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PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE AND TEACHING INTERSECTIONALITY INTERSECTIONALLY

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When I began teaching women's studies courses in the mid-1980s, many feminist scholars and teachers had become disillusioned with the rigidity of the theoretical constructions of feminisms that frequently contoured pedagogical approaches in women's studies as well as social movement scholarship on the women's movement.¹ In fact, the first course I taught on the sociology of gender was informed by frameworks such as liberal, Marxist, socialist, and radical feminisms. The clarity of the distinctions between them made it easy to teach. Each framework had a very different origin story, strategies for social change, and goals for social transformation. At the core of much of these debates were the ways these frameworks either disappeared race or class, as in liberal feminism, or centered one form of oppression over others, such as Marxist feminism or radical feminism. As Kim Case (this volume) describes in her introduction, the intervention of women of color in the U.S. context revealed the limits of feminist approaches that could not account for the power of white supremacy and racism to structure the experiences of all social actors. Their challenges were grounded in praxis, insights generated in the context of struggle, and therefore deepened the complexity of theoretical practice.

In an effort to go beyond an additive approach to theorizing multiple oppressions, a bridging paradigm emerged in the form of standpoint epistemology. Rather than adding oppressions together as in white supremacist capitalist patriarchy, standpoint epistemologies argued for a materialist understanding of how knowledge derives from different social experiences and therefore influences perceptions of the social and political context (Naples, 2003). Debates arose around whether and to what extent different women's experiences were more or less privileged in accurately assessing the complex matrix of domination (Collins, 2000) or relations of ruling (Smith, 1990) that contoured different

social locations. Intersectional feminism can be understood as a further effort to go beyond the additive approach but one that is more self-consciously derived from anti-racist praxis than many standpoint epistemologies with the exception, of course, of Collins's (2000) analysis of Black feminist thought.

For contemporary feminist studies scholars and teachers, intersectionality is one of the primary theoretical lenses through which women's studies is envisioned and taught. Many programs now situate their mission statements and pedagogical practice through an intersectional lens. As Wiegman (2012) noted, intersectionality is "repeatedly posited as both a core pedagogical tenant and a field-defining analytic and institutional goal" (p. 240) in women's studies programs and national organizations. In fact, she concluded, "it is no longer exaggeration to say that intersectionality circulates today as the primary figure of political completion in U.S. identity knowledge domains" (p. 240).

The ubiquity of intersectionality in feminist teaching and scholarship led some commentators to see it as a buzzword (Davis, 2008) that has lost its meaning as a powerful analytic term. Some critics are concerned that as intersectionality traveled across academic sites and disciplinary investments, a "tendency to treat intersectionality as a feminist account of identity . . . [and confusing] personal kinds of identity and structural identities" developed (Cooper, 2015, p. 4). Quoting Nash (2008), Cooper (2015) pointed to another problem in contemporary intersectional theorizing and argued that "'vectors of race, gender, and class, and sexuality,' are conflated with a discussion of remedying 'racism, sexism, and classism'" (p. 5). Another concern relates to debates over the centrality of Black women's experience to intersectional analyses. Cooper (2015) noted that because "Crenshaw constructed the intersectional proposition on the ground of black women's erasure in civil rights law, intersectionality has come to stand in as a kind academic and/or theoretical pronoun, whose antecedent is, or has at different turns been, black women, the black woman, and the black female experience" (p. 9). She explained that for some "feminist scholars . . . black women anchor intersectionality to a kind of particularity that seems difficult to overcome" (p. 10). While I cannot resolve these challenges to the utility of intersectionality approaches, I outline below a way to orient students to the diverse approaches with special attention to intersectional feminist praxis.

How intersectionality achieved such a central place in women's studies curriculum and scholarship reflects, on the one hand, "its lack of definition and analytic specificity" (Wiegman, 2012, p. 242) and its perceived power to resolve the tensions within and between different feminisms. If this is the case in some settings, then I see several significant problems for feminist pedagogy. First, the lack of definition and specificity and the wide-ranging ways intersectionality is defined by different scholars makes it very difficult to teach (Grzanka, this volume). Students come away more confused than before the course started if intersectionality has an endless array of definitions and intersections that occur

everywhere and with no specific analytic focus. As Wiegman (2012) explained, “By posing itself as a counter to single-axis analysis, intersectionality pursues not only complexity but particularity, specifically through the critical location attributed to both black women and black feminism *and* in such a way that no configuration of identity as a constructed social relation of power and subordination is thought to be beyond its analytic reach” (p. 240).

Second, the tensions with and between different feminisms produced diverse insights into how inequality is constructed and reproduced and effective ways to challenge it in different settings. Third, the loss of a historical perspective on feminist praxis may result in intersectional theories disappearing other modes of theoretical engagement, even as intersectionality relies upon the analytic work of earlier feminist, critical race, and materialist feminist theories. As a fourth concern, I also wonder to what extent intersectionality can capture the ever-changing insights of queer and trans theories, if in fact, these perspectives should be brought into the frame.

Below, I take up the challenge of teaching intersectionality intersectionally. This effort examines the intellectual and activist history of the conceptualization of the term and the ways different scholar-activists adopted and reformulated it to analyze specific social phenomena and activist goals. I also offer a way to conceptualize the different approaches to intersectionality and conclude with a reflexive approach that retains the power of intersectionality as a feminist praxis.

The Changing Context for Teaching Intersectionality

Even before I had a word for it, the intersection of race, class, and gender as it shaped different women’s experiences captured my intellectual imagination and activist energies. My dissertation project, along with almost every other research study I initiated since then, was informed by my desire to capture the complexity of social relations, experiences, inequalities, and structural dynamics that contour the diversity of women’s lives, situated knowledges, and resistance strategies.

Not surprisingly, every course I teach is organized around an intersectional frame. When I first began teaching in the 1980s, I struggled to go beyond the additive approach of race, class, and gender that was dominant at the time to produce a more nuanced course outline (see also Case, this volume). As the term became popularized following Crenshaw’s (1989) influential article, I sought to identify any research study or analysis that claimed intersectionality as the organizing frame or methodological approach to inform my syllabi. Fortunately, the number of feminist analyses using an intersectional frame has grown exponentially since the 1980s. It is now possible to chronicle a wide array of approaches to intersectionality that differ significantly by discipline, epistemology, methodology, and conceptualization.

Many of the scholars who have adopted intersectionality as a central analytic approach generated studies incorporating data from women of different racial-ethnic and class backgrounds as a way to advance their intersectional projects (see Naples, 1998). These scholars argued that incorporating an intersectional perspective forces a reconceptualization of their understanding of different conceptual frames. For example, Glenn, Chang, and Forcey (1994) contested the traditional constructions of mothering based on white, middle-class, nuclear family models (see James & Busia, 1993). My development of the conceptualization of *activist mothering* (Naples, 1992) and Abramovitz's (1988) analysis of the *family ethic* also reflected the power of intersectional analysis for reconfiguring notions of politics and family. Starting from the lives of Black women, Springer (2002) used an intersectional approach to contest the wave approach to women's movement activism in the U.S. By 2013, the application of intersectionality had moved beyond what I call the *embodied approach* to encompass social movement strategies and decolonizing methodologies (Chun, Lipsitz, & Shin, 2013). Intersectionality as a feminist framework also foregrounded a number of challenging critiques that raise important intellectual and activist dilemmas that I address below.

Teaching Theories of Intersectionality: Mapping a Course

Many of my graduate students have engaged in the challenging and sometimes elusive goal of designing and implementing intersectional research studies. They struggled, along with many of the anonymous authors whose manuscripts I reviewed over the years, to conceptualize and operationalize intersectionality. In many instances, their efforts fall short of their goals. Many realized that it is not enough to assert that one's study is intersectional. To succeed, a researcher must clearly specify what makes the study intersectional, discuss why certain methodologies chosen for the study are the most productive for intersectional research, and reflect on which aspects of intersectionality are brought into the frame and which are left out or treated less centrally in the analysis (Naples, 2003). Given the diversity of conceptualizations and disciplinary approaches, it is often difficult for new researchers to identify the most effective intersectional perspectives and models for their own research.

To facilitate my students' understanding and application of intersectionality, I constructed an interdisciplinary course that would highlight the diversity of approaches to intersectionality and attempt to map the field of intersectional studies. My goal was to help provide students with a roadmap for their own efforts to produce intersectional research. The course, Theories of Intersectionality, was designed to focus on how different scholars theorize, research, and analyze intersectionality. I considered the following questions in designing the course:

- What are the limits and possibilities of different disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to intersectionality for understanding and analyzing difference?
- How have social scientists taken up the call to intersectionality in their research?
- What types of methodologies are most effective for an intersectional analysis?
- How does intersectionality inform feminist praxis?

My course readings drew from the fields of law, policy studies, science studies, comparative historical research, disability studies, sexuality studies, and cultural studies. I also reviewed work by feminist scholars in social, cultural, and political geography, anthropology, sociology, economics, and political science. The resulting overview incorporated postcolonial, postmodern, and queer theoretical approaches as well as other epistemological approaches including Marxist and symbolic interactionist inspired studies.

In constructing the course, I made my own approach to intersectionality explicit. I began with the following assumption to guide my course development: an intersectional framework should attend to historical, cultural, discursive, and structural dimensions that contour the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, national, and religious identity, among other identities. In my view, the most powerful approaches to intersectionality examine the ways these interactions produce contradictions and tensions across various levels of analysis and dimensions of difference with the goal of producing insights for feminist praxis (e.g., Maynard, 1994). I used this conceptualization to guide my organization of the outline and identify readings to illustrate the weekly topics.

The call for intersectional analyses were first heard from feminists of color who critiqued approaches that constructed women's concerns without attention to the ways race, class, and sexuality inform the experiences of women. Early challenges to reductive feminist analyses are found in the analyses of: Johnnie Tillmon who organized ANC Mothers Anonymous, the welfare rights group in Los Angeles; the Combahee River Collective (1977/1997); and Angela Davis's (1983) now classic book *Women, Race, and Class*. I decided to open the course with the Combahee River Collective's (1977/1997) "A Black Feminist Statement" and other early articles, such as Anthias and Yuval-Davis's (1983) essay on "Contextualizing Feminism: Gender, Ethnic and Class Divisions," to demonstrate some of the origins of the concept in different geographic regions (see also Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1992). I also assigned a more recent article by Brah and Phoenix (2004) to set the stage for discussion of an historical overview of the changing definitions and approaches to intersectionality.

The next class focused on defining intersectionality. Here, I wanted to include both early and more recent conceptualizations, keeping in mind regional differences as well as postcolonial interventions and philosophical debates. I used

the following readings: Collins' (1998) "It's All in the Family: Intersections of Gender, Race, and Nation" and Crenshaw's (1991) "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color." I also added Stephan's (1986/1996) "Race and Gender: The Role of Analogy in Science" and a more recent article by Yuval-Davis (2006) on "Intersectionality and Feminist Politics." Drawing on these readings, students considered:

- whether and in what ways the notion of intersectionality functioned as an analogy or metaphor;
- what intersectionality offered as a way of capturing the complexity of positionality and structural differences; and
- what other metaphors might prove more effective or more useful for different analytic purposes.

The class also contrasted the American and British approaches to intersectionality. For example, Prins (2006) argued that, in contrast to the U.S. model, the "British approach to intersectionality has adopted this more relational and dynamic view of power . . . [and] elaborated a constructionist interpretation of intersectionality" (p. 280).

After mapping the field, I recognized several major differences in emphases that differentiate approaches to intersectionality. Early work offered what I call an embodied or individual approach, emphasizing the ways women's social locations at the intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality contour their lived experiences. Writings in this vein included analyses that theorized difference by race, class, and gender as they affect individual experiences, worldviews, and oppression. Subsequent work tended toward a relational approach and offered a more historical and regional variation on the earlier themes of difference. I found Glenn's (2004) *Unequal Freedom: How Race and Gender Shaped American Citizenship and Labor* most useful in illustrating these variations. While Glenn's study offered a powerful historical and regionally diverse lens through which to view intersectionality, I also introduced students to the more focused social constructionist methodology offered by Fenstermaker and West (2002) and the rich ethnographic case study by Bettie (2002) as examples of the significance of social interaction and context for shaping identity construction and intersections of race, class, and gender.

A third approach adopts a social structural stance toward intersectionality and typically draws on quantitative data. McCall (2001) used the construct *configurations of inequality* in her analysis of how "race, gender, and class intersect in a variety of ways depending on underlying economic conditions in local economies" (p. 6). She emphasized the importance of regional variation, an emphasis also featured in Glenn's (1992) historical analysis of gender, race, and class in three different regions of the U.S. While Glenn focused on the relationships between White women and women of color within interdependent labor

contexts, McCall used quantitative data to examine the structure of inequality in the labor markets as they vary across different regions.

McCall (2005) differentiated between anti-categorical and intra-categorical approaches to intersectionality. Finding both inadequate for her purposes, she offered a third strategy that she called *intercategorical*, which she applied to the new inequality within the American labor market. In her weekly memo, class member Jayme Schwartzman described the approach as follows:

Following the directives of the intercategorical approach introduced by McCall, the analysis brought out in *Complex Inequality* (2001) emphasizes the relationships of inequality that exist between social categories such as race, gender, and class and uses them as “anchor points” (McCall 2005: 1784–5) to further substantiate how they should be used as the focus of the analysis itself.

One class member, Jamie Gusrang, found McCall’s approach one of the most valuable for her own research. As she explained, “inequality is an economic condition directly affected by a combination of race, class, and gender, [but] given the gaps in much of the (new) inequality literature, [McCall] pays particular attention to gender in her work.” Gusrang appreciated the effort to apply intersectional analysis to quantitative data. McCall’s comparative method also revealed the importance of examining the intersection of race, class, and gender in a regional context.

Prins (2006) drew a distinction between systemic and constructionist approaches to intersectionality, both of which “adhere to an anti-essentialist view of identity” (p. 6). On the one hand, Prins (2006) argued that the systemic approach “upholds that the meanings of social identities are determined by racism, classism, sexism, etc., which are taken to be static and rigid systems of domination,” thus ignoring “the agency of individual subjects by interpreting identity constructions as not only made and as such contingent, but as made by the powers-that-be and as such false” (p. 6). On the other hand, for constructionist approaches, “constructions of identity are not ideological distortions of a suppressed and authentic experience, but the (symbolic-material) effects of performative actions” (Butler, 1990, p. 6). However, a more effective approach to intersectionality requires a nuanced conceptualization of the relationship between systemic and constructionist processes.

Many scholars who adopted an intersectional perspective emphasized the interactional construction of power and oppression. For example, as former University of Connecticut graduate student Maura Kelly explained in her gender field exam:

This tradition understands systems of oppression as grounded in relational power differentials. Men’s domination is thus related to (and dependent upon) women’s subordination and the status of poor women of color is

related to (and dependent upon) the status of affluent White women. Using a multi-lens approach or a race/gender/class approach allows researchers to understand consequential power differentials among women as well as those between women and men. Hence, this framework can help explain why women's common structural location as women is not sufficient for mobilization against gender inequalities.

Feminist work on intersectionality is often linked to standpoint epistemological frameworks with overlapping concerns with the construction of experience, politics, and epistemology. My own intersectional approach is especially indebted to Smith's (1987, 1990) institutional ethnographic methodology that avoids viewing women's embodied experiences as the endpoint of analysis and also resists reifying systems of oppressions, arguing instead for a contextualized and historicized angle of vision. Smith's (1987) formulation of the *relations of ruling* captures "the intersection of the institutions organizing and regulating society . . . [and] grasps power, organization, direction, and regulation as more pervasively structured than can be expressed in traditional concepts provided by the discourses of power" (p. 3).

In exploring the epistemological grounds for different intersectional perspectives, I conceptualized a fourth framework that, in my view, offers more analytic power than the other approaches in that it brings into view the multiple dimensions of intersectionality. This epistemological approach to intersectional analysis is rooted in insights from the different theoretical perspectives designed to analyze gender, race, and class inequalities as well as sexuality and culture. For example, within my intersectional research on social policy, citizenship, and community activism, I drew on materialist feminism, critical race theory, political economic theory, and queer theory (Naples, 1998). An epistemological view is also evident in the work of both Collins (2000) and Smith (1987, 1990). Collins's (2000) intersectional approach, which centered the construct of the matrix of domination, identified four dimensions of power woven together to contour Black women's social, political, and economic lives:

- a structural dimension (i.e., "how social institutions are organized to reproduce Black women's subordination over time" (Collins, 2000, p. 277);
- a disciplinary dimension, which highlights the role of the State and other institutions that rely on bureaucracy and surveillance to regulate inequalities;
- a hegemonic dimension, which deals with ideology, culture, and consciousness; and
- an interpersonal dimension, the "level of everyday social interaction" (Collins, 2000, p. 277).

Collins (2000) argued that by "manipulating ideology and culture, the hegemonic domain acts as a link between social institutions (structural domain), their

organizational practices (disciplinary domain), and the level of everyday social interaction (interpersonal domain)” (p. 284).

Smith’s (1987) approach to intersectionality incorporates historical, cultural, textual, discursive, institutional, and other structural dimensions that contour the intersections of race, class, gender, sexuality, national, and religious identity, among other social phenomena. She used the term *relations of ruling* to capture the ways these different dimensions shape everyday life. Her institutional ethnographic approach is especially powerful for revealing how interactions within and across these different dimensions of social life produce contradictions and tensions that can create the grounds for resistance and politicization.

In order to broaden the factors to be incorporated into an intersectional frame, I foregrounded disability and sexuality studies in my course. We read Smith and Hutchison’s (2004) book, *Gendering Disability*, and Beckett’s (2004) “Crossing the Border: Locating Heterosexuality as a Boundary for Lesbian and Disabled Women.” Class member Michael Hardej found the focus on disability useful for his interest in issues of the body. As he explained in his weekly memo:

By taking the disability framework and incorporating it into feminist critiques and more importantly using intersectionality the ability/disability binary can be problematized to further understand the body. Not just one monolithic body, but variations of the body that take into consideration issues of gender, sexuality, race and class. Bodies with disabilities show how genders can be rethought of and understood. When . . . a body . . . no longer works in [traditional ways in] a given capacity alternatives are formed. It is with these alternatives that gender is reinvented.

Furthermore, I wanted to make sure that our discussion of intersectionality included sensitivity to contemporary globalization as it influences conceptualizations of difference, feminisms, and positionalities. I found work by Kaplan (1994), Basu (1995), Kondo (1999), Stasiulis (1999), King (2002), and Mohanty (2003) offered useful introductions to the complexities associated with the interplay of local social formations and transnationalism. In this regard, I added a session on geography and intersectionality using readings from Staeheli, Kofman, and Peake’s (2004) edited collection *Mapping Women, Making Politics: Feminism and Political Geography*. In their essay in the book, Wastl-Walter and Staeheli (2004) argued:

As social powers, territory and boundaries are ways of enforcing ideas about who and what belongs in particular places and the kinds of activities and practices that belong to a place or are seen as being appropriate; as such, questions of identity and difference are critical to the ways in which territory and boundaries are constructed. (p. 141)

Class member Jayme Schwartzman explained that “apparent in this assertion is the malleability of boundaries and territories depending upon one’s social location and position in ‘the state.’” Feminist social geographers offered another angle of vision on intersectionality that destabilizes essentialist notions of identity as well as that of place and space.

Queer intersectional analyses also proved productive in that they destabilize fixed or binary approaches to gender, sexuality, and the body. For this intervention, I included publications by Butler (1994) and Currah (2006) whose scholarship has been especially useful in this regard. Given my own research on sexuality and migration, I included a session on gender, race, sexualities, and migration that featured analyses by Luibhéid (1998), Cantú (2000, 2001), and Manalansan (2006). In our introduction to *The Sexuality of Migration: Border Crossings and Mexican Immigrant Men* (Cantú, 2009), Vidal-Ortiz and I (2009) explained how Cantú takes up the insights from theories of political economy and migration and places them in dialogue with feminist and queer theories to produce a new framework for understanding the immigration of Mexican men who have sex with men:

He complicates analyses of sexuality and gender, not merely with a gesture towards intersectionality – the simultaneous study of gender, sexuality, race and class – but by intentionally illustrating how migration is constitutive of sexuality and how sexuality is constitutive of migration and as such, formulating a distinctive kind of analysis. He refers to his approach as a queer materialist paradigm and his goal, that of producing a queer political economy of immigration. (Naples & Vidal-Ortiz, 2009, p. 9)

Class member Miho Iwata found that “queering of and incorporating sexualities in transnational migration studies clearly has potential to provide yet another dimension to the analysis and production of critical intersectional understanding” that “also challenges researchers to broaden the scope of their research.”

I concluded the course with a discussion of methodology, featuring Haraway (1991) and Sandoval (2000). We also read Ken’s (2008) article that offered an innovative use of a culinary metaphor for intersectional analyses. In her final memo for the course, class member Nikki McGary wrote:

Crenshaw once suggested that we envision a traffic intersection in order to see how gender, race, and class literally intersect on bodies and have very real affects in terms of lived experiences. I have carried that analogy with me all semester. And as our readings deepened my understanding of intersectionality, the traffic intersection became increasingly [too] simple . . . too one-dimensional . . . Ivy Ken’s analogy of sugar, however, does take it a step further. By looking at food, especially sugar, we are able to see how it is grown, processed, manufactured, consumed, and recycled.

In terms of the embodied intersectionality of social categories and lived realities, the analogy is useful when considering how complex social power relations are taught, maintained, consumed in the market, internalized and perpetuated. However, this approach focuses on the body and does not focus so much on the intersectionality of methodology. Instead, imagine a multidimensional star, with lines that have no beginning and no end and that the point where they intersect is the point of focus. These lines could represent embodied social categories (gender, sexuality, race, class, ability, “etc . . .”) or social systems (education, the family, law, disciplinary practices . . .) or academic disciplines and theorists (cultural theory, racialization theory, poststructuralism, Foucault, Fanon, Butler . . .). But then imagine that the point of focus can slide endlessly along any part of any line, making an infinite number of possible foci for intersectional research. What lines are selected for examination, the boundaries between the lines, locating invisibilized lines and where the lines meet becomes the methodological point of departure.

In response to concerns raised by class member Barbara Gurr, whose research focuses on Lakota women’s prenatal care and childbirth (Gurr, 2014), I wove in readings throughout the course by scholars who analyzed Indigenous or Native women’s positionality and political activism. In her final memo for the course, Gurr commented on Ross’s (2005) essay, “Personalizing Methodology: Narratives of Imprisoned Native Women,” which we read for the concluding session:

Ross hints at the complexity of Native identity at several points in her essay; yet at the same time, she seems to find a sense of solidarity with the Native women prisoners she describes, despite the variable “states” of their Native-ness (for instance, reservation, off-reservation, and non-reservation). Thus there seems to be a unity forged among Native women in the face of a common “enemy” (White people? The prison system? Colonization?) The cultural and historical production of “Native-ness” shared by both Ross and the Native prisoners seems to create community between them those non-Native prisoners and staff members cannot (or do not) access. Is this sense of community amongst these Native women, similar perhaps to a common “Black” identity, forgeable only in the face of a common oppositional force?

Ideally, in my view, intersectional studies should link analyses across different fields (Greenwood, this volume). Few scholars discuss how to place different intersectional approaches in dialogue with one another. In fact, I wish more scholars who assert an intersectional analysis for their work would make their methodology explicit.

Smith's (2005) institutional ethnographic approach offers one of the most powerful methodologies for intersectional research. Smith's (1987, 1990, 2005) focus on reflection, action, and accountability formed a core component of what I have come to identify as a fifth approach to intersectionality, *intersectional feminist praxis*. This form of intersectionality foregrounds the ways activism or experience shapes knowledge, an insight often lost when theoretical approaches are institutionalized in the academy. It also reflects the feminist praxis that gave rise to the concept and honors the fact that theory develops in a dialogic fashion from practice. Intersectional analyses require crossing many different kinds of borders including those drawn between academic disciplines, between academic feminism and feminist activism, and between local and transnational politics. From the point of view of praxis it is necessary to create stronger links between local organizing and transnational politics and, in turn, translate the political strategies and organizing frames generated on the transnational political stage to benefit local social and economic justice movements.

Each approach to intersectionality we examined during the course offered a different angle of vision on the complex processes, relationships, and structural conditions that shape everyday life, relations of ruling, and the resistance strategies of diverse actors. But much has changed in the field since then including within my own work on intersectionality. For example, other scholars have developed typologies that more or less map onto my own. Knowledge generated through praxis continues to inform the feminist project both within and outside of the academy. The challenge is to keep the reflexive process alive through intersectional practice in different arenas. This includes attending to ways of knowing both within and outside of the academy. For example, Choo and Ferree (2010) considered the challenge in multiple approaches to intersectionality as "group-centered, process-centered, and system-centered" (p. 130). The first approach aligns with Strid, Walby, and Armstrong's (2012) attention to "giving voice to the oppressed" (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 131). The second mirrors my discussion of "analytic intersections" (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 131), or what I call the social structural approach, both approaches using McCall (2001, 2005) as an illustration. The third foregrounds the differences in the extent to which researchers do or do not "give *institutional primacy* to one or more sites for producing social inequalities" (Choo & Ferree, 2010, p. 131). Following an overview of the different approaches, Choo and Ferree concluded with a call for a complex intersectional approach.

Intersectional Feminist Praxis

In my review of different academic categorizations or differentiations of intersectionality, I was struck by the lack of attention to praxis as a central component. I then shifted attention to case studies informed by feminist praxis to explore the extent to which intersectionality was a central frame in the analysis.

Five dimensions surfaced in the shift from understanding intersectionality as an analytic framework to becoming more self-reflexively focused on social change. Some of these dimensions are evident in previously discussed approaches such as the embodied and relational approaches. The first dimension follows from the standpoint epistemological understanding that “the intersection of diverse social experiences . . . produce different ways of knowing” (Naples, 2013, p. 661). This also evokes a second dimension, the recognition that these knowledges are further deepened in community and dialogue.

Others dimensions are explicitly action-oriented such as “empowerment for activism” (Naples, 2013, p. 661), a third feature of intersectional feminist praxis. As I explained, “empowerment for activism underscores the significance of community and the availability of safe spaces for providing the context in which individuals can critically reflect on their experiences and political strategies in dialogue with others” (Naples, 2013, p. 661). This dimension of intersectional feminist praxis has a long history that evokes the work of Freire (1970/2000) and is evident in the feminist consciousness-raising groups of the 1970s. However, attention to race, class, and other structures of difference and power that Collins (2000) and Springer (2002) detailed in their Black feminist approaches were missing in these previous formulations.

A fourth dimension that informs intersectional feminist praxis is “placing in dialogue situated knowledges generated in multiple social locations by diverse social actors for generating collaborative strategies for action” (Naples, 2013, p. 662). This dimension captures the process by which local actors come into association with others who are, at times, far from their social positions and geographic locations (see also Young, 1990). In intersectional feminist praxis, the central role of the collaborative deliberative process of knowledge production is to generate strategies to inform collective active to challenge inequality and other social justice efforts. These actions are then reflected on though the participatory and deliberative process to inform subsequent social justice activism.

Collaborative deliberative practice is illustrated in Sharma’s (2008) rich case study that demonstrated the challenges and possibilities of intersectional feminist praxis. Sharma’s study brought the state back in and helped students understand the contradictions of feminist praxis as it engages with state-supported community action. The angle of vision offered by Sharma resurfaced a central concern of Crenshaw’s (1989) in her analysis of Black women as plaintiffs in discrimination cases in the U.S. Using court cases, Crenshaw (1989) illustrated how race and gender were understood as separable facets of Black women’s cases. Instead, she argued, an intersectional approach challenges the basic premise by which these cases are heard and resolved. Here it is important to point out the central goal of intersectional analyses, namely, to inform social activism and policy.

Strid et al. (2012) further examined the contradictory processes by which feminists engage with the state. They examined the extent to which multiple

intersecting inequalities became visible in three different policy arenas: sexual violence, domestic violence, and forced marriage. Strid et al. (2012) conceptualized visibility of diverse inequalities ranging “from the simple naming of inequalities to a substantive recognition of intersectionality that has an effect on the policy outcome” (p. 565). The most robust inclusion of women’s voices occurred in the construction of policy against forced marriage. Analysis of domestic violence policy also revealed a strong process of inclusion and increased visibility. Within the policy debates on sexual violence, intersectional inequalities were named but “the connection between inequalities and how they work structurally through intersecting fields and intersecting policy domains” remained invisible (Strid et al., 2012, p. 559). Strid and colleagues challenged “the assumption that visibility necessarily equates with recognition and voice, or that invisibility means a lack of inclusion and intersectionality” (p. 574). Strid et al. concluded that:

For empirical analysis, the understanding that inequalities are interconnected but can simultaneously be named separately and distinguished is very important. This means that the relation between multiple inequalities is theorized as one that is mutually shaping rather than as either additive or mutually constituted. (p. 575)

Intersectional methodological practice is also a central concern of Choo and Ferree’s (2010) analysis. Choo and Ferree argued for developing methods to study “multiple and intersection hierarchies more relationally . . . [and] call for critical understandings of the workings of the discourses and networks where power circulates throughout societal institutions at different ‘scales’” (p. 147). Their goal was to promote a more robust intersectional sociological methodology. Although they did not start and end in praxis, implicit in their analysis was the goal of fostering research that provides better understanding of how inequality is produced and sustained. With such knowledge, it is possible to consider more effective interventions. In this way, Choo and Ferree shared an implicit praxis goal that Strid et al. (2012) made more explicit.

Conclusion

The institutionalization of intersectionality in the academy led to a displacement of praxis as the central force driving its articulation. However, intersectional feminist praxis continues to inform social justice activism and, in this way, has the potential to reinvigorate academic approaches (e.g., Dessel & Cordivae, this volume; Rios, Bowling, & Harris, this volume). Hewitt (2011) emphasized the importance of intersectional feminist praxis in transnational social justice activism. Feminist insights highlight the importance of generating processes to create and sustain “egalitarian, horizontal, and intersectional modes of working and

thinking” (Hewitt, 2011, p. 88). Intersectional feminist praxis includes drawing insights from diverse social movements to further enrich complex understandings of how power works and can be resisted in different contexts. As I noted, “lessons from anti-racist, anti-colonial, and anti-capitalist struggles and campaigns for LGBT and disabilities rights have been incorporated into intersectional feminist praxis and have also informed activism within these movements” (Naples, 2013, p. 674). For example, Crass (2013) analyzed the powerful solidarity work of feminists and anti-racist organizers, Wappett (2002) detailed the significance of feminist praxis for disabilities rights activism, and Moghadam, Franzway, and Fonow (2011) explored the effective interventions of feminists and LGBT activists in the labor movement. Queer interventions have been especially powerful for interrupting the complacency of intersectional feminist approaches. For example, Currier (2012) demonstrated the importance of queer perspectives for intersectional feminist praxis. As I explained,

Currier’s rich historical and ethnographic comparative account cautions against positing intersectional feminist praxis as a decontextualized and abstracted political methodology, and, in and of itself, a solution to the contradictions and divisions that plague social justice organizing. (Naples, 2013, pp. 674–675)

Taken together, different intersectional approaches provide a powerful analytic lens through which scholars can uncover what Grewal and Kaplan (1994) termed the *scattered hegemonies* that differentially structure everyday lives. However, without making explicit its epistemological grounds, methodological strategies, and implications for praxis, feminist research will fail to achieve the promise of intersectionality. Feminist teachers have the opportunity to share the history, context, and complexity of intersectional approaches as they function within an ongoing feminist praxis designed to identify and challenge social inequalities and achieve social justice.

Note

- 1 A previous version of this chapter was published as: Naples, N. (2009). Teaching intersectionality intersectionally. *International Feminist Journal of Politics*, 11, 566–577. Reprinted by permission of the publisher (Taylor & Francis Ltd, www.tandfonline.com). The current version was altered to reflect APA style and formatting, update citations and information, and connect with the broader edited volume.

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