

Recent Developments in Intersectionality Research: Expanding beyond Race and Gender

Introduction

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Intersectionality has long been a cornerstone of feminist discussion and scholarship around the world (McClintock 1995; Rao 2012). But the concept itself – intersectionality – continues to demand additional explication, interrogation, and development. In 2005, *Politics & Gender* published a Critical Perspectives on intersectionality that generated a great deal of interest and debate. A recent mini symposium in *Political Research Quarterly* coedited by Evelyn Simien and Ange-Marie Hancock (2011) further extended this discussion, providing contributions from across subfields in political science to enrich the theoretical arguments and empirical explorations of topics that intersect and combine issues of sexual orientation, race, gender, class, and national origin across the world. This Critical Perspectives seeks to build on these foundations by contributing additional empirical and theoretical attention to the ways in which intersectional analysis can render certain experiences of oppression invisible or seemingly out of the bounds of politics.

Research on intersectionality has gone through several stages in its academic development. In the South Asian colonial struggle, intersectional analysis of caste, gender, and colonialism had versions that included a strong class analysis (Rao 2003; 2012). In the United States, early work by Crenshaw (1989; 1991) sought to contextualize the ways in which the multidimensional nature of black women's experiences of injustice were rendered invisible or even exacerbated by single-axis approaches to justice in which sex was separated from race into apparently mutually exclusive categories. Neither antiracist

politics without feminism nor antisexist politics without antiracist analysis were liberating to African-American women.

As the work of Jordan-Zachary shows, though familiar as a starting point for United States–based academics, intersectional analysis is still not done very well, even when it pertains to African-American women specifically. This is because, as Hirschmann argues, the import of intersectional analysis is more of a truism than a practice in feminist scholarship. Feminists recognize diversity and difference within categories more often than we analyze diversity and difference in scholarship.

The topic continues to be of central importance to feminist scholars, and research in this area has continued to evolve (Davis 2008; Hancock 2007). Indeed, there are many more categories of experience that intersect and overlap and that can be explored from the perspective of intersectional thinking, particularly in furthering our understanding of the ways that certain identities become politicized while others do not. It is important to note that such representations reflect and reinforce the dominant power hierarchies that exist in various cultures and societies around the world.

Perhaps intersectional analysis, as it was developed in the reflection of African-American women's exclusion related to race and gender, must keep the notion of exclusion central. Perhaps such a regrouping of U.S. feminists' intersectional analysis in U.S. African-American women's exclusions could teach us two things. It might simply teach us that we are prone to exclusion, even in our academic work, and so we should be careful not to exclude any category of individual, starting with those who have been previously excluded on the basis of race and gender, and expanding that list to include all manners of exclusion, including sexuality, disability, immigrant status, and so on. The list may get long, but the concern is straightforward (Hancock 2011). Yet such a descriptive view of exclusion does not appreciate the analytical potential of intersectionality (Ackerly 2011).

Starting with African-American women's exclusion takes us in another direction as well. That is, intersectional analysis has the potential to enable us to see forces at work, not merely the categories of humans on which they work (though it does do that). The authors of this Critical Perspectives section take the inspiration of that 1980s work by African-American feminists and they use it to unleash intersectionality's analytical potential not only to examine a range of political contexts in which groups and their politics are marginalized,

but also to understand how the political processes by which their politics become invisible often remain invisible themselves.

Intersectional work among feminists in U.S. academe typically draws upon the work of African-American feminists whose political arguments were situated in, and informative of, U.S. race and gender politics. Respect for that history need not ignore the historical contingencies of that history. Elsewhere, in South Asia for example, the historical contingencies of caste, class, gender, and colonialism framed the emergence of intersectional analysis more than a century ago. Today, around the world, we can see examples of feminists using intersectional analysis to reveal a whole range of concealed intersectional power dynamics across a wide range of historically diverse and environmentally shaped contexts.

These essays broaden the analytical capacity of intersectionality in unexpected ways. On the surface, it may appear that they are adding queer (Duong, Strolovitch), disability (Hirschmann), and African-American lesbian (Jordan-Zachary) to the list of categories ripe for intersectional analysis. Or it may appear that they are applying familiar intersectional analyses to unfamiliar debates around lynching (Carter) and human trafficking (Robertson and Sgoutas). The propensity to list political concerns, however, is a legacy of simplistic uses of intersectionality to which none of these authors contributes.

Instead, they use intersectional analysis to gain fresh analytical purchase on old problems. These analytical contributions are quite different. Robertson and Sgoutas, as well as Carter, give us new applications for intersectional analysis; Hirschmann reveals the function of fear in the construction and normalization of categories of people. Duong reveals the politicization of identity. And Jordan-Zachary trains our gaze on the role of the researcher.

The contributions to these Critical Perspectives on intersectionality were solicited through an open call. The submitted manuscripts demonstrate that there is a wealth of work in progress that is using intersectional analysis to transform our categories and processes of analysis — particularly as they are focused on political processes. As this work illustrates, intersectional analysis is a lynchpin feminist tool that connects the study of newly visible struggles to the insights we have learned from prior analysis of *other formerly invisible struggles*.

Our goal in this section is to be analytically reflective as well as suggestive of future research agendas. These essays suggest a more theoretically inclusive construction of intersectionality and encourage

both a wider empirical lens in future work and more self-conscious interrogation of the explicitly political role that marginalized identities serve within existing dominance hierarchies. *Politics & Gender* strongly encourages future submissions on these topics from interested scholars working on topics in this area.

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What Does Queer Theory Teach Us about Intersectionality? Kevin Duong, Cornell University

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"What does queer theory teach us about x ?" ask Berlant and Warner (1995). "As difficult as it would be to spell out programmatic content for