying women who are poor, powerless, and marginalized” (1996, ix). Like Wolf, our fieldwork forced us to recognize that we had also created academic studies that focused on poor, marginalized, and highly vulnerable women, which would ultimately advance our careers.

Drawing from the framework of intersectionality also allowed us to look more closely at the multiple layers of contradictions that became apparent as we situated our research within broader levels of social relations. Most strikingly, our projects sought to redress social power imbalances, focusing particularly on women’s and girls’ empowerment. While holding these ideals as the overarching goals of our projects, on a daily basis we witnessed gender bias at both structural and micro levels. Yet, we refrained from intervening or even commenting on these circumstances as we questioned the extent to which our own assumptions connected to gender norms framed by our

Western, racially defined, class-based socialization. Instead, we asked ourselves: *How do we address inequalities as activists while still observing distinct social environments through sound methodological processes? And, to what extent can we isolate gender inequalities without connecting our observations to other defining hierarchies such as race and class?* As we considered addressing these inequalities within our research settings, we tried to remain aware of the reality that our willingness to speak out on issues of gender oppression remained centrally connected to our social privilege by class, race, and nationality.

Our research repeatedly taught us that working from the framework of intersectionality and feminist-activist field research required that we disengage from our own expectations and assumptions in order to understand the complexities of the multiple and interlocking layers of social power within our respective settings. Yet, we often wondered how we could make feminist change in our local contexts without compromising the ethics of our research. This became strikingly apparent in Rothchild's home-stay setting, where the family gave the youngest child, their eleven-year-old niece, the lion's share of work every day. They also occasionally kept her home from school to catch up on domestic work, while her cousins, two boys, attended school without fail. The boys were enrolled in a private school; their girl cousin attended a not-so-well-supported public school.

Meanwhile, Rothchild's observations of this process took place within a broader study of the social forces gendering girls and boys at home and in schools. Certainly, the intersection of gender and class shaped family decisions regarding children's participation in school. Yet, Rothchild believed speaking directly to the overt discrimination within the intersections of social power she observed would have compromised the quality of her research and likely shifted the data collected. As this example represents, our research continually reminded us that we needed to observe, and sometimes take part in, spaces that embodied sharply asymmetrical intersections of social power in order to write analytically about them. In this sense, our academic voices emerged from participation in systems of social inequality, thereby reinforcing broader power differentials on the basis of gender, race, class, and geographic location.

Feminists have rarely reported the ways in which they navigate these necessary and sometimes problematic relationships, in which those responsible for perpetuating systems of inequality and injustice must be appeased in order to conduct research (Wolf 1996). In some instances, this requires feminist scholars to "play the game" of gendered assumptions and roles in order

to secure access—a contradiction based on intersections of social power. Rothchild first encountered this complexity in Nepal when seeking approval and clearance for her project:

*I spent several weeks waiting for our research visas to be approved. As I passed entire days sitting and waiting in government offices, I came to resent the high caste men in the immigration office who refused to acknowledge my pleas for expediting the process. My Western expectations inhibited my capacity for patience, and I became increasingly frustrated and angry. Eventually, the men in the immigration office agreed to speak to my husband and processed the visas, but only after a high-ranking Nepali friend (a man) in another government office spoke with the immigration division. Similarly, when seeking approval of my project from the government at the local level, the male officials sent my husband a statement of approval, as they assumed the proposed research project was his. The local officials were surprised when they learned that I, a woman, actually conducted the research, rather than my husband, who had been seen at our home washing the laundry.*

—J. ROTHCHILD, *fieldnotes*, 1 November 1999

For Rothchild, this complex experience of “getting in” to the field, at the juncture of gender, nation, race, and class, provided a valuable introduction to the rigid inequalities and interlocking systems of social power she was about to study.

Throughout our work, we also relied upon our ability to transcend social status boundaries in order to access networks that would assure the success of our projects. For example, Rothchild highlighted her educational credentials as part of her efforts to establish rapport with governmental and Nepali university officials as well as rural community leaders; conversely, in the villages, she often withheld details about her educational background from participants in rural communities, most of whom had not finished high school. Similarly, Fish’s project included “getting in” with employers who were most often affluent and white, as well as domestic-worker union members. The fact that Fish was white, American, and economically privileged enough to afford to dine at the Cape Town’s elite Waterfront shopping center fostered a wider acceptance through her ability to transcend social spaces. Being white also created substantial divides, particularly in township community locations where fully “fitting in” was not possible.<sup>8</sup> As researchers, we strategically worked within the intersections of social power to ensure access and

the eventual production of high quality projects. At times, doing so made us question the extent of our activism in the field.

Our intersecting identities afforded us power in the spheres of race, class, and geographic identity, yet we simultaneously depended on the local populations to enhance the quality of our projects and mediate the ease of entering and working within each community. Throughout our research, we became acutely aware of how the multiple vectors of social power are often contradictory and skewed when the process of data collection becomes the central venue for forming relationships among women across lines of class, race, and nationality. Working within these margins necessitated that we continually evaluate our positions as both scholars and activists.

#### BRIDGING INTERSECTIONS OF SCHOLAR-ACTIVISM

*When I met the union leaders, I felt they were skeptical of me. I wondered if it was my age, my skin color, my language, my dress, or my nationality—maybe a combination of all. How would they perceive me, declaring I wanted to be part of “their” struggle? By the end of the meeting they asked, “What can you do for us?” I then learned of all the “professors” before me who had asked for their life stories without ever returning “the book” to them.*

—J. FISH, *fieldnotes*, 8 February 2001

Our research experiences in both Nepal and South Africa reflect the inevitable ways in which intersections of social power present severe challenges to feminist aspirations of working in full solidarity with women in less advantaged social locations. As the above fieldnotes excerpt represents, researchers’ long-term use of acquired data remains within communities and the collective memory of organizations. Transcending divides through “giving back” can be a powerful tool to confront divisions and challenge the asymmetries of power central to working across social location differentials. Our own experiences illustrate that recognizing such layers of intersecting identities holds the potential to merge powerful relations across lines of class, race, and geographic location, while providing a central analytic vantage point at each phase of the production of research.

In our own cases, working within “the hyphen” of scholar-activism has emerged through our professional and personal commitments to return to the field with both knowledge and resources. We continue to maintain deep relationships with people in our respective field sites. In our experience, returning with the interview manuscripts and eventual book publications proved to be one of the most effective measures to work in solidarity with local populations. While acknowledging the privilege we hold in our ability

to situate our professional selves in academe, our research emerges, to the best of our ability, from the input of our participants in the field. In these ways, we continually reframe our longitudinal research in efforts to respond to what local populations identify as most meaningful. Certainly, these efforts do not alleviate or artificially gloss over power. Yet, our own longstanding relationships have created opportunities to realize a sense of solidarity, while drawing from the knowledge we create to give back in meaningful ways. In particular, our commitment to activist projects has fostered avenues to creating transnational solidarity in ways that support mutually held values of gender equality. We close this essay with the materialized projects that guide our work and provide a vision for feminist-activist research. It is our hope that these emerging projects can redress the asymmetrical divides among women by working with knowledge of difference guided by the ideological and applied framework of intersectionality.

Since the inception of her research, Rothchild and others have worked to open Sam's House, a children's home that serves displaced, orphaned, and abandoned children in Nepal. The home's admissions policy of a 3:2 girl-to-boy ratio reflects Sam's House's commitment to redressing gender inequalities. Developing and supporting a nongovernmental organization serves as a catalyst to renew commitments to activism, as Rothchild works closely with others addressing the needs of children in Nepal. Further, Sam's House serves as a site for longer-term research. In her ongoing study of the social constructions of gender and family in Nepali orphanages, Rothchild argues that the exigency of meager resources within most Nepali orphanages necessitates a more egalitarian environment in terms of gender roles within these orphanages. Thus, these children's homes become sites of competing family structures where we can learn more about the influence and "social constructedness" of family and gender roles. This research informs her social activism with Sam's House, and vice versa, thereby modeling the importance of grounding analysis in the local spaces of social relations.

In South Africa, Fish continues to work with the national union of domestic workers as an advocate and writer, and she returns to South Africa every summer. This ongoing contact—coupled with active long-distance communication throughout the academic year—facilitates a long-term scholar-activist partnership that promotes the establishment of solidarity between women's organizations and academic researchers. In addition, Fish leads academic service-learning study-abroad courses in South Africa, where the work of the domestic workers' union is a central thematic experience. Broadening the contact between union leaders and American graduate and

undergraduate students who offer their time to support the union's development serves to solidify the scholar-activist partnership, particularly in the context of South Africa's ongoing transition to democracy.

These longstanding relationships have been our most effective measures in working within the intersections of social power, while continuing to "give back" in the spirit of feminist-activist scholarship. We continue to reflect on how the complexities of intersecting identities affect our data and how we might put feminist ideology into practice. Our ongoing hope is that by recognizing and working within the divisions of power to the best of our abilities as researchers in cross-national field settings, we may contribute to the visionary work of utilizing intersectionality to better understand and eventually break down power asymmetries that continue to shape the global community.

#### NOTES

1. We thank Bette Dickerson and Gay Young for their formative contribution to our understanding of scholar-activism and its central role in our ongoing work as public sociologists.

2. In our respective projects, we attempted to "give back," so that we might lessen the extent to which social power defined our relationships with the women in our studies. However, this notion of giving back remained entrenched in power differentials throughout our fieldwork as our ability to serve remained centrally connected to how we as researchers made independent decisions about our contribution to the field, even from an activist standpoint.

3. Intersections of social power shape both everyday relations and social structures by mutually reinforcing interlocking vectors of privilege and marginalization. We suggest that intersections of social power are evident in the most micro layers of daily social life as well as the broadest layers of global restructuring. Our use of the term intersectionality stems from this dialectic process, which both defines individual identity in connection to one's particular social location and structures a global system of hierarchy. As we see in our research, these constructed social inequalities interact simultaneously along multiple lines to reproduce one another and shape the nature of social interactions. In this essay, we build from the level of microsocial interaction to explore how the notion of intersectionality is central to the relationship between social researchers and research communities engaged in feminist projects.

4. Rothchild's scholar-activist work includes a book entitled *Gender Trouble Makers* (2006), as well as the establishment of Sam's House, a home for orphaned and abandoned children in Pokhara, Nepal. Sam's House serves as a site for social activism by providing a home and educational opportunities to marginalized children in Nepal as well as a venue for scholarly inquiry regarding gender constructions in families.

5. Fish's research on domestic labor and nation building is compiled in her book, *Domestic Democracy* (2006). In addition, her scholar-activism takes the form of ongoing

work with the national South African Domestic and Allied Workers' Union, along with leading annual study-abroad programs that immerse undergraduate and graduate students in the South African context.

6. Both of us (Rothchild and Fish) lived with our male partners while in the field, and this elevated our status by reinforcing the value of heterosexism. Being married moved us into a social category perceived as higher in status in both of our research settings.

7. Even though we had spent substantial time in Nepal and South Africa prior to our field research projects, our basic cultural outlook was (and still is) Western.

8. The geographic residue of South Africa's racial apartheid is most evident in the residential divisions that define social identity through the political meaning of particular locations. Townships were the designated residences for the black majority population authorized to live outside of urban cities throughout apartheid. To date, townships are overcrowded and severely lacking in resources. Because townships remain composed of black South African residents, nonresidents traveling to and working within townships become immediately recognizable as "outsiders." Fish's interviews with domestic workers took place in township locations, which encapsulated these complexities of intersections of difference within the field research process.

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## Milk and Blood

*Rivaling and Familial Ties in*

*Eccentric Neighborhoods*

*by Puerto Rican Writer Rosario Ferré*

.....

IVETTE GUZMÁN-ZAVALA

A newborn girl from a light-skinned privileged family in Puerto Rico develops rheumatic fever, a loud heart murmur, and will not suckle. Her mother, Valeria, decides not to nurse the baby, Clarissa, so the infant's life is in grave danger. Alvaro, her father, sets his eyes on a poor pregnant woman, Miña, washing clothes in the river; he notices her dark brown skin, big, round belly, and swollen breasts; he concludes that her milk will be perfect for his baby. Miña, at the command of her husband, Urbano, leaves her family to take care of another's family and to work as a *nodriza* (wet nurse), mainly for economic reasons. Later, when the "white" baby and brown woman are abruptly separated, the girl develops a trauma that will mark her and her descendants for the rest of her life.

This description from Rosario Ferré's fictional novel *Eccentric Neighborhoods* contains interesting allusions to race, class, and gender. The conclusions we get by analyzing them provide clues for the better understanding of cultural, political, and social matters that lay outside of the literary text. In this essay, I examine the ambiguity and contradictions brought along, in this case, by Clarissa's contact with the wet nurse. I also explore how in the so-called private familial space, unspoken tensions between "blood" and "milk" relationships play a part in the nation-formation process. Since Miña is not the protagonist of this narrative, a reading focusing on her requires us to—as

Andersen and Collins (2007) suggest—“move your angle of sight to include those who have been overlooked” (3).

Rosario Ferré’s *Eccentric Neighborhoods* was published in both Spanish and English in 1998.<sup>1</sup> It narrates the stories of the Rivas de Santillana and Ver-net families, whose stories are intertwined with historical events in Puerto Rico during the twentieth century. As part of this account, there are various relationships between women that develop through the wet-nursing transaction. One is between Clarissa, her wet nurse, Miña, and her biological mother, Valeria. It is also important to consider that the narrator is Elvira, who is Clarissa’s daughter and who also documents her family’s experiences. The presence of a wet nurse not only foregrounds the complexities of intersectionality inside the familial circle but also helps to question and broaden traditional definitions of Caribbean motherhood.<sup>2</sup>

Growing up in Caguas, Puerto Rico, I witnessed a type of nonbiological motherhood that sustained our family through love and work. Isa and Rosa were two sisters who—beside my grandmother—helped my mother with babysitting and household chores. This enabled my parents to work, sometimes two jobs at a time, and my mother to pursue graduate studies. Thanks to the system they built, four children and a dog were regularly fed and taken care of. Isa had a fifth-grade education and Rosa (who this year turns one hundred!) went only to kindergarten, because economic difficulties forced them out of school and into the workforce. I used to wonder why we visited and brought them gifts on Mother’s Day, when clearly, they were “childless.” Nevertheless, they were “othermothers” (Collins 1990, 119) who assisted with child-care responsibilities.

The experience of observing this nonbiological motherhood inspired me to read Ferré’s *Eccentric Neighborhoods*, paying close attention to Miña, the wet nurse who cares for the children and does laundry, yet remains in a “questionable” position within the family circle. As a single mother and academic who researches motherhood, I have learned that throughout documented history, most wet nurses were single mothers looking for a way to survive. In *Eccentric Neighborhoods*, this *nodriza* is not a single mother, yet her social class and race also position her in a vulnerable place.

In *Of Woman Born*, Adrienne Rich (1986) describes her black wet nurse, pointing out that such a strong connection between women is prohibited under patriarchy, especially if it transcends race and class. Nevertheless, these *other* mothers often appear in literary texts of African American and Caribbean writers. For example, Caroline Rody (2001) describes “the plot of cross-cultural connection” in which “fictional daughters of the Caribbean

find inspiration, knowledge, and love in transhistorical and transcultural meetings with other women” (125).<sup>3</sup>

Wet nursing is not a common theme in contemporary Puerto Rican literature, so it is remarkable that it appears in a novel situated in the twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Historically, poor women of different races performed this work in the Americas. Maybe that is why in her first appearance in Ferré’s novel *Miña* is described solely on the basis of race and class: “*Miña era mitad india taína y mitad negra jefefe, y su familia era muy pobre*” (*Miña* was part Taíno Indian and part African, and she came from a very poor family) (1998a, 116; 1998b, 90). The Taínos were the natives of Puerto Rico at the time of Spanish colonization in the fifteenth century, a population that quickly started to decrease because of illnesses and the brutal treatment they faced. They were later joined with African slaves to provide labor as subordinated groups in sugar plantations and domestic work. From a historical perspective, since *Miña* represents a combination of both Taínos and Africans, she will not be a central part of the protagonist’s family configuration but will provide a significant contribution to them. The complete national history is in the background of these fictional familial interactions.

It is crucial to consider racial relations as experienced, represented, and analyzed on the island because they can differ from the way these issues are handled in the United States. In *Puerto Rican Nation on the Move* (2002), Jorge Duany explains that there is a wide variety of skin colors and phenotypes on the island and “at least nineteen different racial categories are commonly used in Puerto Rico” (237). As the title of one of his chapters suggests, *Miña* is “neither white nor black” (236) and can probably be best described as “*trigueña*” or “*morenita*” (236), categories that escape the rigid racial conceptions of the U.S. mainland, which generally divide people between black, white, or “other.” Even though there is considerable social acceptance of mixed races in Puerto Rico, Valeria, Clarissa’s biological mother, is fearful of how nursing her baby would alter her body and make it similar to *Miña*’s.

According to Elvira, the narrator, it was a popular belief among white elite women that nursing their offspring would change their bodies, making their nipples swollen and dark, supposedly like mulatto women. This became their excuse to not breastfeed.<sup>5</sup> So women like Valeria wanted (*Miña*’s) healthy milk for their children yet distanced themselves from the lactation experience precisely because they did not want to become like dark-skinned women. In other words, the *nodriza* is depended upon but at the same time kept at an ambiguous distance. She is given restrictions and her behavior is

scrutinized to avoid being labeled “problematic.” Julio Ramos has identified this “fear of racial contact” on the background of discourses based on purity and contagion, because “miscegenation could destroy the whiteness associated with power” (Ramos 1994, 7).<sup>6</sup> If Valeria’s body comes to resemble that of a brown woman, then she could lose her privileges associated with race and ethnicity. Yet bodily contact with the *other* woman does occur through breastfeeding. When Miña’s Taíno and African body comes in contact with the fair-skinned baby, the resulting bond resembles and at the same time challenges the way national racial identity has been depicted and understood in Puerto Rico.

Such an image—a brown-skinned woman nursing a “white” baby—takes on added significance in the context of the visual representation of race in Puerto Rico because one key symbol in the Puerto Rican discourse has excluded women. Ricardo Alegría, a prominent Puerto Rican anthropologist and founder of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture in 1955, has identified three racial roots, which are depicted in the Instituto de Cultura’s emblem (see image) with three figures of men. One of my teachers in school used this image to explain our racial heritage, and I remember seeing in my Puerto Rican classmates vivid examples of the three racial roots that shaped our population. Jorge Duany describes it as follows: “The seal represents a well-dressed Spaniard in the center with a grammar book in his hand and three Catholic crosses in the background; to his right stands a seminude



Official seal of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture,  
created by Lorenzo Homar, 1961. Courtesy of the  
Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña.

Taíno with a *cemí* and a corn plant; to his left, a topless African holds a machete and a drum, with a *vejigante* mask lying on his feet and a sugarcane plant on one side” (Duany 2002, 277).

In contrast to these three men who stand independently—although to-

gether at the same time—in *Eccentric Neighborhoods* these three racial roots are represented in women’s bodies through the act of wet nursing. In this feminine model they have bodily contact: the white baby needs the other races for nourishment; therefore, there are two bodies instead of three. The milk “bonds” them together, instead of the blood model of the Spanish tradition. It is also significant that the Taíno and African otherness/alterities (represented by Miña) serve the *lighter* race. Again, history informs this fictional encounter.

Miña is expected to nurse Clarissa, her four sisters, and her brother so they would be “*hermanos de leche*” (milk siblings), something that, according to their father, Alvaro, would strengthen the blood tie that they already had. Even though this connection is described as positive, it was also commonly believed that children could inherit diseases, bad habits, and even character flaws through breast milk; therefore, ambiguity and trepidation are also present. When the relationship between Miña and Clarissa seems to be intensifying, Miña is identified as a threat and immediately is told to stop breastfeeding. After that, her work options, family background, and position within the protagonist’s family singularly reflect her social class.

Language, whether spoken or written, is another sign that indicates class differences in this story. When Miña becomes aware that most of the women in Clarissa’s family have an education, she asks to be taught to read and write. At a time when women could not vote in local elections, she voices her opposition against this other type of marginalization.<sup>7</sup> Clarissa teaches Miña to read and write, and on Clarissa’s birthday Miña gives her a portrait of herself with her signature handwritten on it. The symbolic meanings of both the visual image and the written name point out Miña’s desire and attempt to be included in the familial history. The picture is kept as a decoration, though it is not included in the family album, which is the space where “official” family members become visible. Therefore, Miña remains on the outskirts of the family’s history.

After Miña starts nursing Clarissa, the girl’s health improves; she gains weight and, more importantly, bonds with her *nodriza*. As a healing technique, Miña carries the baby tied around her body with a cloth and covered with leaves. But Clarissa’s biological mother prefers to follow a medical doctor’s advice, explaining,

Hoy, todos los manuales de instrucción afirman que es más saludable dejar que los bebés lloren a cargarlos en brazos. Si se acostumbran al sacrificio de pequeños, sufrirán menos de grandes. [Today, all the

manuals say it's healthier to let babies cry than to pick them up. They get used to hardship and suffer less later on in life. Also their lungs become stronger.] (Ferré 1998a, 119; 1998b, 92)<sup>8</sup>

Shari Thurer (1994) explains that through this medical approach, the father is “replaced by the medical or psychological expert, who was installed in the home as the new source of patriarchal authority” (229). The privileged mother supports patriarchy and opposes a different care-giving method, even if it can save her baby's life. Nevertheless, the baby's separation from the wet nurse will have consequences that will carry on for generations.

Right after Clarissa is estranged from Miña, she is unable to use language, going backwards in her development and returning to primitive behavior. An association of language and lactation is the concept of “*mamar la lengua materna*” (suckling the mother's language), which comes from the Spanish tradition since colonial times, as Emilie L. Bergmann explains.<sup>9</sup> The idea is that language can pass through the milk, since it was often the wet nurse who taught language to the baby (Ramos 1994). After crying nonstop for thirty-six hours, Clarissa

se comió todo el potaje con las manos y vació el tazón con la lengua . . . Cuando teminó, se hizo caca y pis sobre el piso como si fuera un animalito. [ate all the porridge with her little hands and licked the milk plate clean. . . . When she was finished, she relieved herself on the floor like a small animal.] (Ferré 1998a, 119; 1998b, 92)

After losing this primal contact with her *other* mother, the baby plummets into a condition that brings her closer to a “primitive” past that precedes formal language acquisition.

Miña will keep working with the family but cannot get close to the girl or she will lose her job. They ignore one another in the beginning, but eventually girl and wet nurse develop strategies for hidden contact that sustains their relationship. Miña will continue to influence Clarissa's life during key moments, such as when leaving for the university and on her wedding day.<sup>10</sup> Even so, Elvira mentions that the abrupt separation left a mark on her mother's emotional life. She describes Clarissa as if a sliver of ice had stabbed her chest, a reason why it was very difficult for her to love other people. Later, this experience will come between mother and daughter, symbolizing how emotional traumas, historic events, or attitudes like racism or sexism can pass from generation to generation.

Ivonne Knibiehler (1996) explains that milk is not only a biological secre-

tion but also produces imaginary representations and social relationships. In her analysis, the relationship that develops through milk and bodily contact establishes bonds of affection that can transform family relationships and even renew the state. So the opportunity for positive change depends on the acknowledgment of the bonds created through the milk. Valeria's sudden prohibition of lactation is symbolically due partly because of fear of a new configuration of family as well as nation. The characters who favor the maintenance of a traditional order will closely supervise the wet nurse and prevent changes to the dominant system, which is not overturned.

Class and gender are probably the most evident categories that influence the wet-nursing experience since only a woman, or a poor mother, would do this type of work. Yet in *Eccentric Neighborhoods*, it is the men who negotiate the terms of Miña's wet nursing. In essence, they decide who will feed the upper class. This demonstrates how class and gender are irrevocably linked in a patriarchal society. Shari Thurer (1994) notes that in ancient Greece, for example, the fact that "for centuries, it was the father who brokered the wet nursing transaction with the husband of the lactating woman hints at a more salient explanation: patriarchal control" (75). Miña was chosen because it was commonly known that "*sus cuatro hijos eran los más saludables de Camarones, gracias a su leche abundante*" (she has had four children, who were among the healthiest [in the town] of Camarones because of her abundant milk) (Ferré 1998a, 116; 1998b, 90). As these authors suggest, Miña's milk also ties the feminine body with various aspects of race, class, health, hygiene, and socially accepted norms, so it does much more than nourish babies. Even though breast milk is a valued commodity, because of these other meanings or consequences, Miña's milk and bodily presence form an emotional bond and therefore pose a threat for Valeria, who decides to marginalize her.

Valeria downgrades Miña to laundress; however, this new role gives her access to the family's secrets. As she cleans the clothing and linens containing their bodily secretions and odors, she learns who is sick, who is making love (or not), who has a menstrual cycle, and when Clarissa's brother reaches adolescence. Elvira later discovers that Miña made a big, solid ball with bits and pieces of the washing soap, which contains these odors from the clothes and linens. This activity works in a similar way to feeding all of the siblings; it serves to keep the cohesion of the group. Even though Miña is evidently the corporeal axis through which the family comes together, they do not acknowledge her efforts, so her role remains an inferior and subordinate

one. She is simply someone who provides a service and continually goes unrecognized from the perspective portrayed by the protagonist's family.

Patricia Hill Collins (1994) urges us to contextualize when we place mothers like Miña at the center of our analysis. She also insists on using this perspective to further question feminist theorizing about motherhood. In *Eccentric Neighborhoods*, we learn how this mother's needs (not to mention her children's) are ignored in order to serve the ideology of the dominant family. Her feelings, sacrifices, and the humble conditions in which her children have to live are not considered even by Urbano, and neither is the fact that she will be separated from them.<sup>11</sup> Rosario Ferré's narration gives us partial access to Miña's point of view:

Miña empezó a llorar y siguió así toda la noche. Se le rompía el corazón nada más que de pensar que tendría que dejar al bebé con su hermana para que lo cuidara. [That night Miña cried herself to sleep. Just thinking that she would have to give the baby to her sister to take care of tore her heart.] (Ferré 1998a, 117; 1998b, 90)

We would need a narrative in the first person in order to hear her voice, or a more inclusive space in Clarissa's daughter's account.

*Eccentric Neighborhoods* ends with one of the narrator's dreams, in which the women of her family are drowning in a river while she passively sits inside the car with her mother. The class implications that have been analyzed by Frances Aparicio (2003)<sup>12</sup> are obvious in this description:

Clarissa y yo, vestidas con nuestra ropa de domingo, permanecemos perfectamente quietas dentro del Pontiac, sin pronunciar una sola palabra. Entonces mamá sacó un dólar de su bolso, bajó el cristal una pulgada, e hizo ondear el billete fuera de la ventana hasta que los campesinos que aguardaban en la ribera opuesta nos vieron, y acudieron con sus bueyes a sacarnos [Clarissa and I sat safely inside the Pontiac, dressed in our Sunday best. She took a dollar out of her purse, rolled down the window just enough so she could wave the bill at the men on the riverbank, who soon came and pulled us out.] (Ferré 1998a, 448; 1998b, 140)

Even though Miña remains living with the family, does their laundry, keeps their family secrets, and advocates for women's rights to education and to vote, she does not appear in this last scene or in the family tree at the beginning of the book. This novel offers a limited and ambiguous space for

the racialized female subject but is also moving away from representing the nation as a monolithic subjectivity that—as is evident in the seal from the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture—was predominantly Hispanic and male.

Although traditional definitions of motherhood do not include women like Miña, she becomes a mother to the protagonist's family, even if it entails servicing them through her body. With the advantage of a historical perspective, Rosario Ferré creates a space, albeit restricted, for cultural miscegenation that is possible through the relationships created by the milk. This *nodriza* remains within the limits of the nation but differs from the one that appears in nineteenth-century antislavery novels who is both silenced and segregated. The poor, black, and indigenous woman can influence the narration/nation/family through bodily contacts that both transcend and question the traditional blood model of the family and the traditional female reproductive role as biological mothers.

#### NOTES

I include citations from the Spanish and English versions of *Vecindarios Excéntricos* or *Eccentric Neighborhoods*. Part of this analysis also appears in my doctoral dissertation from Rutgers University in 2004. This essay is dedicated to Isa and Rosa.

1. Rosario Ferré was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico, in 1938. She has published essays, short stories, poetry, and novels and is the daughter of former governor Luis A Ferré. Her first collection of short stories, *Papeles de Pandora* (1976), is one of her most popular books. *The House on the Lagoon* (1995) was her first novel written in English and was a National Book Award finalist in the United States that year. *Eccentric Neighborhoods* was the second biggest selling book in Puerto Rico in 1999. For an analysis of the reception and meanings of Ferré's work written in English and Spanish refer to "Rosario's Tongue: Rosario Ferré and the Commodification of Island Literature" in *Boricua Pop* by Frances Negrón-Muntaner (2004).

2. The traditional definition of motherhood has been based on the biological dimensions of pregnancy and birth, a perspective that has been questioned by scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins, Adrienne Rich, Shari Thurer, and Silvia Tubert, among others.

3. Studies on wet nursing in Puerto Rico are very scarce, so I rely on texts that include the Caribbean, Spain, and the Americas. Janet Golden, in *A Social History of Wet Nursing in America* (2001), for example, notes that in the United States during the twentieth century wet nursing was replaced by bottle feeding, a trend that was popular on the island, too.

4. For sociohistorical perspectives on wet nursing see Fildes (1986, 1988) and Yalom (1997); see also Golden (2001). A variety of breastfeeding practices through various times and cultures show influences on these practices according to different social and political motivations that reside beyond the scope and privacy of the home. Fildes points out that breastfeeding contracts are not mentioned in historical texts in general. Golden also points out the lack of evidence about wet nursing; and while "wet nursing offers a

critical window into the historical construction of motherhood, it is a subject that has not been studied very much in the American context” (2). These and other texts led me to look for evidence of wet-nursing practices specifically in Puerto Rico, but wet-nursing practices as part of the historical process are not mentioned in historical texts from the island. Nevertheless, Puerto Rico and other colonies like Argentina and Perú around the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries probably inherited some of these practices from Spain: “It was commonplace for the wealthier white colonists to use both Indians and Negroes to suckle their children” (Fildes 1988, 128). There is also the complete absence of narratives from the point of view of wet nurses.

5. Valeria has more than one reason not to breastfeed her daughter, based on class and race factors that structure her life differently than *other* mothers. As a member of a higher class, she was not necessarily expected to deal with disease and hunger: “Back then, Puerto Rican ladies didn’t breastfeed their children. . . . All they did was rock the cradles and sing lullabies to their babies. Valeria was very proud of her breasts, which were alabaster white and just the right size, with nipples as delicate as rosebuds. . . . If she nursed the baby, her breasts would become swollen and dark, like those of mulatto women, and she certainly didn’t want that” (Ferré 1998b, 91).

6. This aspect of wet nursing in Caribbean and South American literature has been studied by Julio Ramos and Jossiana Arroyo. I am quoting from Ramos’s book, *Paradojas de la letra* (1996), and also from his unpublished presentation, “Wet Nurses and Contact,” delivered at the Modern Language Association Convention in 1994. I thank him for letting me use this paper.

7. Clarissa says that women with university degrees should be allowed to vote, and Miña gets angry and answers that *all* women should be allowed to vote. Later Miña develops an interest in learning to read and write, and Clarissa teaches her. Miña is also aware of gender prejudices in the family and raises her voice against it, showing that she is not completely passive and ignorant about her situation.

8. Valeria’s preference for books and manuals are part of the power/class struggle between these women. Since Miña does not know how to read, this is a way to impose a different kind of knowledge than what the wet nurse represents, a kind closer to nature.

9. For studies on wet nursing in the literature of early modern Spain see Bergmann (2000, 2002). Bergmann notes the absence of studies on wet nursing, the ambiguity toward interracial lactation, and the idea that personal traits, sicknesses, and even moral character could be passed on through the milk. The “milk as blood model” was prevalent in Spain and then brought over to colonies such as Puerto Rico.

10. At moments like the ones I mentioned, Clarissa has direct contact and conversations with Miña. At other times she wears a “Mexican sarape” that symbolizes their connection.

11. A text that was instrumental for me in understanding how differences in race, class, gender, and nationality shape women’s experience of motherhood was *Representations of Motherhood* (1994). Patricia Hill Collins’s chapter, “Shifting the Center,” identifies the experiences of Native American, African American, Hispanic, and Asian American women in the United States and highlights the importance of carefully considering context when thinking about motherhood. This perspective facilitates our understanding of why Miña is silenced and her personal and maternal needs ignored.

12. Frances Aparicio analyzes what she describes as Ferré's classist perspective in "Writing Migrations." Aparicio notes that the perspective that predominates in *Eccentric Neighborhoods* is that of a higher social class that is unable or unwilling to identify with the struggles of sectors of the population, such as the immigrants who are considered "part of the family" but kept apart.

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One, No One, and a Hundred Thousand  
On Being a Korean Woman  
Adopted by European Parents

.....

LIDIA ANCHISI

RIFLESSIONI:

1°—*che io non ero per gli altri quel che finora avevo creduto d'essere per me;*

2°—*che non potevo vedermi vivere;*

3°—*che non potendo vedermi vivere, restavo estraneo a me stesso, cioè uno  
che gli altri potevano vedere e conoscere, ciascuno a suo modo; e io no;*

4°—*che era impossibile pormi davanti questo estraneo  
per vederlo e conoscerlo; io potevo vedermi, non già vederlo;*

...

6°—*che, come me lo prendevo io, questo mio corpo, per essere a volta  
a volta quale mi volevo e mi sentivo, così se lo poteva prendere  
qualunque altro per dargli una realtà a modo suo (33–34).*

—LUIGI PIRANDELLO *Uno, nessuno e centomila*

REFLECTIONS:

1st—*that I was not for others what, until now, I had thought I was for myself;*

2nd—*that I could not see myself live;*

3rd—*that, not seeing myself live, I remained a stranger to myself, that is,  
someone that others could see and know, each one in his own way, but not me;*

4th—*that it was impossible to place this stranger in front of me to  
see him and know him; I could see myself but not “him”;*

...

6th—*that, the way I took it, this body of mine, to be time and again how  
I wanted myself and felt myself to be, such could it be taken  
by someone else to give it a reality in his own way.*

—LUIGI PIRANDELLO *One, No One, and A Hundred Thousand*

Transracial and transnational adoption complicates racial categories and identity politics and situates adoptees at a crucial intersection of race, gender, and class. Indeed, the confluence of multiple and often contradictory systems of cultural meaning on which a transracial and transnational adoptee draws inevitably results in a chaotic disruption of categories. A Korean woman adopted by an Italian father and an English mother, my racial and national identity has been conditioned by multiplicity and hybridity; different racial and cultural attitudes toward gender have helped me reject normative gender roles and dominant conceptualizations of the feminine; and the circumstances of my adoption provided me with the opportunity of surpassing class determination. I have always been aware of the necessity of considering my identity within the theoretical framework of intersectionality, but it wasn't until I had developed a scholarly interest in feminist theory that I was able to fully grasp—and appreciate—the significance of my location at the “borderlands,” to use Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) expression. Understanding and accepting these intersections, however, have not come without the cost of personal struggles.

One of the most significant struggles I faced as a transracial and transnational adoptee has been delineating my racial and national identity. Throughout the various stages of my life, the communities in which I lived and the people with whom I developed close connections were nearly exclusively white. I have two sisters, an older one and a younger one, both of whom were very blond as children and have recognizable physical characteristics that run in both my father's and my mother's families.<sup>1</sup> My father's job had consisted of overseeing subsidiaries of an Italian automotive company located abroad. I have thus lived in Tokyo, New York City twice (the first time in the early 1970s and the second time in the mid-1980s whereupon I remained in the United States), Singapore, and Turin, Italy, where I lived the longest prior to moving to the United States. Despite the fact that some of these neighborhoods were located in foreign countries like Japan or Singapore, or in cities as racially diverse as New York, we always lived in neighborhoods that were predominantly white. The whiteness of my environment was sustained at school as well. From the Alliance Française in Singapore to the Lycée Français in New York the number of nonwhite students in each school could be counted on one, sometimes two, hands. These communities came to shape my identity such that I viewed myself through the lens of my nationality and not my race: *I was Italian before I was Korean*. My first and last names indicated it and my Italian passport confirmed it. Well, actually, let me rephrase that. My parents, and consequently everybody else, have always

called me Lidia, but for reasons that are still unclear to me, they never made that name official, and therefore on paper I was—and continue to be—Hwa Soon Anchisi.<sup>2</sup> To me, Hwa Soon remained a meaningless collection of syllables that only surfaced in my life in documents and was a constant source of frustrating confusion. It was never a means for addressing me.

Being racially different from my environment and my family also meant that it was never apparent to the outside world that I belonged in my family. People have a hard time believing that my sisters are indeed my sisters. Any public displays of affection identify us as lesbians rather than sisters: this was made evident when I arrived at a party holding my sister's hand; guests automatically assumed we were lovers. This misinterpretation of affective bonds extends to my father as well. When I walk down the street arm in arm with my father, people look at us with suspicion, even judgment, assuming, I suspect, that we are lovers. I will never forget the time when, strolling down East 85th Street in New York, someone yelled out "Woody Allen and Soon-Yi!" implying that there was a parallel between the notorious lovers and my father and me.

The fact that I chose to privilege my nationality over my race was indicative of an internal conflict regarding racial identity that has been noted by a number of transracial adoptees.<sup>3</sup> Commenting on the case study of Kristin Rhinehold, an African American raised by white parents, Sandra Patton (2000) notes that Kristin described herself as "white with very, very dark skin" (87). Patton explains that Kristin was white-identified because her

social location in a white family and community had provided her with a set of cultural meaning systems that are usually only available to whites. To her, these mainstream systems of cultural meaning seemed *natural*; indeed, she explained that she often *forgot* she was black until someone else reminded her. She experienced a gap between the identity she had constructed through the cultural meaning systems available to her and the way she was seen and treated by the world. (87–88, emphasis in the original)

Like Kristin, I too was white-identified. With the exception of a name I refused to call my own, a traditional Korean dress that I never wore, and a small South Korean flag I would hang in my bedroom, I had no exposure to Korean culture, nor did I ever partake in cultural activities that promoted awareness and knowledge of my Korean roots.<sup>4</sup> Therefore the only sets of cultural meaning systems available to me were the ones available to my family and the communities in which I lived. I never publicly framed my racial identity

as white, since I was aware of the contradiction of such an assessment. Instead, I described myself as Italian, which, however, amounted to the same thing. It occurred to me later on in life that my hesitation to identify with one racial group over another was not dissimilar to the internal conflict that multiracial individuals experience. According to Miville and others (2005), because the development of racial identity is linked to location, people, and developmental periods, the identity of biracial or multiracial individuals is a flexible one, one that evolves according to the individual's desire to adapt to expected social or cultural demands (what they refer to as the "chameleon experience"). Even though I am not literally multiracial, my so-called whiteness was clearly symptomatic of this chameleonic experience.

The disjunction that Kristin's story makes evident between the identity of the transracial adoptee and the outsider's interpretation of the racial codes embodied by the adoptee most definitely afflicted my life. In my particular case, the fact that I am Italian amplified the gap: it was not just a question of white versus Asian, but also of Italian versus Asian. With such a large influx of Asians migrating to the United States, the incoherence between geographic location, ethnic identity, and race for Asian Americans is unremarkable. If a Korean woman says that she is American, nobody flinches. A realignment between race and national identity is much less fluid in the case of Italians because the number of Asians living in Italy is very low. In fact, to this day, people are confused, or even incredulous, when they find out that I am Italian. No matter what country I enter, every time I present my Italian passport to immigration officials, they always hold my passport a little longer than necessary when they glance at me. When I speak to Italians in Italian, their gaze goes blank, and they then proceed to speak to me in English. When my students enter the classroom and see me, they think they are in the wrong class. Anticipating their assumptions, I immediately assure them that if they are in the room to take an Italian language class with Professor Anchisi, they are in the right place. When I tell people that I teach Italian, they are incapable of hiding their surprise. Worrying that they might question my command of the Italian language, I hastily inform them that I was adopted by an Italian father and that I lived in Italy for several years.

It already became clear at a young age that when people looked at me they didn't see me as I saw myself, but as they believed I should be. The problem, then, wasn't just that I was what I seemed not (Italian), but also that I was not what I seemed (Asian). People assumed that I was culturally socialized as an Asian. I have been asked countless times how to say "x" in Korean, if I liked *kimchee*, or if I did martial arts. Parents of an Italian childhood

friend insisted that I cook a Korean meal for them despite the fact that I had told them that I had never eaten Korean food, let alone cooked it. When I moved to New York, Koreans tended to address me in Korean. Confronted with a language that was completely foreign to me, I would shake my head in rapid denial, waving my hands fervently, blurting out that I didn't speak the language, that other than my body, there was nothing Korean about me. The response, typically, was a disappointed "oh." And then we both went about our business as if the parenthetical exchange had never taken place. All these incidents were indicative that certain cultural assumptions were being made on the basis of racial makeup. The cultural identification the outsider prescribed me made me very uncomfortable. If my so-called whiteness was determined by my social location and my family, it must also be said that it was equally determined by a refusal to acknowledge that I might have something in common with Asian racial groups. Having had little to no interaction with Asian communities, my own interpretation of racial codes was shaped by media images and dominant racial narratives. As a result I had come to internalize negative stereotypical representations of Asians and in particular Asian women. Asians, the "yellow" people, had speech impediments (reversing the "R" with the "L"), sounded guttural when they spoke their own language and incomprehensible when they tried to speak a foreign language; their street markets were filled with smelly, unappetizing food; they either lacked elegance and table manners, or they were exaggeratedly restricted and rigid in their movements; they had undesirable physical features such as "puffy" eyelids, low-bridged noses, and hefty calves;<sup>5</sup> men were overly concerned with reputation, honor, and tradition; and women were mere passive, inferior sexual objects.

I had also experienced racist incidents in the form of ridiculed role-playing of Asian stereotypes, race jokes, and resentment. One of the earliest memories that has haunted me for years dates back to my days in grade school in Italy. Children my age, having never met another Asian, would come to me chanting "chin chin samurai," bowing, with their arms crossed and hands up their sleeves. These episodes were so frequent that I began to dread recess time, shielding myself behind grownups in a vain attempt to avoid them. Other incidents include comments such as "can you really see out of those eyes?"; "you are a Twinky, yellow on the outside, white on the inside"; "go back to your fucking country"; "I'm not a racist, but enough with this 'Asian invasion'" (a variant of this latter comment was a particular favorite of locals in Florence); "Asian women have a special vaginal muscle to increase men's sexual pleasure"; "you are so exotic and mysterious"; and

so forth.<sup>6</sup> Not wanting to recognize myself in these public images and negative stereotypes, I would downright resist any explicit or implicit connection with Asian groups. I may have looked like I was one of “them,” but in fact I was nothing like them.

Thus, in a nutshell, the root of my concerns could be summarized in these terms: I was part of a world I considered marginal, and at the margins of a world I considered my own. I was not who I appeared to be, yet I was who I appeared not to be. I felt alienated, fragmented, but worst of all resentful. I was resentful that I didn’t *look* like I belonged in my family; that I always had to explain to passport officials that I was adopted when they looked, with uninhibited puzzlement, at my Italian passport, then at me, then at my passport; that I couldn’t change the fact that what other people saw had little if not nothing to do with who I was; that children and grownups alike made fun of my physical features and role-played Asian stereotypes; and that (Western) representations depicted Asian women as sexual, mysterious, and submissive. I was resentful if men didn’t want to date me because I wasn’t white or if men did want to date me because they were “afflicted” with the “yellow fever” or had developed an “Asian fetish.” I was resentful that there even were expressions such as “yellow fever” and “Asian fetish” to describe men who were only interested in dating Asian women. My resentment turned into bitterness, and even hatred, toward my Asian traits. I felt that, on the one hand, they betrayed me, causing me to be identified with social groups that were foreign to me and impeding authentic membership to social groups I claimed as my own; on the other hand, they were the reasons why I was subjected to ridiculous comments, racial discrimination, and sexual and racial stereotyping. I developed complexes about my body and in particular about the physical traits that distinguished me as Asian. Like many Koreans, I became obsessed with plastic surgery. Not only had I internalized Western concepts of beauty, I firmly believed that if I could just change the shape of my eyes and acquire a Caucasian nose, I could somehow reduce the incongruence that left me feeling so fragmented and alienated.<sup>7</sup> Sadly, I was so determined to wallow in my own pool of self-pity, so focused on indulging my resentment, that I had not realized that I was contributing to racial oppression by maintaining the hegemonic status of the dominant racial ideology. I was in fact shamefully exercising a blatant form of racial discrimination that was directed at both myself and at Asians in general.

As I ventured down the path of academia, I developed an interest in feminist theory and the significance and social implications of systems of inequality.<sup>8</sup> Feminists have spent many decades analyzing, uncovering, and

deconstructing power relations through the lens of gender first and, more recently, through the lens of class and race.<sup>9</sup> The female subject cannot be reduced to the single category of gender; she is multidimensional, marked by her gender, race, and class. The experience of a middle-class white woman in a developed country is radically different from the experience of a Hispanic woman trapped below the poverty line in a developing country. The intersection of social categories requires feminists to think multidimensionally and globally. It also requires that I reevaluate my personal experience and my attitude toward racial meaning. I suddenly realized that the problem was not that people couldn't see me for who I was but that I had attached negative cultural meanings to race. What needed to be done, then, was to rethink my narrative of difference. I had adopted a "color-blind" attitude, considering race to be insignificant in defining who I was. But I came to realize that not only could I not escape race, but also that, as Omi and Winant (1994) remind us, "the concept of race continues to play a fundamental role in structuring and representing the social world" (55).<sup>10</sup> I was living proof that Italian and Asian were not mutually exclusive categories. I was not one or the other, but a hybrid, an intersection. Multiracial and multiethnic feminists such as Gloria Anzaldúa view their "hybridity" as a means for disrupting a dialectics of duality such as inside/outside, center/margin, and us/them, for it affords them the possibility of inhabiting the borderlands located at the intersections of categories:

The work of *mestiza* consciousness is to break down the subject-object duality that keeps her a prisoner and to show in the flesh and through the images in her work how duality is transcended. The answer to the problem between the white race and the colored, between males and females, lies in healing the split that originates in the very foundation of our lives, our culture, our languages, our thoughts. (Anzaldúa 1987, 80)

The connections between race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and so forth that I embody offered me tools for delegitimizing negative stereotypes of race and gender and deconstructing mechanisms that maintain the racial and gender order and affect racial and gender oppression. I began to look at my situation differently. My sense of regret was transforming into a sense of gratitude. I wasn't unlucky; quite the contrary, I was *incredibly lucky*. I was privileged with the richness of multiplicity: I am a Korean woman, adopted by a white middle-class European couple, raised in countries across several continents, culturally socialized as an Italian but educated within the French

scholastic system, having received an American bachelor and doctoral degree and then teaching Italian language and culture in a small private liberal arts college in south-central Pennsylvania, and recently married to a white American man. Today I, Lidia HwaSoon Anchisi Hopkins, no longer consider myself a sham.<sup>11</sup> Sitting at the crossroads of all my identities, I like to joke that I am a Benetton ad wrapped up in a single body, the diversity requirement. I not only subvert conventional perceptions of race and nationality, I also destabilize the presumed link between these two categories. I am strength, not weakness; I am more, not less. I am not one or the other, but a multitude. Anzaldúa's words ring with tremendous clarity: "Soy un amasamiento, I am an act of kneading, of uniting and joining that not only has produced both a creature of darkness and a creature of light, but also a creature that questions the definitions of light and dark and gives them new meanings" (81).

#### NOTES

The translation of Luigi Pirandello's *Uno, nessuno e centomila* is my own.

1. My elder sister died tragically in 1991.
2. My parents aren't sure why they never changed my name. It is possible to speculate that my parent's decision to keep my Korean name was meant to preserve a certain degree of my Korean cultural identity. Sara K. Dorow (2006) looks at how practices of naming are linked to parenting enculturation beliefs.
3. See for example Sara Dorow (2006); Eng and Han (2006); Lee et al. (2006); McRoy and Zurcher (1983); Sandra Patton (2000).
4. Research on transracial and transnational adoption has focused on the effects of parenting socialization practices such as enculturation and racialization. For scholars such as Lee et al. (2006), enculturation and racialization may serve to provide transracial and transnational adoptees with coping strategies and defense mechanisms against racism and racial discrimination.
5. Olivia Chung's "Finding my Eye-identity" and Eugenia Kaw's "'Opening' Faces" clearly illustrate how deeply rooted and common is the impression that Asian features are undesirable.
6. These comments have not been made exclusively in the United States, although Italians, and Italian men in particular, tend to be more intrigued by the "exotic mysteriousness" I supposedly exude than offended by my presence. Nevertheless, inhabitants of Italian cities that attract large numbers of Japanese tourists have been known to express their frustration toward Asians in general.
7. It was clear that I experienced my Asian traits as "bodily intrusions" (Gimlin 2006, 704) and that I viewed cosmetic surgery as a way to alleviate "bodily dys-appearance."
8. My interest in feminist theory equally grew out of the fact that I became aware of how systems of cultural meaning have an impact on gender relations and representations. Many countries, including Italy and Korea, remain rather unsympathetic toward feminist ideals and practices.

9. See for example Barbara Arrighi (2001), Irene Blea (1992), and Naomi Zack et al. (1998) on theories of intersectionality.

10. As Omi and Winant (1994) underscore in their work on racial formation, the racial dimension is present at both micro- and macrolevels, and these two levels are organically connected, informing and informed by each other. Curiously, adoption policies changed from a racial “matching” position to promoting color-blind policies. For more on federal adoption policies, see Sandra Patton (2000) and Simon and Altstein (2000).

11. I have not made Lidia or Hopkins (my husband’s last name) part of my legal name, at least not yet. But I like to include them all when I am asked, unofficially, to give my name.

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## The “Johnny’s Story” *Founder of the Race, Gender and Class Journal*

.....

JEAN AIT BELKHIR

*Without hope there is little we can do. It will be hard to struggle on, and when we fight as hopeless or despairing persons, our struggles will be suicidal.*

—PAULO FREIRE

I am the founder of the *Race, Gender and Class* journal<sup>1</sup> and also of the Southern University of New Orleans (SUNO) Race, Gender, and Class Annual Conference. This short contribution will illustrate the importance of the intersection between history and biography. According to Mills (1956), a deeper understanding of society is achieved if we look where biographies are located within the broader historical context. This “Johnny’s story” will try to show how my biography and the social context of my background influenced my fight for the race, gender, and class (RGC) intersection. Indeed, understanding the interconnections among race, gender, and class has become a cutting-edge issue in critical academic work today, producing a wide variety of studies in the United States, though dealing mainly with U.S. topics. I believe that any social theory and analysis that do not integrate the elements of race, gender, and class don’t go to the root of our problems. However, how do we map social structure if race, gender, and class are considered of equal analytic significance?

Just a few months after earning my PhD in sociology, my RGC work was deeply influenced after reading Angela Davis’s *Women, Race, and Class* (1981). This was the first book I read that treated RGC from a “Marxian working-class” perspective. Davis analyzes the interaction of RGC exploitation and domination of African women on slave plantations. In fact, Angela Davis

received the first RGC Award at the 2000 SUNO RGC Annual Conference in New Orleans. This award has since been named the Angela Davis RGC Award. In this essay, I promote the idea of using a Marxian perspective in RGC studies because of the obvious importance of class in the capitalist system. However, while class is the most central factor in any capitalist society, I do think that the call for RGC analysis requires both theoretical and political practice. The explanation is pretty simple; it is the famous circumspection against any “Johnny.”

#### A “JOHNNY” RACE, GENDER, AND CLASS BACKGROUND

I am very proud of my RGC background, which began as a white French Algerian Berber (Kabyle male) from the working class. My illiterate North African working-class father contributed to my early politicization by giving me the daily task of reading him the newspaper during the war of liberation of the Algerian people against French colonialism. Therefore, I became aware of RGC issues in my early childhood, not only because of my background, but also because of the kind of education I received from my father, a freedom fighter against French colonialism in Algeria. *Ethnic identity* was and still is very real for me.

In the same vein, my *class consciousness* was awakened as a factory worker at fifteen years old, and also by my experience in jail at seventeen as a result of vagrancy, a condition in which I found myself due to my father's death and a series of “boring” dead-end jobs. When I left prison, I was no more than eighteen years old and scared to death for my future. I wanted to get out of trouble and to have a normal life without “problems.” Unfortunately, my social background and cultural capital only prepared me to make the same decision that many young working-class males with no future all over the world do: “volunteering” in the army. I signed a contract for five years as a volunteer in one of the most elite branches of the French Army, the Paratroopers. After a few months of “resocialization” to become a well-disciplined and obedient “legally trained killer,” I was ready to follow any order given to me to protect and maintain the French imperialistic democracy overseas. After my training, I asked to serve in Africa at Madagascar, and as soon as I arrived, it was evident that the main mission of the French paratroopers was to maintain French colonial interests in the Indian Ocean. We were sent to the Ile de la Réunion to break down a strike led by the African French sugar cane workers struggling to improve their working conditions under the white plantation owners. I refused to take part in the fight. The earlier

Algerian war against the French was a part of my life and had bred in me a sensitive “double-consciousness” mindset (the famous DuBois and Fanon concepts), which aroused my paradoxical position: a French paratrooper from an Algerian Berber ethnic background. This double consciousness reinforced my willingness to do whatever necessary to break my contract with the army, although it was legally impossible for a volunteer paratrooper to separate from the army. Thus, I deserted. I was conscious that I would have to pay the price for this desertion, but I was ready. I surrendered to the French paratrooper authorities, who arrested me and court-martialed and sentenced me to several months in military prison. After getting out, I wanted to help other army volunteers willing to break their contracts with the army. I became the founder-president of the first association struggling to defend the right of people like me to quit the army without being court-martialed and sentenced to prison. Looking back, I know this was a unique life experience from an RGC perspective. With such a social background it might not surprise the reader that I see myself as a rebel and revolutionary with no trust of the political democracy offered to us, because I strongly believe there will never be true democracy without economic equality.

Lastly, my *gender consciousness* was ignited by my experience as a boy raised (without a mother) by a tough man. The Muslim culture taught my father that women are inferior to men and must be subordinate to them. It took me years and years to understand why my mother left home when I was seven years old. This experience stretched my feminist awareness about oppression and exploitation of women. For example, when I went back to Algeria just after my father died, it was a cruel cultural shock to see with my own eyes how men treated the women in my father’s homeland and village. I did not feel any cultural relativity; I just felt disgust for my “country” that I loved without really knowing anything about it except what my father had told me. I feel sorry that it took me so many years to understand why my mother left us. On a personal level, my experiences left me confused about women; fortunately, I learned from these experiences to develop my gender consciousness.

My formative experiences in France, Algeria, Madagascar, and later India, as well as my academic training in the only French open-admission university in the mid-1970s (I left school when I was fourteen and went back at twenty-eight), gave me a way out of my social destiny and prepared me to become an activist in the RGC social and academic movement. I was lucky because of my educational success; I don’t know anyone with whom I grew up who got a college degree.

The establishment of the *Race, Gender and Class* journal has been a long and difficult process. Indeed, when I came the first time to the United States, in the mid-1980s, I started to see RGC as simultaneous operating spheres of social inequality that should always be studied together. For example, my first intellectual and academic work in RGC studies was to translate into French several important articles (see Belkhir and Science for the People 1985; Belkhir and Hirsch 1987; Belkhir and Hirsch 1988) by members of the Sociobiological Study Group (led by Richard Lewontin and Jay Gould) that questioned the mainstream sociobiological charlatans pretending to demonstrate “scientifically” that intellectual-quotient (IQ) scores and social inequality were genetically determined. Two and a half years later, I was hired as a full-time adjunct assistant professor at the University of Wisconsin–Superior. That was the beginning of my full engagement in RGC studies. In 1993, I participated in an American Sociological Association (ASA) workshop on RGC intersectional work, organized by the Memphis State Center for Research on Women. The inaugural issue of the *Race, Gender and Class* journal (see Belkhir and Ball 1993) was produced from participants’ papers in that workshop.<sup>2</sup> In 1994, I became the first man to teach in the Women’s Studies Program at Towson University since its creation, more than twenty years ago at the time. It is well-known that RGC studies originated basically from women’s studies, and specifically from women’s and ethnic studies led by women of color.

Let me be clear here about RGC. Until the emergence of black feminism in the United States, not a single social theorist took seriously the concept of the simultaneity of RGC intersection in people’s lives. This concept is one of the greatest gifts of black women’s studies to social theory as a whole and for an integrative understanding of racism, sexism, and classism. The African American experience in the United States and efforts to theorize RGC intersections have spurred scholars’ recognition of the simultaneity of RGC in the lives of not only African Americans<sup>3</sup> but also other marginalized groups such as Asian Americans, Latina Americans, and Native Americans (see *Race, Gender and Class* special issues on “Domination and Resistance of Native Americans” [1996]; “Asian American Voices” [1997]; and “Latina/o American Voices” [1997]).<sup>4</sup> My main goal in creating *Race, Gender and Class* was to apply bell hooks’s (1984) well-known phrase, “moving from the margin to the center,” to listen to the voices of the voiceless!

Since the forming of the journal, several issues of *Race, Gender and Class*

have fostered debate and discussion on issues of RGC across disciplines, and junior RGC scholars' manuscripts have been especially encouraged. This has allowed the journal to publish cutting-edge work in the field of RGC studies (see special issues on psychology, environmental politics, education, and others). I want to point out that the journal is an independent, self-sustained journal, housed both at SUNO and the University of New Orleans. It has been published without any interruption since fall 1993 (except when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans so badly in August 2005 and put the journal one year behind; but we have caught up and are back on track with scheduled publications). The journal is a quarterly publication which has published over 500 authors so far!

In addition, in 1995, I became the chair-founder of the ASA RGC section. The section has nurtured scholar-activists at the beginning of their careers by sponsoring discussion roundtables, out of which many special issues of the journal have been produced. Finally, my last contribution to RGC studies has been the establishment of the SUNO RGC Annual Conference in 1999, thereby providing another forum for all those interested in RGC studies.

#### JOHNNY'S CRITICAL THINKING ABOUT RGC

Overall, my main critique about RGC is my observation that class analyses are the least developed in the RGC trilogy because of the cold attitude toward Marxism and class identity in the United States. This has been a recurring criticism of RGC analysis from scholars who embrace this perspective (Belkhir 2001; Gimenez 2001; Kandal 1995; Mann and Grimes 2001; Price 2001) and other writers who have pointed not only to the meager attention given to class but also to the paucity of working-class voices and the theoretically impoverished treatments of class in major texts in RGC studies.<sup>5</sup> For all of these reasons, I strongly state that RGC needs to include a Marxian analysis to go beyond semantics (e.g., the meaningless hypothesis that all RGC factors must be considered as equal) and to fulfill its avowed theoretical and social-equality objectives.

I hold that, contrary to the prevailing neglect of Marxian analysis in mainstream RGC studies, a Marxian approach is indeed more than necessary for understanding the issues of RGC in national and global capitalism—there is no other way to understand the totality of social relations structuring racial, gender, and class inequality in U.S. and global capitalism. As Espiritu (1997) says, “Naming the categories of oppression and identifying their interconnections is to explore, forge, and fortify cross-gender, cross-racial, and cross-class alliances” (17). This is the key social and political purpose of RGC:

*constructing alliances*. Indeed, it is to construct what Mohanty (1991) calls an “imagined community, a community that is bounded not only by color, race, or class but crucially by a shared struggle against all pervasive and systemic forms of domination” (13). Therefore, in the context of national and global capitalism, pretending that “RGC must be considered of equal analytic significance is politically and sociologically a ‘dead end hypothesis’” (Belkhir forthcoming). The RGC paradigm is theoretically unsatisfactory knowing that, from a capitalist perspective, class is much more central than race and gender. Racial and gender inequality might be “abolished” in the capitalist system without destroying the system itself. It is unimaginable for class inequality to be abolished in the same way; this would mean crushing the system itself! This is absurd and inconceivable from a capitalist standpoint.

I am aware, however, that many RGC theorists don’t take Marxian analysis seriously and that theorists of RGC oppression have been, on the whole, unfriendly to a Marxian approach. More importantly, the United States is a country where class surfaces as “a dirty taboo,” is not part of the common-sense understanding of the world, and remains conspicuously absent from the vocabulary of politicians and RGC writers. This is why, despite the U.S. history of labor struggles, today people are more likely to understand their social and economic grievances in race, gender, and class or in Weberian socioeconomic terms rather than in Marxian/class words, despite the fact that class is the essence of the capitalist social system. We should not continue to talk about RGC without raising the question of economic justice.

At best RGC is a distraction and, at worst, an essentially liberal middle-class ideology; therefore, the main purpose of this short contribution is a call to rethink RGC social theory. The reality is that mainstream RGC intellectuals don’t like the idea of class wars. RGC academic activists have turned RGC into a social theory for making classes of different colors, genders, and sexual orientations more comfortable within the capitalist system. The old Socialist leader Eugene Debs used to be criticized for being unwilling to interest himself in any social reform that didn’t involve an attack on economic inequality.

I am not arguing that racial- and gender-based protests are less important, nor that they are secondary to class in the present historical conjuncture in the United States. All RGC writers are fully conscious not to articulate class issues separately from gender and racial/ethnic issues. Nonetheless, the significance of class in the RGC trilogy is insufficient and replicates its relative invisible presence within this approach; class is “the weak link in the chain” (Kandal 1995, 156).

## SUMMING UP

The situation now is that RGC publications and studies obsessively interest themselves in issues that have nothing to do with economic inequality and social class. Today the trick is to think of inequality as a consequence of our prejudices rather than as a consequence of our social system and thus to turn the project of creating a more egalitarian society into the project of getting *individuals* to stop being racist, sexist, classist, and homophobic. The problem with RGC is that, from the standpoint of economic equality and class wars, it doesn't matter which side you are on and it doesn't matter who wins. Both ways, economic inequality is absolutely untouched, and the dream of liberal capitalism—the idea of the free market as the essential mechanism of social justice—is completely compatible with mainstream RGC social theory. Here is where the concept of liberal capitalism is genuinely clarifying. A society free not only of racism but also of sexism and of heterosexism is a neoliberal utopia where all the irrelevant grounds for inequality have been eliminated and whatever inequalities are left are therefore legitimated. The meaning of antiracism, antisexism, and antiheterosexism in RGC is thus that it gives us an ideal—the ideal of a society without prejudice—to which we can all sign on. What is surprising is that the battles over social justice in politics are battles over what color of skin, gender, and sexuality the rich people should have. The fundamental problem with RGC is its silence to the injustices of capitalism, making us somehow believe that injustices are only due to racism, sexism, and heterosexism.

I believe that we should fight against the trend in RGC to think that the differences dividing us are not the class system and social-economic differences but instead the differences between race, gender, and sexuality. RGC intellectuals have responded to the issue of class by insisting on the importance of difference and diversity. But classes, as I have been arguing, are not like races, genders, or sexualities; and treating class as if it were different, but equal, is a theoretical and practical dead-end of RGC theory. Rather than solely addressing racism and sexism and homophobia almost exclusively, I am suggesting that RGC academic activists take up economic justice and equality.

## NOTES

1. The *Race, Gender and Class* website is [www.suno.edu/sunorgc/](http://www.suno.edu/sunorgc/).
2. The inaugural issue of *Race, Gender and Class* (1993) was produced from participants' papers by Elizabeth Higginbotham, Patricia Hill Collins, Jeanne Ballantine, Mar-

cia Texler Segal, Larry T. Reynolds and Leonard Lieberman, Walda Katz-Fishman and Jerome Scott, and Jean Ait Belkhir.

3. See “African-American Perspectives,” special issue, *Race, Gender and Class* 6 (1999).

4. See “Domination and Resistance of Native Americans,” special issue, *Race, Gender and Class* 3 (1996); “Asian American Voices,” special issue, *Race, Gender and Class* 4 (1997); and “Latina/o American Voices,” special issue, *Race, Gender and Class* 4 (1997).

5. See also “Working Class Intellectual Voices,” special issue, *Race, Gender and Class* 4 (1996).

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## Epilogue

### *The Future of Intersectionality: What's at Stake*

.....

ANN RUSSO

*The most useful theory will be that which teaches us to use  
the particular, to frame big and inclusive questions, to integrate  
seemingly conflicting needs and sacrifice no one.*

—AURORA LEVINS MORALES

*The Intersectional Approach: Transforming the Academy through Race, Class, and Gender* could not be more timely. I say this in the face of the 2008 feminist debates over the U.S. Democratic Party primaries. On January 8, 2008, Gloria Steinem, in an Op-Ed for the *New York Times*, urged people to vote for Hillary Clinton on the grounds that “women are never front-runners.” She wrote, “Gender is probably the most restricting force in American life, whether the question is who must be in the kitchen or who could be in the White House.” While she qualifies her argument with “I’m not advocating competition for who has it toughest,” she claims that black men “generally have ascended to positions of power, from the military to the boardroom, before *any women* (with the possible exception of obedient family members in the latter)” (emphasis mine). Ignoring the ways that gender intersects with race and other forms of systemic oppression as well as privilege, she uses this claim as the basis for urging feminists to vote for Clinton to break what she defines as an endemic, singular, and monolithic gender barrier.<sup>1</sup>

The feminist politics embedded in Steinem’s Op-Ed exemplify exactly what intersectional theorists, scholars, and activists have been seeking to critically challenge and transform. As revealed in *The Intersectional Approach*, the theoretical, research, and activist paradigms that embrace intersectionality continue to be contested terrain. While they have grown substantially

over the past thirty-plus years, these frameworks continue to face resistance and marginalization as well as cooptation. In the case of the Democratic primaries, feminist scholars and activists across the country fiercely debated Steinem's arguments. Often the debate divided along the lines of race, although not always. The fact that so many white middle-class mainstream feminists proliferated gender-exclusive arguments made real the ongoing and very divisive power dynamics that continue to undermine the momentum of coalition-based feminist politics grounded in intersectional theories and applied frameworks. At the same time, there were also many feminists who resolutely refused this categorical polarization and its competitive and singularly defined identity politics. For instance, Melissa Harris-Lacewell,<sup>2</sup> Kimberlé Crenshaw and Eve Ensler,<sup>3</sup> Suzanne Pharr,<sup>4</sup> Zillah Eisenstein,<sup>5</sup> Jennifer Fang,<sup>6</sup> and Barbara Ransby,<sup>7</sup> among others, offered critical analyses and alternative perspectives. Melissa Spatz and I, both white, antiracist, progressive feminist activists, circulated a petition, "Stop the False Gender/Race Divide," that called on progressive white women, and feminists in particular, to refuse this polarized rhetoric and recommit to an intersectional coalition-based analysis and politics.<sup>8</sup> The petition garnered over 550 signatories, with many powerful testimonies to intersectionality as a theoretical and practical framework.

The debate itself makes visible the significant stakes underlying this new collection of essays. *The Intersectional Approach* offers a candid assessment of the state of intersectional thinking, particularly in the academy, with important implications for policy, advocacy, and activism around a variety of issues, including healthcare policy, beauty and bodies, sexuality, transnational adoption, and occupational stereotyping, among others. The authors, from a variety of perspectives and vantage points, each remind us of the importance of revisiting the historical imperatives of intersectionality, the significance of the theoretical and methodological challenges posed by it, as well as the envisioned possibilities in terms of feminist theorizing, scholarship, advocacy, and activism. The collection provides us with an opportunity to reflect deeply on why theoretical and political approaches that recognize interlocking systems of oppression and privilege have not had the much needed impact across a spectrum of feminist theories and politics. And most importantly, the collection offers new strategies to broaden the impact of intersectionality across disciplinary and interdisciplinary fields of theory and research methodology as well as to carve out new directions.

Rooted in the experiences and perspectives of those who live at the intersections of multiple and interlocking systems of oppression, it has been the

overlapping and interconnected groups of women of color, poor and working-class women, lesbian and bisexual women, transgender and intersex people, women from the global south, and youth who continue to be at the forefront of challenging gender-exclusive identity theories and politics. The argument has been that centering the identities, experiences, and perspectives of those who are often marginalized and erased in political projects that rely on singular identity-based frameworks will proffer a more transformative feminist politics that sacrifices no one. For myself, the challenges began in the early 1980s, with the writings represented in the groundbreaking books of radical women of color, including Cherríe Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa's *This Bridge Called My Back*, bell hooks's *Ain't I a Woman*, Angela Davis's, *Women, Race, and Class*, Barbara Smith's *Home Girls: A Black Feminist Anthology*, and many others. As a young white middle-class lesbian feminist, I had to rethink all that I thought I knew about feminism, sexism, and gender and to consider how deeply enmeshed my own lived experiences and feminist perspectives are in white supremacy, homophobia and heterosexism, imperialism, classism, able-ism, and Christian dominance. What intersectionality taught me is that I consistently need to consider the implications of the research, policies, and politics that I am forging in terms of whether they contribute to the perpetuation of any of the interconnected systems of oppression and privilege.

The essays in *The Intersectional Approach* showcase the strengths of moving beyond singular-identity-based analyses that often reflect the needs, issues, and perspectives of the most privileged within these groups, that marginalize those impacted by multiple systems of oppression, and that erase the differential relations of privilege/power within "groups" however they are conceived.<sup>9</sup> This collection deepens our understanding of how different locations within matrices of domination and privilege shape experiences and perspectives, as well as relationships between and within overlapping groups. As Maxine Baca Zinn and Bonnie Thornton Dill note, "Intersecting forms of domination produce *both* oppression and opportunity."<sup>10</sup> These systems shape the identities, experiences, and perspectives of "women and men of all races, classes, and genders."<sup>11</sup> For them, a multiracial feminism "highlights the relational nature of dominance and subordination" such that "women's differences are *connected* in systematic ways."<sup>12</sup> Moreover, these "differences" are themselves not so easily discernible. For instance, as Lidia Anchisi's essay explores in the case of adoptees of transracial and transnational adoptions, the complexity and fluidity of identities in people's lives often disrupt the automatic presumed stable race and gender identi-

ties and other so-called characteristics. From a variety of vantage points, then, the theory and research represented here deepen and complicate our understanding of intersectionality. They pave the way for new directions in theories, research, pedagogy, and activism that do not single out one axis of oppression over another, one identity over another, and that do not sacrifice anyone's needs. These goals are essential in terms of transforming our knowledge as well as our public policy. The significance of this research in terms of shaping both activism and public policy is brought to the fore throughout this volume; for instance, Kia Lilly Caldwell's work to center the lives, issues, and needs of black women in Brazil illustrates the stakes for refusing a singular-axis approach to developing sound and comprehensive health policy in Brazil.

The wake-up call of the 2008 race-versus-gender debate begged the question of why many mostly white middle-class feminists so easily and quickly and unthinkingly retreated to this old divided politics. *The Intersectional Approach* offers a variety of answers for why scholars and activists might embrace and yet abandon intersectionality within the same context. Rachel E. Luft's essay is quite compelling in exploring how claims of intersectionality might actually result in the "flattening" of the "very differences such approaches intend to recognize." She draws on the experience of antiracism trainers who find that in their trainings, white folks often use some aspect of intersectionality in their own lives (e.g., class, gender, sexual orientation) to flee from owning up to their implicatedness in a racial system. Given this, Luft makes a strong argument that in particular contexts it may be essential to have a singular focus on racism, so as not to allow an intersectional approach to flatten our differential relations to power. One can see such "flattening" in Steinem's Op-Ed piece where she gives a brief nod to intersectionality, and then abandons it. She writes, "The caste systems of sex and race are interdependent and can only be uprooted together."<sup>13</sup> And yet Steinem then argues that gender, in opposition to race, is the most significant issue in the Democratic primary. What Steinem's nod reveals is that she does not conceptualize whiteness as a system of privilege that shapes the identities and experiences of white middle- and upper-class women, including herself, and that, therefore, white privilege and power remain unmarked and unaddressed. It seems that many may tend to embrace intersectionality when it comes to analyzing those oppressed by multiple systems of oppression but not when analyzing the simultaneous relations of privilege that also shape their own experiences, perspectives, and implicatedness in these systems of power.

It is vitally important that scholars and activists apply intersectionality not only to those at the intersections of multiple oppressions but also that we scrutinize systems of power and privilege. By exclusively focusing on oppression and not privilege in our analyses of white middle-class women, for instance, the interconnected relations of dominance between people remain unmarked and thus underanalyzed, untheorized, and not accounted for. Elizabeth R. Cole and Natalie J. Sabik's essay in this volume offers three powerful questions that would be quite useful for scholars interested in exploring intersecting and interrelated systems of oppression and privilege. They ask, "Whose perspective is represented and whose is left out? What role does power play? Where are there similarities?" Using these questions to explore ideas about beauty and bodies among black, Hispanic, and white women, they make a compelling case for an intersectional analysis of differences in the context of power. By illuminating the differences in women's experiences and understandings of beauty, the authors underline the importance of reconceptualizing dominant group members' experiences, that is, white women's experiences, as also "specific and contextualized, rather than as reflecting a universal experience."

Making more visible the ways in which relations of power intersect with oppression creates the possibility for more accountability for relations of dominance and privilege. Sherene Razack argues for a shift to a politics of accountability that, for her, is a "process that begins with a recognition that we are each implicated in systems of oppression that profoundly structure our understanding of one another. That is, we come to know and perform ourselves in ways that reproduce social hierarchies."<sup>14</sup> For her, by "tracing the complex ways in which they help to secure one another, we learn how women are produced into positions that exist symbiotically but hierarchically. We begin to understand, for example, how domestic workers and professional women are produced so that neither exists without the other."<sup>15</sup> Similarly, in the context of Cole and Sabik's research on beauty and bodies, in exploring their question, "What is the role of power?" they find that "white women's privileged position with respect to beauty is premised, in part, on their comparison to women of color, particularly black women. . . . Thus white women are simultaneously subordinated and privileged by beauty norms, and in some sense responsible for them. Because white women benefit from their privilege in the domain of beauty, they complicitly participate in the perpetuation of this inequality." Such an approach would reconfigure feminist analyses of the media, which mostly have not addressed the power and privilege of whiteness and the impact of this power system on relations

between and among white women and women of color. Doing so would create the possibilities for more accountability with respect to challenging racism as well as sexism, to relationships forged through research and activism, and to creating an agenda for change that would address multiple and differential identities and relations of power.

The importance of studying the privileged is also borne out by Jessica Holden Sherwood's analysis of the "matrix of privilege" operating in the world of the "country club." She illuminates the ways that privilege is naturalized and perpetuated through the stories that members tell one another. Deconstructing such narratives might help us begin to construct, as she suggests, discursive interventions and disruptions. In returning to the feminist debates, and thinking about "whose perspective is represented?" and "what is the role of power?" we might ask about whose identities might be most represented by Steinem's arguments and the role of her own power in making the argument. As Melissa Spatz and I suggest, "For white women, an exclusive and defensive focus on sexism denies accountability for our racial privilege. It erases our own complicity in the multiple systems of oppression that shape our lives, perspectives, and allegiances."<sup>16</sup> In fact, one can even see such an inkling of recognition of differential power in Steinem's parenthetical reference embedded within her claim about black men's ascension to power, where she qualifies her statement by saying, "(with the possible exception of obedient family members in the latter)." Rather than submerge such a statement, feminists might explore it through an analysis of white middle- and upper-middle-class women's differential access to power and privilege across a range of issues and trace out the implications for political agendas and alliances. An emphasis on interlocking systems of oppression *and privilege* center the question of accountability across differences, rather than relying on ideas of "shared oppression." Jennifer Fish and Jennifer Rothchild very thoughtfully explore the implications of their own identities and locations in relation to their field research and related activism in Nepal and South Africa; they provide a great scholar-activist model that recognizes and addresses issues of power between researchers and the communities with whom they are connected. Their hope is that such recognition and the alliances that may emerge from within that recognition "may contribute to the visionary work of utilizing intersectionality to better understand and eventually break down power asymmetries that continue to shape the global community."

For the past several years, I've had the opportunity to reflect on transformational changes in feminist antiviolence theory, research, and analysis in

the United States. The changes again are due to the powerful and groundbreaking work of feminist and queer women-of-color scholar-activists, many connected with the national organization Incite! Women of Color Against Violence.<sup>17</sup> By centering the lived experiences of women of color at the intersection of multiple and overlapping systems of oppression, the severe limits of a mainstream feminist antiviolence movement that has relied on a gender-exclusive framework have been illuminated, and new strategies and models are being developed. In the past couple of years, the Women and Girls Collective Action Network (WGCAN) has been bringing together and documenting some of the innovative work emerging out of these critiques. In late 2007, WGCAN published a research report that I cowrote with Melissa Spatz, the executive director, called “Communities Engaged in Resisting Violence.” We documented sixteen fierce and radical antiviolence organizations in Chicago.<sup>18</sup> All sixteen emphasize multiple and interlocking systems of oppression, and all center women marginalized in mainstream antiviolence work, including overlapping groups of young women of color, women with disabilities, women in the sex trade, queer and trans youth, and immigrant women, among others.

These organizations embrace approaches that radically transform many of the taken-for-granted assumptions of the mainstream feminist antiviolence movement. Many of the projects, for instance, challenge the assumption that antiviolence groups are necessarily “safe spaces” based in notions of shared identity and oppression. Instead, they approach “safety” as something that is an ongoing process of creation, rather than as something that can be taken for granted. Given this, they are developing internal accountability strategies to contribute to “safer” spaces where differential power relations are acknowledged and addressed rather than overlooked. In addition, many of the organizations do not assume that men are always the perpetrators and women always the victims of violence. Instead, they recognize that individuals and groups may be both victim-survivors as well as perpetrators or beneficiaries of violence, particularly given multiple sources of violence enmeshed in interlocking systems of oppression and privilege (e.g., sexism, racism, xenophobia, homophobia, and genderism). In so doing, they build in more strategies for accountability within their projects as well as in the broader community-based work.

What these projects reveal about the power of intersectionality is that through it we can forge a political analysis capable of building alliances and coalitions that do not require anyone to choose one’s oppression over another nor to sacrifice some needs over others. What such an approach requires is

a commitment to a politics of interrelatedness and accountability across our commonalities and differences. Such an approach is beautifully envisioned by AnaLouise Keating in this volume. She culls the powerful lessons of *This Bridge Called My Back* and offers a visionary approach to alliance building that emphasizes “(1) making connections through differences, (2) forging an ethics of radical interrelatedness, and (3) listening with raw openness.” By exploring the difficulties Keating observes and experiences in feminist work to bridge our differences, she provides thoughtful commentary on some of the barriers and roadblocks to change, as well as offering radical and yet very simple methods for how to build movements based in interrelatedness and mutual accountability, and ones more open to internal fluidity, change, and transformation.

I believe that the future of intersectional theorizing and action must continue to insist on a deep recognition of the power issues at their center and the implications for the creation of knowledge and social policy, as well as movement strategy and action. At the center of inquiry and action might be the questions Antonia Castañeda poses to scholars and activists engaged in the struggle to end violence; she asked, “Where do each of us stand on each of these interlocking elements? And what will each of us do with this historical legacy? I would ask each of us to interrogate ourselves, our organizations, our work places, our families—to examine our individual gender, sexual, racial, and class politics, and our power and privilege in each realm.”<sup>19</sup> This to me is the radical future of intersectionality, and the essays in this volume are an important step toward its realization.

#### NOTES

The epigraph is a quotation from Morales, *Medicine Stories*, 123.

1. Steinem, “Women Are Never Front-Runners.”
2. “Race and Gender in Presidential Politics.”
3. Crenshaw and Ensler, “Feminist Ultimatums.”
4. Pharr, “Does Race Trump Gender?”
5. Eisenstein, “Hillary Is White.”
6. Fang, “Gloria Steinem.”
7. Ransby, “Clinton and Obama Campaigns.”
8. Russo and Spatz, “Stop the False Race-Gender Divide.”
9. Crenshaw, “Mapping the Margins.”
10. Zinn and Dill, “Theorizing Difference from Multiracial Feminism,” 357.
11. *Ibid.*
12. *Ibid.*
13. Steinem, “Women Are Never Front-Runners.”

14. Razack, *Looking White People in the Eye*, 12.
15. *Ibid.*, 13.
16. Russo and Spatz, "Stop the False Race-Gender Divide."
17. Incite! Women of Color against Violence, *Color of Violence*.
18. Russo and Spatz, *Communities Engaged in Resisting Violence*.
19. Castañeda, "History and Politics of Violence against Women," 318.

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## Contributors

LIDIA ANCHISI is assistant professor of Italian at Gettysburg College, where she teaches classes in Italian literature and culture. Her publications include articles on several aspects of Italian literary studies and feminist theory. While her main area of research is Italian literature, she has recently developed a scholarly interest in transnational adoption and the politics of identity.

NAOMI ANDRÉ is associate professor in women's studies and in the Residential College at the University of Michigan. Her research focuses on nineteenth-century opera and issues surrounding gender, voice, and race. Her publications include topics on Italian opera, Schoenberg, and women composers. Her book *Voicing Gender: Castrati, Travesti, and the Second Woman in Early Nineteenth-Century Italian Opera* was published by Indiana University Press (2006). Her current research interests extend to constructions of race, ethnicity, and identity in opera.

JEAN AIT BELKHIR is associate professor of sociology at Southern University at New Orleans and the University of New Orleans. Belkhir founded the American Sociological Association Section on Race, Gender and Class, which he chaired from 1994 to 1998; he was reelected chair in 2005 and 2006. He also created the journal *Race, Gender and Class* in 1993. Since the formation of the journal and the section, several issues of the *Race, Gender and Class* journal have fostered debate and discussion on issues of intersectionality. In 1998 he founded the annual Race, Gender and Class conference at New Orleans, which he continues to organize.

MICHELE TRACY BERGER is associate professor in the Department of Women's Studies and an adjunct professor in the Department of Political Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her books include *Workable Sisterhood: The Political Journey of Stigmatized Women with HIV/AIDS*

(Princeton University Press, 2004) and the coedited collection *Gaining Access: A Practical and Theoretical Guide for Qualitative Researchers* (Altamira Press, 2003). In 2006–7, she received an American Association of University Women (AAUW) American Fellow award for her new work on African American mother and daughter communication on health and sexuality. Her teaching and research interests include multiracial feminisms, qualitative methods, and HIV/AIDS activism.

KIA LILLY CALDWELL is an anthropologist who teaches in the Department of African and Afro-American Studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Her book *Negras in Brazil: Re-envisioning Black Women, Citizenship, and the Politics of Identity* was published by Rutgers University Press in 2007. She has published articles in *Frontiers*, *Transforming Anthropology*, the *Journal of Negro Education*, *Gênero* (Brazil), and *Revista Estudos Feministas* (Brazil). Her research interests include critical race theory, black feminism(s), African diaspora studies, citizenship, and human rights. She is currently conducting research on black women and HIV/AIDS in Brazil and the United States.

ELIZABETH R. COLE is associate professor in women's studies and psychology at the University of Michigan, where she has taught since 2000. She is also affiliated with the Center for Afro-American and African Studies there. Her research aims to bring feminist theory on intersectionality to social science research on race, class, and gender identities. Her current research uses both qualitative and quantitative methods. It includes a longitudinal investigation of the effects of diversity-themed courses on college students and several separate studies exploring the ways black and white women perceive, value, and perform femininity.

KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW is professor of law at the University of California, Los Angeles. Her primary scholarly interests center on race and the law, and she was a founder and has been a leader in the intellectual movement called Critical Race Theory. Professor Crenshaw's publications include the coedited book *Critical Race Theory* (New Press, 1995) and the coauthored volume *Words that Wound: Critical Race Theory, Assaultive Speech and the First Amendment* (Westview, 1993).

BONNIE THORNTON DILL is professor and chair of the Women's Studies Department and director of the Consortium on Race, Gender and Ethnicity at the University of Maryland. Her research focuses on intersections of race, class, and gender with an emphasis on African American women and fami-

lies and has been reprinted in numerous collections and edited volumes. Her recent publications include *Emerging Intersections: Race, Class, and Gender in Theory, Policy, and Practice* (Rutgers University Press, 2009), a collection of essays edited with Ruth Zambrana.

MICHELLE FINE is distinguished professor of social psychology, women's studies, and urban education at the Graduate Center, City University of New York. Fine's work braids social psychological theory with feminist and critical race theory, participatory methods, and strong commitments to social change. Fine has authored and coauthored numerous books and articles within justice studies on topics ranging from high-school dropouts, women with disabilities, the "missing discourse of desire" in sex education classrooms, Muslim American youth, participatory action research methods, and the impact of college on women in prison. She has received national and international recognition of her work from the Columbia University Teacher's College Winter Roundtable, the American Educational Research Association, Bank Street College, and the American Psychological Association.

JENNIFER FISH is chair of the Department of Women's Studies at Old Dominion University, where she also teaches in the Graduate Program in International Studies. Her research interests center on the intersections of gender and post-conflict development, with particular emphasis on women's roles in restructuring society. For the past fifteen years, she has worked on examining women's contributions to South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy, as portrayed in her book publications: *Domestic Democracy: At Home in South Africa* (Routledge, 2006) and the coedited collection *Women's Activism in South Africa: Working across Divides* (University of KwaZulu Natal, 2008).

MAKO FITTS is assistant professor of sociology at Seattle University and affiliate faculty in Global African Studies and Women's Studies there. Her areas of research include race and ethnic relations; the intersection of race, gender, and sexuality on issues of social inequality; and community mobilization specifically using hip-hop as a tool for social justice activism. She has published and presented research and social commentary on body ethics and aesthetics among women of color, women and queer issues in hip-hop culture, gentrification in historically black communities, and black women's activism.

KATHLEEN GUIDROZ is assistant professor of sociology and codirector of the gender studies minor at Mount St. Mary's University. Her scholarly research

interests include the intersection of gender, labor, and sexuality; and she has written on escort work, telephone sex work, and sadomasochism. Her essay, written with Grant J. Rich, “Commercial Telephone Sex: Fantasy and Reality” appears in *Sex for Sale: Prostitution, Pornography, and the Sex Industry*, edited by Ronald Weitzer, 2nd edition (Routledge, 2009). She is currently researching U.S.-based organizations that provide social, legal, and support services to sex workers.

IVETTE GUZMÁN-ZAVALA was born and raised in Puerto Rico, where she studied art. She holds an M.A. from Syracuse University and a Ph.D. from Rutgers University. Her dissertation was titled “Cuerpos Entrelazados: Representación de la Maternidad en la Literatura y la Plástica Puertorriqueñas” (“Interlocking Bodies: The Representation of Motherhood in Puerto Rican Literature and the Visual Arts”). As a professor at Lebanon Valley College, she continues her research on representations of nontraditional motherhood in literary texts and examples of visual arts from Latin America and/or the Caribbean.

KAAREN HALDEMAN received her Ph.D. in medical anthropology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill and her M.P.H. in nutrition from the University of California at Berkeley. She currently works as an independent scholar with the UNC–Chapel Hill Frank Porter Graham Child Development Center. She has worked in rural and urban North Carolina; San Diego, California; and Tijuana, Mexico. She has been conducting research relating to African American cultural life, pregnancy, childbirth, and motherhood for ten years.

CATHERINE E. HARNOIS is assistant professor of sociology at Wake Forest University, where she teaches courses on gender and statistics. She holds an M.A. and a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill as well as a graduate certificate in women’s studies from Duke University. Her research focuses on bridging multiracial feminist theory and survey research.

ANALOUISE KEATING is professor of women’s studies at Texas Woman’s University, where she teaches courses on U.S. women of colors, multicultural feminist epistemologies, feminist/womanist theories, and Gloria Anzaldúa. Her publications include *Teaching Transformation: Transcultural Classroom Dialogues* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007); *EntreMundos/AmongWorlds: New Perspective on Gloria Anzaldúa* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2005); *this bridge we call home: radical visions for transformation* (coedited with Anzaldúa; Routledge,

2002), and *Women Reading Women Writing: Self-Invention in Paula Gunn Allen, Gloria Anzaldúa, and Audre Lorde* (Temple University Press, 1996). She is editor of *The Gloria Anzaldúa Reader* (Duke University Press, forthcoming) and *Anzaldúa's Interviews/Entrevistas* (Routledge, 2000), and has published over thirty articles on critical “race” theory, queer theory, Latina writers, African-American women writers, and pedagogy.

RACHEL E. LUFT is assistant professor of sociology and women, gender, and sexuality studies at the University of New Orleans. Her areas of specialization are race, gender, intersectionality, and social movements. Since Hurricane Katrina, she has been a participant observer in grassroots movement responses to the disaster, and her research and writing focus on these efforts.

GARY K. PERRY is assistant professor of sociology and an affiliated faculty member with the Women's Studies and Global African Studies programs at Seattle University. He received his doctorate in sociology from the University of Nebraska–Lincoln in 2005. His dissertation is titled “Whose Job Is It? A Mixed Methods Analysis of Occupational Stereotyping and Occupational Prestige Ranking in the New Economy.” His areas of specialization are race-gender-class studies, urban sociology, sociology of education, and community action research. His current projects involve researching the impact of gentrification on Seattle's Central District and qualitative analyses of the resistance movements stemming from the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina.

JENNIFER ROTHCHILD is assistant professor of sociology and gender, women, and sexualities studies at the University of Minnesota, Morris. She teaches courses in gender, childhoods, feminist methodologies, and social inequalities. Since 1996, she has been examining the complexities of gender within the context of Nepal. Recent publications include *Gender Trouble Makers: Education and Empowerment in Nepal* (Routledge, 2006). Her current work involves the intersections of race, caste, gender, and social class in the experiences of displaced, abandoned, and orphaned children in Nepal.

ANN RUSSO, an antiracist feminist writer, educator, and activist, is currently the director of women's and gender studies at DePaul University. Her work is embedded in social justice movements resisting and transforming sexual, gender, racial, homophobic, and xenophobic harassment, abuse, and violence. Her publications include *Taking Back Our Lives: A Call to Action in the Feminist Movement* (Routledge, 2001); the coauthored *Pornography: The Production and Consumption of Inequality* (Routledge, 1998); and two coedited volumes,

*Talking Back and Acting Out* (Peter Lang, 2002) and *Third World Women and the Politics of Feminism* (Indiana University Press, 1991). She works in collaboration with the Women and Girls Collective Action Network, Beyondmedia, Young Women's Action Team, and Young Women's Empowerment Project.

NATALIE J. SABIK is a doctoral candidate in the joint program in women's studies and personality and social contexts psychology at the University of Michigan. She received her undergraduate degree from Ohio State University, where she majored in psychology and women's studies, and her master's degree in women's studies is from George Washington University. Her research focuses on how body image and health behaviors are related to intersecting social identities such as gender, race, and age.

JESSICA HOLDEN SHERWOOD received her Ph.D. in sociology from North Carolina State University in 2004. She teaches at the University of Rhode Island and serves as the executive officer of Sociologists for Women in Society. She is a graduate of Phillips Academy, Andover. Her interests include studying how class, race, and gender inequalities are reproduced, or not, across social settings.

YVETTE TAYLOR is lecturer in the School of Geography, Politics and Sociology, Newcastle University, U.K. Her publications include *Working-Class Lesbian Life: Classed Outsiders* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2007) and *Lesbian and Gay Parenting: Securing Social and Educational Capital* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2009). She is currently working on a collection titled *Theorizing Intersectionality and Sexuality* (coedited by Taylor, Hines, and Casey; forthcoming, 2010).

NIRA YUVAL-DAVIS is professor and graduate course director in gender, sexualities, and ethnic studies at the University of East London. Professor Yuval-Davis is an elected member of the Academy of the Learned Societies for the Social Sciences and has been a founder and member of the international research network on women in militarized conflict zones. She has written extensively on theoretical and empirical aspects of nationalism, racism, fundamentalism, citizenship, and gender relations in Britain and Europe and in Israel and other settler societies. She is currently working on a monograph on Nationalism and Belonging (Sage, forthcoming).

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