Doing Intersectionality Research: From Conceptual Issues to Practical Examples
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Intersections of Inequality: Understanding Marginalization and Privilege in the Post-Civil Rights Era

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DOI: 10.1017/S1743923X07000050

The post-civil rights era has left an important dilemma in U.S. politics. Despite the fact that the United States has become more integrated across racial and gendered lines since the 1960s, inequality, particularly economic inequality, has grown. Although much of that inequality continues to fall along racial, gender, and class lines, the opportunities afforded by the "rights revolution" have also created an important heterogeneity of privilege within marginal groups. As social scientists, how best can we identify the sources and results of this inequality? More specifically, how can we better understand the crosscutting political effects of both marginalization and privilege within and among groups in U.S. society? I contend that intersections theory may be a useful place to begin, and that the idea of intersectionality could provide a fruitful framework with which to understand issues of inequality in the post-civil rights era. Such a framework would help address some of the theoretical problems that sometimes arise within empirical work on marginal groups in political science and, ideally, allow scholars to understand better how experiences of marginalization and privilege affect the shape and character of American political life.

Introduction

In 2002, the Council of the American Political Science Association, in an effort to "enhance the public relevance of political science," convened a Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy. The charge to its members was to "review and assess the best current scholarship about the

A previous version of this essay was presented as a paper at the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, Washington, DC. My thanks to Fred Harris, Rodney Hero, Jennifer Hochschild, Michael Jones-Correa, Dianne Pinderhughes, Phillipa Strum, and Howard Winant for their thoughtful feedback, as well as my winter 2004 "Intersections" graduate seminar for their help developing the ideas presented here.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X07000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press

health and functioning of U.S. democracy in a time of rising inequality" (Task Force on Inequality and American Democracy 2004, 651). In its report, the Task Force (ibid.) contends that persistent and rising inequalities within American society are threatening our "country's ideals of equal citizenship and responsive government," and argues that the "scourge of overt discrimination against African-Americans and women has been replaced by a more subtle but potent threat — the growing concentration of the country's wealth and income in the hands of the few." In a review of the research, it finds that inequality has risen at higher rates in the United States than in other industrialized nations. The Task Force (p. 652) also finds that while the "Civil Rights era helped lift the absolute levels of income and wealth enjoyed by African-Americans and Hispanics . . . they remain unacceptably far behind white America." It concludes that the accumulated privilege held by the well-off in terms of their political voice and political influence has the potential to undermine the foundation of our democratic institutions.

The Task Force's report was meant to bring scholarly expertise to bear on the question of inequality in America and to highlight, for a public audience, an important and growing problem within American politics, namely, the increasingly unequal distribution of opportunities, access, and resources within American society. But its report also highlights a significant dilemma faced by those conducting academic scholarship on issues of inequality — how to adequately conceptualize and theorize about the social, political, and economic inequalities that continue to exist in America after the end of de jure discrimination. Although much of this inequality continues to fall along racial, gender, and class lines, the opportunities afforded by the "rights revolution" have created an important heterogeneity of privilege within marginal groups. As social scientists, how best can we identify the sources and results of this inequality? More specifically, how can we better understand the crosscutting political effects of both marginalization and privilege within and among groups in U.S. society? Howard Winant (2000, 180) sees this dilemma as posing a fundamental challenge to racial theories developed during the twentieth century, and argues that we need new racial theories to address the "persistence of racial classification and stratification in an era officially committed to racial equality and multiculturalism." He argues that the world now is racially multipolar and hybridity is a key feature of racial identity. Thus, we need what he calls a "racially conscious conception of action and agency" (p. 181). In other words, frameworks like ethnicity theory and theories of class and

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nation are inadequate to the task of explaining the complexities inherent in racializing processes in the post-civil rights world.

What about our theories of gender? Can they assist in this regard? Feminist theory has explicitly taken on the need to question the epistemological and methodological assumptions of social science theory in order to address issues of power and hierarchy within society (Harding and Norberg 2005). Sandra Harding and Kathryn Norberg (2005, 2011) argue that as part of critical studies, feminist methodology and epistemology prioritize "studying up" — "studying the powerful, their institutions, politics, and practices instead of focusing only on those whom the powerful govern." By doing so, "researchers can identify the conceptual practices of power and how they shape daily social relations." Similarly, Iris Marion Young (2005, 493) argues that our society exhibits "multiple logics of gender" that may "have loose or contradictory relationships to the comportments of actual men and women." As such, "gender is better thought of as a set of ideational and social structural relationships that people move through, rather than attributes they have attached to their persons." It would seem that feminist methodology would be particularly apropos to the study of other ideational and social structural relationships, like race, class, and sexuality, that create inequality among people. Yet for some time, scholars of color have critiqued feminism for not paying sufficient attention to the other kinds of marginalization that exist within and among individuals (Hill Collins 2000; hooks 2000; Srivastava 2005).

The core question being raised by the Inequality Task Force and Winant is: How we can talk about marginalization and privilege among groups within a context of increased heterogeneity both within and among them? How can we compare the experiences of a working-class white woman to that of an upper-class black man? Clearly, both are in privileged positions along one dimension, but also are marginal along others. I contend that the intersections literature is useful in this regard, and that an intersections framework sensitive to the concerns central to feminist methodology can help scholars unpack how privilege and marginalization can coexist within individuals and better understand how the experiences of both affect individuals' political attitudes and behaviors.

Intersections

The intersections literature evolved from a general dissatisfaction, on the part of women of color, with the theoretical models coming out of both

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race studies and gender studies. In her 1984 book *Feminist Theory*, bell hooks articulated her frustration with what she called the race and class biases of American feminism. She criticized Betty Friedan's work as "a case study of narcissism, insensitivity, sentimentality and self indulgence" and argued that "it is only by analyzing racism and its function in capitalist society that a thorough understanding of class relationships can occur" (hooks 2000, 3). She cautioned against the assumption that all women experience a "common oppression," and emphasized that feminist arguments for equality raise the question of "equal to whom"? Do black women want to be equal to black men or to white women? The absence of these concerns in traditional feminist theory, hooks argued, keeps feminism from addressing the multiple oppressions that serve to support and maintain patriarchy.

Since the publication of hooks's work, other scholars have developed further the concepts she laid out. Kimberlé Crenshaw was among the first to employ the term "intersectionality" to describe black women's experiences before the law (Crenshaw 1991). She emphasizes the fact that multiple oppressions cannot be understood as "additive." Rather, they are mutually constitutive. For example, in her historical study of race and gender relations in North Carolina, Glenda Gilmore (1996) highlights the ways that patriarchy was interrelated with the maintenance of white supremacy, particularly in terms of controlling the sexuality of white women in the South. Similarly, Nancy Hirschmann (2003) shows how the denial of educational opportunities to bourgeois women in eighteenth-century England was key to the maintenance of class divisions based on Lockean understandings of "reason." These are just two examples of how systems of oppression interrelate and support one another. As a result, no single oppression (i.e., that of race or that of gender) can be singled out and analyzed on its own; all must be understood and included simultaneously.

How can these theoretical insights enhance our ability to study inequality? First, on the micro level, the idea of intersection is predicated on the principle of complicating and interrogating individual identity. One of the main points made by intersections theorists is that none of these lines of oppression — race, class, gender, or sexuality — can be understood without reference to the others, and individual identity, by definition, includes more than one kind of experience. In other words, individuals cannot be boiled down to one kind of societal categorization, and individual experience, by definition, has the potential to include experiences of marginalization and privilege simultaneously. Additionally,

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individuals' understanding of these categorizations is largely a relational one; self-identifications do not exist in isolation and derive their meanings from their relationships to other categorizations. That hybridity within groups and within individuals is one of the aspects of the post-civil rights world that scholars need to be able to understand.

Second, on the macro level, intersection forces scholars to situate individual experiences within the larger historical and structural context, including the role of the state in perpetuating these systems of inequality. For example, as Hawley Fogg-Davis (2005) shows, the street harassment of lesbian working-class African-American women, and society's reactions to it, cannot be understood without looking at how these women's positionality challenges common understandings of race, gender, class, and sexuality. The structural location of both the perpetrators and victims of this crime must be taken into consideration in order to understand fully the political implications of such behavior. This satisfies Winant's (2000, 181) assertion that a new racial theory must link "the micro and macro aspects of racial signification and racialized social structure." What it also does is allow us to see how these racialized processes intersect with experiences of class, gender, and sexuality, thus providing a more complete picture of how the unequal distribution of marginalization and privilege operates in our society.

These theoretical insights are important insofar as we can use them to inform the methodological approaches we use to study these questions. Traditionally within the social sciences, the dividing line has been between qualitative and quantitative approaches. Yet, Mustafa Emirbayer (1997) argues that the distinction should really be between what he calls transactional (or relational) analysis and what he calls "inter-action." In an analysis using inter-action, Emirbayer argues that "things" are balanced against other "things" in causal interconnection and all substantive action takes place among them; it is assumed that the things themselves do not move or act. In contrast, in a "trans-action," "the very terms or units involved . . . derive their meaning, significance and identity from [changing] functional roles they play within that transaction" (p. 287). As a result, "'things' can only exist in relation to one another and can never be treated as 'given' in isolation" (p. 287). Thus, "individual persons . . . are inseparable from the transactional contexts within which they are embedded" (ibid.). He goes on to argue that one of the problems with standard statistical models in social science is that they employ an inter-action framework, and thus conceptualize independent variables as remaining fixed and unchanging as they

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"bounce" off one another within a particular model. In these models, the independent variables are assumed to "act upon" the dependent variables, but none of the variables, other than the dependent one, are seen as changed or affected by that inter-action. I argue that this relational understanding of power and structural position is central to intersections research and can move us forward in our ability to study and explain experiences of inequality.

Toward a Model of Intersection

Theorists in other disciplines have been talking about these conceptual problems for years, yet little of this discussion has made its way into the "empirical" world of political science (some exceptions are Cohen 1999; Dawson 1994, 2000; Hochschild 1995; Jones-Correa 1998; Tate 1993). Although factors like race and gender have largely been accepted as social constructions in terms of political science discourse, that conceptualization has been seen as incompatible with empirical (often quantitative) analysis (Smith 2004). As a result, empirical studies of marginalization largely have not been informed by political theory, and vice versa (Fogg-Davis 2003).

This split is founded on important normative differences, which I do not wish to dismiss. Many theorists looking at questions of marginalization would be extremely uncomfortable with (if not outright hostile to) any attempt to "operationalize" what are fluid and contested processes. I agree with the position that we must be careful not to essentialize or reify particular group identities and/or memberships. But at the current state in political science, a growing number of scholars are using methodological tools created for the study of whites and applying them to the study of marginal groups. As Jan Leighley (2001) points out, this adaptation has happened with little discussion of the theoretical assumptions underlying these approaches. Many of these analyses only focus on one line of marginality — race, gender, and/or class — rather than on any sort of intersection among them. So the current state of the discipline is that scholars are studying inequality, but in a way that has a limited relationship to our theoretical understandings of why inequality matters in society. For scholars interested in these questions to simply say that these experiences cannot be operationalized is insufficient, I believe, and cedes the empirical field unnecessarily. The result is that we miss the opportunity to develop a more theoretically informed understanding of the role that inequality plays in the structure and function of

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American society, across multiple dimensions, and to use that understanding to inform the methods we apply to study these processes. In the following, I lay out the ways in which I believe this theory can be applied in social research, with the understanding that no approach is perfect, but that using this theoretical frame may move us closer to a more nuanced and accurate understanding of the role these social forces play in the distribution of power in society.

Yet we are left with the question: How do we do this? I would argue that at the core of intersectional work is a questioning of existing categories and the refusal to accept any social groupings as "natural." In addition, the research design would need to be flexible enough that it allows for the research to arrive at an answer that is unexpected. As such, a model of intersection would need to reflect the dynamic relationship that exists between the individual and his or her social context, and demonstrate that individuals' understanding and experience of that relationship is at core a relational one. Finally, power should be located at the center of the analysis, in terms of analyzing the experiences of the marginal and of the privileged, and in terms of the perspective of the scholar conducting the research. As Harding and Norberg (2005, 2009) point out:

> Social research turns the chaotic and confusing experiences of everyday life into categories of people in society, categories that reflect prevailing political arrangements. The social sciences then assign causal relations to people and social relations in these categories. These causal accounts enable institutions to govern our everyday lives in ways that fulfill the interests and desires of these institutions, and of the social groups that design and manage them, but not the interests and desires of our societies' most socioeconomically, socially, and politically vulnerable groups. Thus the social sciences, while claiming to do impartial research, construct the "conceptual practices of power."

I would hope that an intersectional approach would, by definition, deconstruct the "conceptual practices of power," both discursively and empirically. But as scholars, we need to be mindful of not reifying or essentializing the very categorizations that we are attempting to question, and open to the possibility that our story will change in the process of engaging in that research.

Thus, for me, intersectional work is defined by its very diversity. This analytical approach can encompass multiple methods and multiple approaches to understanding and critically interrogating social phenomena in the United States and abroad. Yet as intersectional

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scholars, we need to retain a certain amount of humility and realism — no single study or approach is going to be able to encompass the entirety of inequality in society. But as a body of work employing multiple methods and using multiple measures, I believe, intersectional social science can move us closer to understanding how marginalization and privilege affect individuals' and groups' life experiences and life chances. In terms of my own work, I have developed an intersectional approach for understanding political incorporation in marginal communities. My model includes four key concepts: 1) a multifaceted understanding of collective identity; with a focus on 2) the relationship between stigma and group membership; 3) the role of social networks; and 4) the effects of the larger sociohistorical context. I will discuss each in turn.

"Measuring" Collective Identity

For the study of political engagement in marginal communities, I believe a core question is an individual's group attachments and the relative levels of social stigma (and therefore power) that they believe come with those attachments. Ascriptive social groupings become problematic because of the negative attributions, and the access (or not) to material benefits, that are attached to those groupings. Thus, I believe it is not necessary to know *exactly* what a person's identity is — it is likely that it is impossible to arrive at the absolute answer to that question. Rather, it may be more fruitful to focus on the *relational* aspects of that identity, meaning what they believe *others* think about them, and the relative social, political, and economic standing that entails because of the group(s) they belong to. In other words, the issue is not whether a person identifies as blue or purple. What matters is how they believe others view those colors, and the relative stigma and power attached to that (and potentially other) attribution(s). Personal identity is a quintessentially *individual* experience, but the social, economic, and political implications of that identification are largely relational. It seems to me that the role of intersectional social science is to accept the existence of the first, and to focus its energies on disentangling and interrogating the second.

That said, identity has to be one of the most difficult concepts to define or measure, and so I make no claims to providing a final answer here. But I do believe that political scientists could do a much better job of measuring group identity than we do currently. I also believe that scholars should make the attempt, with the understanding that any potential measure is bound to be imperfect, and unlikely to completely grasp a concept that

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is fluid, relative, and contested. I believe a focus on the relational aspects of identity may be most fruitful, and addresses some of the limitations surrounding the measurement of this concept. As such, what is important is that the measure allow individuals to express multiple group memberships, and that it allow individuals to express the degree to which they believe their fate is "linked" to that of each group, and the value they attach (and believe society attaches) to that linkage.

The importance of allowing individuals to express multiple group memberships is straightforward, particularly within the context of intersection. I would just like to provide a number of caveats. First, such an understanding must not see these group memberships as additive or hierarchically ordered. It may be true that particular memberships, for important political and historical reasons, are more salient with regard to certain issues and contexts. This has been found to be true in terms of racial versus gender identity in the United States (Gay and Tate 1998; Mansbridge and Tate 1992). But scholars must keep in mind that any extant ordering is likely a *political* product, rather than any "natural" ordering of these identifications. As the intersections literature shows, we need to treat individuals as whole people with multiple identifications, rather than trying to separate out, and hierarchically order, the particular identifications.

Second, the acceptance of multiple potential memberships should also keep scholars open to the potential for multiple potential experiences both within and among different groups. Many contemporary commentators point to the lack of a universal "black," "gay," or "female" experience as justification for ignoring these categorizations altogether. Part of what has allowed this and other "color-blind talk" to take root in American political discourse has been scholars' inability to show how this multiplicity of experience is in fact the direct result of inequality of opportunity in American society across multiple dimensions (Kim 2000). As hooks (2000) points out, all forms of oppression support one another. Rather than attempting to generalize across what are very different experiences, this more flexible model of collective identity would allow scholars to see how marginalization and privilege are crosscutting, and how they express themselves differently across groups, contexts, and experiences. We are trying to measure multiple identities but cannot forget that all are interrelated and relative to one another, even within a particular person.

In addition to incorporating an understanding of multiple group identity, an intersectional collective identity measure should also

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incorporate some understanding of what Michael Dawson (1994) calls "linked fate" — the extent to which the individual sees his or her fate (social, economic, and/or political) as related to the fate of the larger group. While Dawson (1994) shows quite convincingly the importance of this factor among African Americans, little has been done to look at the role of linked fate in the attitudes of members of other marginalized groups. In the Latina/o community, I find that feelings of linked fate, combined with feelings of group worth, are important to the development of political efficacy, particularly at the local level (García Bedolla 2005). Cathy Cohen's (1999) work on gays in the black community would lead us to expect that feelings of "linked fate" will vary significantly across multiple marginalities, but these questions need to be explored further. Incorporating the idea of linked fate, and exploring it among multiple potential identities, is important because it shows the relative degree of attachment the individual has to particular group identifications. In particular, it shows how meaningful certain attachments are relative to others the individual may have. This helps scholars understand the interrelation among identities, something we currently know little about. It also provides important information about how individual affinities relate to external group attributions, a point which I return to later.

In terms of concrete measures that address these questions, social psychologists have developed a number of different scales that hold promise as potential measures of collective identity. For example, in his work on party identification, Steven Greene (2002) provides a useful critique of the standard National Election Study/Michigan measure of partisanship, much of which is applicable to other measures of group identification. He suggests the use of a psychologically based measure of group social identity, one which contains measures of group affinity, linked fate, and some gauge of feelings of group stigma. J. Phinney (1989) has developed a model of ethnic identity development, which is based on a 14-item multigroup ethnic identity questionnaire. It includes measures of group attachment, feelings of belonging, and group behaviors. John Duckitt, Jane Callaghan, and Claire Wagner (2005) refine Phinney's work and test four identity scales — ethnocultural involvement, ethnocultural attachment, salience of ethnocultural identity, and generalized group attitude — on four ethnic groups in South Africa. They find all four to be quite reliable. In a recent pilot study, I tested these scales with Latino, Asian American, and white eighth-grade students in Orange County, California, and found all to

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have reliability measures of over .75 (García Bedolla 2006). This is not meant to be an exhaustive listing of all the options available for measuring group identity. Instead, it is meant to show that social psychologists have been working to develop quite sophisticated measures of identity processes, and that these measures could provide a useful starting point for incorporating the concerns raised here.

Stigma and Group Membership

As I mentioned previously, inequality results from group memberships because of the negative attributions attached to those groups. Thus, it would be useful for intersectional studies of marginalization to include some measure of the relationship between stigma and group membership. Jennifer Crocker, Brenda Major, and Claude Steele (1998, 505) define stigmatized individuals as ones who "possess (or are believed to possess) some attribute, or characteristic, that conveys a social identity that is devalued in a particular social context. . . . [S]tigma is a devaluing social identity." So, for stigmatization to occur, it must be placed within the larger social context. Because of this, Bruce Link and Jo Phelan (2001: 367) argue that "stigmatization is entirely contingent on access to social, economic and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labeled persons into distinct categories, and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination." Studies have shown that members of stigmatized groups internalize societal stereotypes early in life, and that this internalization has negative effects on their future socioeconomic status and psychological health. This process is also mutually reinforcing. The more stigmatized groups accept their lower status, the less likely they are to challenge the structural barriers they face.

But how would we measure stigma? Again, as we saw with measures of collective identity, it would be difficult, if not impossible, to measure "actual" levels of stigmatization in a particular society, across all possible dimensions. But what *is* possible is to arrive at some sense of individuals' feelings of personal stigma, and relate those feelings to their group identification(s) and feelings of linked fate. Again, stigma is a relational concept, one that is more about perception than concrete experience. Some of the social psychology measures discussed earlier include questions regarding relative levels of stigma. With regard to intersection, it would be important for scholars to include questions about the relative stigmatization of multiple potential group memberships. Such a

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framework would allow scholars to see how feelings of stigma can exist among multiple dimensions and how they may vary, for different reasons, both within and among marginal groups. For example, a black man is marginalized in terms of his racial identity, but dominant in terms of his gender. It is likely that these crosscutting experiences of marginalization complicate his feelings of both power and subordination within particular social contexts. A model looking at intersection must allow for a more complex picture of how power operates both within and among groups. Such a model would provide a more accurate picture about how inequality, marginalization and feelings of social stigma interact in American society and affect the life experiences of members of both marginal and dominant groups.

Social Networks

One of the most important factors tied to group membership in the United States is how it affects access to particular social networks. Scholars looking at social networks have found that individuals tend to engage in those that are racially and ideologically homophilous (McPherson, Smith-Lovin and Cook 2001). It is interesting to note that due likely to the dominance of heterosexual relationships in the United States, homophily has not been found to be as prevalent in terms of gender. To my knowledge, no studies have looked systematically at levels of homophily in relation to sexual orientation, but findings from oral histories and qualitative studies suggest tendencies towards homophily on that dimension as well (Lapovsky Kennedy and Davis 1994; Rodríguez 2003).

Thus, studies have found that members of marginal groups tend to have social networks made up largely of group members, and that network membership has important effects on group attitudes and behaviors. Clearly, people's social contexts are important. As David Knoke (1990, 1042) points out, "people constantly compare themselves to those with whom they have close ties and seek to emulate the attitudes and actions of those intimates. The recurrent communications within these small, intimate networks construct the grand interpretive schemes that anchor people to larger social systems." Particularly in reference to political behavior, he finds that social networks "are critical to shaping Americans' political behaviors. Being embedded in a strongly partisan political environment and talking about political matters with others are significant factors in national electoral participation" (p. 1058). With

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regard to marginalization and privilege, it is likely that the degree of politicization of those networks, and the kind of political conversations that occur within them, will vary significantly across groups. Incorporating social network analysis into political studies could provide important information about how inequality affects political socialization in the United States.

Yet focusing on social networks does raise a chicken/egg question — do people seek out homophilous networks because of their identifications? Or, given the high level of racial and class segregation in American society, do people have homophilous networks because those are the people with whom they have contact? It is difficult to know which direction the causal arrow goes. What we can focus on in our analysis is the ways in which social networks relate to larger feelings of linked fate and general political attitudes among group members. Since these intersecting identifications exist within a particular social context, it is important that intersectional studies of political incorporation include some measure of social networks, and that those measures also focus on the relationship between social networks and group membership. Knoke (1990) recommends a battery of questions regarding a person's close friends. Ideally, scholars could interview the friends as well. But barring that, some information about respondents' primary social connections and how they relate to their overall group memberships and process of political socialization is necessary to fully understand the intersections story.

Sociohistorical Context

The measure of social networks discussed here will address the impact of individuals' immediate social context on their political attitudes and activity. But we cannot forget that those individuals are embedded within a larger sociohistorical context that also affects their experiences and resulting worldview. As Knoke (1990, 1058) points out, national studies of political behavior in political science depict respondents as "atomized actors floating unanchored in a homogenized stream of national mass-media stimuli, their perceptions unfiltered by constraining and validating personal relationships." Clearly, that image does not accurately reflect how people experience their political lives or their local social and historical context. There are many aspects of this context that need to be taken into consideration when questions of inequality and political incorporation are dealt with.

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The first is the long-term impact that segregation has had on the development of American communities and social networks. As we mentioned, American social networks remain highly homogenous, particularly with regard to race. Martha Menchaca (1995) calls this phenomenon "social apartness" — the tendency for de facto segregation to exist even after de jure segregation ends. As social scientists, we need to be aware that this homogeneity within social networks can exist within an ostensibly racially integrated setting. Similarly, Rodney Hero (1998) shows that there is a strong correlation between the level of racial diversity within a state and the kinds of social programs and policies pursued by states. He finds that more homogenous states tend to have more generous social policies. Similarly, in recent work on social capital, Hero (2003) finds that it seems to be higher in areas that are racially homogenous. These findings suggest that the racial context has an important impact on the politics and policies of particular localities. It seems reasonable to assume that that context also has an effect on the political attitudes and behaviors of those located within that context, be they members of dominant or subordinate groups. Thus, the racial makeup of social networks and of the larger social context need to be considered when scholars look at the effects of intersection on incorporation.

There are other aspects of this context that should be important as well, including racial and economic inequality, poverty rates, home ownership, unemployment, types of employment, and levels of segregation, among others. It would be especially helpful to include some measures of community history, particularly local political organization and/or race relations. While this may seem a tall order, new technologies using geographic mapping programs may make such a construction of the "topography" of intersection possible. At the very least, we should take seriously the fact that history and structure matter — people's political socialization does not occur in isolation, and we need better ways of including these larger contextual questions in our analyses of individual attitudes and behavior.

This is just one example of what an intersectional model would look like. It is not meant to answer every possible question, but rather to highlight issues of inequality in American political incorporation that may go unnoticed using other kinds of approaches. Intersectional models examining labor practices or sexual practices would likely look very different. The main strength of this framework is its flexibility and its ability to be applied in varied contexts.

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Conclusion

Underlying this work is a normative objective of using social science research to decrease inequality in American society. Systems of social coercion are by definition highly complex. As Chantal Mouffe (1996, 254) points out, in order to address the effects of power, one first must render it visible. Intersections approaches have at their heart the desire to be true to the complexity of the human experience. By doing so, they are in fact rendering that power visible, and, therefore possibly decreasing its negative effects. In addition, for the sake of advancing public policy and pubic discourse, I believe it is important that social scientists develop a more theoretically informed understanding of how marginalization and privilege express themselves across different dimensions in American society. Through such an analysis, our work will be more true to people's actual lived experience. Additionally, the policy prescriptions and discourse arising from such an analysis would be more effective and better able to target the actual location of oppressive forces at work in our society. At the very least, we could do a much better job of describing and analyzing the structure and effects of inequality in the United States than we are currently doing. My hope is that intersectional social science approaches could be an initial step toward that larger goal.

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Intersectionality as a Normative and Empirical Paradigm

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DOI: 10.1017/S1743923X07000062

In the 10 years that I have conducted intersectional research, my views have changed significantly in terms of how I conceptualize the subspecialization. Originally I thought of intersectionality as a content-based specialization that emphasized the subjectivity of women who reside at the intersections of race-, gender-, class-, and sexual orientation–based marginalizations (and other categories of difference). Thinking of it in this way, with a focus on content, follows the logic of much groundbreaking work in women's studies and women and politics scholarship. The primary pursuit of this focus is inclusion – incorporating previously ignored and excluded populations into preexisting frameworks to broaden our knowledge base regarding traditional questions of political science. For example, examining gender differences in voting behavior, party identification, candidate recruitment, and social movements has contributed critical knowledge to the discipline of political science.

In a very similar way, questions about black women's feminist opinions (Simien 2004), Latinas' participation in social movements (Montoya, Hardy Fanta, and Garcia 2000), and Native American women's struggle for equal rights in tribal politics (Prindeville 2004) are all contributing valuable knowledge to political science and other disciplines. Such work on specific populations moves beyond a singular emphasis on race-based OR gender-based OR sexual orientation–based stratification. Intersectional research has long focused on expanding what is considered relevant to women as a group facing diversity within and significant political challenges without.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1743923X07000050 Published online by Cambridge University Press