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Intersectionality from Theoretical Framework to Policy Intervention

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Intersectionality, the assertion that social identity categories such as race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability are interconnected and operate simultaneously to produce experiences of both privilege and marginalization, has transformed old conversations while inspiring new debates across the academy. Intersectionality encourages recognition of the differences that exist *among* groups, moving dialogue beyond considering only the differences *between* groups. Originating from discontent with treatments of "women" as a homogenous group, intersectionality has evolved into a theoretical research paradigm that seeks to understand the interaction of various social identities and how these interactions define societal power hierarchies. Intersectionality encourages us to embrace the complexities of group-based politics by critically examining the variances in social location that exist among those claiming membership in groups.[1]

At the same time that intersectionality helps to make sense of the experiences of people who find themselves living at the intersections of social identities, intersectionality also is concerned with the systems that give meaning to the categories of race, gender, class, sexual identity, among others. In other words, at the societal level intersectionality seeks to make visible the systems of oppression that maintain power hierarchies and organize society while also providing a means to theorize experience at the individual level.

Intersectionality scholarship has emerged as one of the most significant areas of research across academic disciplines. It has been considered "the most important theoretical contribution that women's studies in conjunction with related fields has made so far" (McCall, 2005, 1771). It has opened a plethora of new and exciting research questions and analyses. Viewing the world from the intersections of various social locations, including race, gender, class, ability, nationality, sexuality, among other locations, has produced an important paradigm shift in terms of how we study and approach questions of hierarchy, inequality, power, and what constitutes the just society. As Berger and Guidroz (2010, 7) argue, intersectionality represents a new "social literacy" that challenges traditional framing of research questions and methodology. Speaking to the reach of this new social literacy, they assert that to be "an informed social theorist or methodologist in many fields of scholarly inquiry, but most especially in women's studies, one must grapple with the implications of intersectionality." (Ibid.)

In this chapter, I focus largely on the developments of intersectionality from a Western, predominately US, perspective. However, as intersectionality is at its core concerned with questions of power and inequities, this discussion is applicable to wider political contexts. In fact, as more scholars engage intersectionality in their work in non-Western contexts, under differing political regimes, power hierarchies, and varied historical understandings of how difference is constituted, we are able to further our collective understandings of power and the role that institutions play in giving meaning to identities. Not all claims of intersectionality theory as constituted through a Western, specifically US, lens are applicable to non-Western, non-US contexts. As I show here, this perspective reflects particular power hierarchies predominantly, though not exclusively around race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability. Social categories do not carry the same meaning across contexts and systems of oppression operate differently according to the context. While race, gender, class, sexuality, and ability have been central to intersectionality approaches in the United States, these same categories may be less salient in other contexts where citizenship, language, and region may structure the formation of social hierarchies.[2] For example, Anil Al-Rebholz in this volume illustrates the salience of religion and culture as categories of analysis,

while race is less a determinant of social hierarchies in the lives of women in Turkey.

As intersectionality is used to understand power hierarchies in spaces outside the United States, the categories of analysis must change as well. However, as intersectionality travels, some elements are so fundamental that without these elements intersectionality becomes unrecognizable and incapable of doing the political work it was designed to do. Kimberle Crenshaw, who is credited with naming the concept of intersectionality, has remarked that intersectionality often appears as a traveler who shows up at a destination without her luggage (Crenshaw, 2011). As it has traveled it is often stripped of the very elements that made it a critical theory with a social justice imperative. One of my goals in this chapter is to connect intersectionality back to its origins and in doing so equip it for future travels. This volume attests that while the categories of analysis may alter based on the political context under study, core elements of understanding engagements with power remain salient. As scholars around the world continue to contribute to the development of intersectionality as a research paradigm, we are able to develop greater specificity regarding the *processes* by which groups are privileged and marginalized in societies.

I begin this chapter by first offering a brief genealogy of intersectionality locating its origins with black feminist scholars and activists. Next, I assert a set of general principles reflected in articulations of intersectionality, noting the shifting terrain of intersectionality scholarship. Since intersectionality scholarship is understood widely as under development, I pose the question, "What do social scientists, such as political scientists and others interested in institutions and institutional processes, offer to the further development of the intersectionality paradigm?" Using my own work as an example of deploying intersectionality in the study of political institutions, I situate the types of questions political science illuminates in relation to intersectionality. I also recognize that the tensions that make intersectionality attractive to so many, may limit its advancement within political science and other social science disciplines. The paradox for social science researchers is that intersectionality exists as both a highly structured theoretical framework, yet a loosely configured research paradigm. An overemphasis on this concern, as I argue at the close of the chapter, could derail the potential advocacy and policy work scholars are

poised to do in an attempt to address inequality across identity categories.

Those of us who study the manifestations of power through societies' political institutions are well positioned to push the development of intersectionality toward even greater attentiveness to the structures and institutions that give meaning to politicized identities. The legal apparatuses articulated through policies, conventions, resolutions, and institutions give individual subjects meaning by at times extending, and at others resending, rights. As well, these institutions and structures bound, direct, and order individual and group choices. These apparatuses configure prominently in determining the material consequences for individuals and condition how individuals articulate their identities. Ultimately, applying such structural analyses to intersectionality moves toward an expanded notion of what constitutes "identity politics." Such a focus on structures and institutions does the political work of troubling essentialized notions of identity and interrogates the idea of naturalized categories with distinct boundaries by understanding identity as evolving as institutions (i.e., laws, policies, and conventions) shift and change. In addition, this focus allows the foregrounding of the material consequences and implications of identity categorizations on individual life circumstances and group politics. Understanding the internal logic and organizational patterns of the structures and institutions that dictate and enforce identity hierarchies, I argue, is a critical step toward reconfiguring the effects of these structures and their role in determining individual and group circumstances.

The chapters in this volume are representative of the work political scientists and others interested in the study of institutions are contributing to deepening our understandings of how institutions and political structures give meaning to identities and structure the relationships between social identity groups. The focus on institutions and institutional behavior allows us to add clarity to the conversation on the *processes* by which multiple identities are constituted and how the salience of identity categorizations shift and evolve over time as they interact with political institutions, structures, and movements. In honing political scientists' contribution to this ongoing conversation in this way, I do not mean to undermine or limit the study of intersectionality at the analytical levels of individual subjective experience, cultural discourse,

and representation for political scientists.[3] Indeed, these are all relevant levels of analysis for intersectionality research and illuminate important aspects of how identity categories intersect and how social divisions are constructed and maintained (Yuval-Davis, 2006). However, in light of the specific claims and values of political science as a discipline, we are positioned uniquely to advance thinking about the role of institutions and structures in defining and maintaining identity categories.

In other writings, I have made the case for political science and policy studies more fully adopting intersectionality as a research paradigm and how intersectionality contributes to the study of politics and policy analysis (Smooth, 2006, 2011). Here, I adopt a different approach, reflecting on what political science and policy studies offer to further develop the intersectional approach. Beyond, how do we situate intersectionality in the study of politics and policy, the question I explore in this piece is, "What specifically can political science and policy studies contribute to the study of intersectionality as a research paradigm that crosses disciplinary locations?" In other words, "What tools of analysis do we offer to the development of intersectionality as a research paradigm?" As well, I consider the importance of political science and policy scholars well versed in intersectionality and policy, structures, and institutions to the emerging policy debates that seek to utilize intersectionality.

Intersectionality and the Politics of Origin Stories

Origin stories are important in terms of locating a historical trajectory and are equally important to determining what remains at stake in our politically engaged scholarship. Therefore, I find it critically important to locate intersectionality's origins in struggles for inclusion that mark the experiences of those who first gave academic voice to the concept: black feminist theorists and activists. Intersectionality stems from investments in societal transformation, inclusion, and challenges to the status quo; therefore, in starting with this origin story I strive to maintain its critiques of durable hierarchies and privileges.

Retaining this understanding of intersectionality's origin is especially critical as it moves across disciplinary locations and

expands from its roots in black feminist theory to function as a theoretical paradigm that may or may not center on negotiations of race and gender hierarchies. With this expansion, it becomes easy to separate intersectionality from its roots in black feminist theory, thereby erasing the intellectual contributions of black feminist scholars and more so their commitments to dismantling race and gender hierarchies.

As intersectionality has grown into an academic "buzzword" (Davis, 2008), it has come to operate as shorthand verbiage used to signify a host of meanings. In its status as the current "it" theory, it takes on assumptions and connotations that move away from its foundation. It has also become all too easy to gesture to intersectionality as a means of mentioning interrogations with difference and power hierarchies without substantively taking up the demands of intersectional analysis. As Knapp (2005) argues, it allows scholars to use the terminology and gesture to inclusion, while continuing to pursue research in ways that do not substantively challenge the status quo. Stephanie Shields (2008) illustrates this tendency through the use of what she refers to as the "self-excusing," often apologetic disclosure paragraph authors may include in their work. In this ceremonious paragraph, authors acknowledge the importance of intersectionality, yet absolve themselves from actually substantively including such analyses in their work (Shields, 2008, 305). In this way, scholars are credited with recognizing the significance of such an analysis and are credited with being politically and intellectually relevant, but their refusal to participate in developing the concept through empirical and theoretical analysis contributes to a stagnating process. Such treatments transform intersectionality into a signifying keyword. Keywords, as Fraser and Gordon (1994) assert, assume a taken-for-granted common-sense status that elide critical reflection. In the wake of becoming academic cache, we can too easily take for granted the historical roots of intersectionality and the politicized struggles associated with the term.

My locating and centering the origin story of intersectionality with black feminist intellectuals also represents an attempt to return attention to intersectionality's critical stance on uncovering the operation of power and privilege that render individuals and groups marginalized. This stands in contrast to deployments of intersectionality that explore how power is most familiar, or explore

the compounded privileges of the powerful.[4] Intersectionality can tell us much about the ways in which intersections of privilege collide to produce greater privilege. For example, a white, Western, middle-classed, heterosexual, able-bodied man presents interlocking social identities that help to explain how he experiences the political world. Intersectionality theory is capable of shedding light on his experiences, identities, and the resulting compounded privileges. However, I maintain that intersectionality is most useful *not* when it is used to explore how power is most familiar, but when intersectionality offers us a means to make visible hidden power differentials that are naturalized through systems of inequality, or when it helps researchers disrupt dominate narratives of privilege. In such projects, intersectionality is aligned more closely with its origins and does the political work of unraveling oppressive systems of power.

A Brief Genealogy of Intersectionality

While critical race legal theorist Kimberle Crenshaw is credited with coining the term intersectionality in her writings on black women's experiences with employment discrimination (1989) and domestic violence (1991), scholars including Crenshaw acknowledge the foundations of intersectionality as emerging much earlier in the works of early black feminist intellectuals. Around the same time of Crenshaw's writings, scholarship reflecting upon oneself as belonging to multiple identity groups and understanding that identity as a qualitatively different experience was developing also beyond the United States (see, for example, Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1992).

Crenshaw (1989) coined the term "intersectionality" as a metaphor to explain the ways in which black women under the US legal system are often caught between multiple systems of oppression marked by race, gender, and economic hierarchies without being recognized for their unique experiences at the convergence of these systems.[5] Focusing on employment discrimination cases, Crenshaw argues that dominant conceptualizations of discrimination under the law rely on determining discrimination using only a single axis framework.

Using court cases brought forth by black women, Crenshaw illustrates a repeated pattern in which black women are protected under

discrimination laws only to the extent in which their experiences align with either white women or black men (Crenshaw, 1989, 143). Racial discrimination cases are thus determined by the experiences of black men, and, in sex discrimination cases, the experiences of white women are privileged. As Crenshaw shows, the courts have a history of failing to account for the lives of black women who experience the effects of discrimination injuries on the basis of both race *and* gender. As well, Crenshaw argues that discrimination law discredited black women as suitable representatives in cases of race or sex discrimination because in either context their "hybrid" identity precluded them from serving as "pure" representatives of either claim (Crenshaw, 1989, 145). In fact, their claims of belonging to both groups have been treated as a compounded discrimination that reaches beyond the intent of antidiscrimination law.

Crenshaw argues that the single axis framework articulated by the courts limits claims of discrimination as emanating from a discrete source of discrimination race *or* sex but not accounting for the experiences of those who are "mutually burdened." The intersectional metaphor is explained:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions, and sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. (Crenshaw, 1989, 149)

It is through this analysis of discrimination law that Crenshaw sets the parameters of the intersectionality framework. In discussing the responses of the courts, she argues that the simultaneous experience of race and sex discrimination render black women invisible by the courts. Similarly, women of color were rendered invisible through the early discursive practices of both feminist and critical race theory. While Crenshaw bases her discussion of intersectionality on the experiences of black women, scholars later extended her discussion to focus on the ways in which single-issue frameworks fail to adequately capture the experiences of a myriad of groups in society that experience marginalization along multiple axes of power.

Writing in the late 1980s, Crenshaw's work is a continuance of women of color's writings that reflect dissatisfaction with treatments of women of color's activism, writings, and lived experiences. Numerous scholars argue that women of color's contributions were suppressed through failures to recognize the convergence of identity categories or systems of oppression. The Combahee River Collective (1982 [1977]), Anzuldua (1987), Dill (1983), Moraga and Anzuldua (1984), King (1988), and Mohanty (1988), all produced pivotal writings during this period that shared in disrupting notions that the category "woman" denotes a universal, homogeneous experience. Instead, these authors asserted that race, class, and sexuality distinguish women's behavior and experiences.

These writings represent a continuance of feminist scholars of color articulating the multiplicities of their identities and the political consequences of multiple constituted identities. For centuries, women of color have articulated the conundrum that the term intersectionality represents and have articulated both a scholarly and activist tradition emanating from their social location in US society. Nineteenth-century African American scholar-activist Anna Julia Cooper recognized the unique position of African American women at the nexus of struggles for racial and gender equality. Cooper argued that the progress of African Americans rested upon the abilities of African American women to advance. She eloquently articulates that it is "when and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole . . . race enters with me" (Cooper, 1892, 31). Cooper's words were similar to other activist women of color such as Sojurner Truth and Ida B. Wells who also articulated the unique positioning of African American women. Later, groups such as the Combahee River Collective, a cadre of black lesbian feminist activists writing in the 1970s, articulated the simultaneous effects poised by race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Across social movements, women of color argued for a politics of inclusion that recognized the legitimacy of their claims based upon their needs as women of color. Many authors recognize the linkages of intersectionality to the developments in black feminist theory. Evelyn Simien (2006) situates intersectionality as growing from black women's lived experience and argues that such theorizing developed as a pragmatic response to their life circumstances. Black feminist theory remains an important theoretical home for

the study of intersectionality, though more contemporary discussions of intersectionality advocate for moving away from thinking of intersectionality as a framework solely explaining the experiences of women of color to thinking in terms of how intersectionality offers more robust understandings of power differentials that exist among various groups in society (Hancock, 2007a).

As intersectionality developed, and in its earliest theorizing and application, most scholars focused on the triumvirate of oppression: race, class, and gender. These three social identities and systems of power were given primacy in light of the ways systems of racial discrimination, gender discrimination, and class oppression work in tandem to situate women of color, particularly in US society. However, as intersectionality has evolved, there is greater emphasis on the systems and processes that operate in tandem to produce various inequalities and privileges. Several chapters in this volume do this work. For example, Miles engages intersectionality as a framework to interrogate state-administered identification practices that protect state interests in maintaining a gender binary while the trans community in Chile must live between legal and lived identities that as Miles argues, "renders everyday interaction a complex, distressing and destabilizing process" (67). Miles and contributors to this volume are not only mobilizing intersectionality scholarship beyond the parameters of the United States where different systems map the basis for discrimination and inequality, but they are also placing an important emphasis on the institutions, processes, and systems that undergird systems of inequality.

PRINCIPLES OF INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality's substantial popularity is driven partially by its appeal to progressive politics exercising a practice of inclusionary politics in which marginalized groups are given voice. With the great acclaim that surrounds intersectionality, there is still much dissent surrounding its boundaries. Scholars from across disciplinary locations are engaging in further developing intersectionality by asserting new definitions, new levels of analysis, and arguing the most appropriate methodologies to capture the theoretical assertions of intersectionality. Intersectionality presents as in flux with limited distinctive boundaries, which is both inviting and problematic for scholars.

Here, I present some general premises of intersectionality as an evolving paradigm and then reflect on each in more detail. In doing so, I fully recognize that intersectionality continues to develop across disciplinary spaces; its elements are under constant negotiation and revision. Nevertheless, these principles are starting points to understanding this dynamic and complex framework. At its core foundations, intersectionality is concerned with the following:

1. *Resisting additive models that treat categories of social identity as additive, parallel categories and instead theorizes these categories as intersecting;*
2. *Antiessentialism and insists upon variation within categories of social identity;*
3. *Recognition that social identity categories and the power systems that give them meaning shift across time and geographical location;*
4. *Embracing the coexistence of privilege and marginalization acknowledging that they are not mutually exclusive;*
5. *Changing the conditions of society such that categories of identity are not permanently linked to sustained inequalities in efforts to build a more just world.*

1. Resisting Additive Models and Parallel Categories

Intersectionality has encouraged scholars to move away from models that situate categories such as race, gender, class, and sexuality as a singular axis of power. This framework staunchly resists an understanding of gender, race, class, sexuality, ability as parallel categories. Instead, what intersectionality encourages us to do is to understand the ways in which these categories are not simply parallel but intersecting categories. Intersectionality posits that race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, and various aspects of identity are constitutive. Each informs the other and taken together, they produce a way of experiencing the world as sometimes oppressed and marginalized and sometimes privileged and advantaged depending on the context.

Intersectionality requires that we pay close attention to the particulars of categories of social identity. As many have argued, it is not enough to simply "add race and stir" to include perspectives of women of color. Intersectionality requires that we recognize that systems of oppression and hierarchy are neither interchangeable

nor are they identical; therefore, much is made of understanding the ways that these categories function. These social categories have differing organizing logics in that race works differently than gender, class, or sexuality. Power associated with these categories is neither configured in the same ways nor do they share the same histories therefore, they cannot be treated identically (Phoenix and Pattynama, 2006).

2. Antiessentialism and Diversity within Categories

Intersectionality takes into account that there is great variation within categories of social identity. Understanding social identities as mutually constitutive produces an array of ways of experiencing blackness, working class, or sex and sexuality. This encourages us to move away from *essentializing* or reducing experiences to "*the* Latino experience" or "*the* lesbian experience" and allows for multiple ways of experiencing these social categories as they link and are informed by other categories. Cathy Cohen (1999) argues that in doing so, we avoid producing secondary marginalization in which issues are defined based upon the needs of the more privileged of a group and not in the interests of those who are impacted by multiple systems of oppression or even less valued systems of oppression by particular communities. This reduces the lure to privilege one aspect of a person's identity at the expense of other aspects. In *Affirmative Advocacy,* Dara Strolovich (2007) shows how this secondary marginalization process happens among advocacy groups that purport to represent complex identities often marginalized in US politics. She finds that despite claims of representing the totality of their group, advocates representing marginalized groups seldom represent their constituents who are intersectionally marginalized, even among the most well-intentioned groups.

3. Power as Shifting and Changing

While intersectionality places great emphasis on understanding the means by which power is configured, it also establishes power as dynamic and shifting rather than static and fixed. As such, we cannot conclude that power operates in the same ways across contexts of time and location. Sociopolitical and economic histories figure prominently into adequately defining the power relations intersectionality seeks to make visible.

Depending upon the context, those who are marginalized and those who have power differ. Therefore, we cannot evaluate oppression and marginalization without a sense of history as well as the social, political, and economic opportunities available to various groups across history. Categories are not fixed and change over time. Their social and political meanings often change in different historical contexts, and are contested and restructured both at the level of the individual (what it means to me and my experiences) and at the societal level (what it means to society and social systems) (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The significance of geographical location to transforming the relationships between categories as well as within categories has grown as intersectionality travels across disciplinary locations and into transnational conversations. The systems of power that dictate whether that social identity is a marker of privilege or marginalization also changes according to geographical location and configurations of power in that society.

4. Privilege and Marginalization

Privilege and marginalization are central to studies of intersectionality. While many might assume that these two categories are mutually exclusive, intersectionality scholarship has focused on their coexistence. One can experience oppression along one axis and privilege along another. Intersectionality focuses on power across categories and in relation to one another understanding that power is not equal across categories. Patricia Hill Collins (1990) situates race, class, and gender as interlocking systems that create an overarching "matrix of domination" in which actors can not only be victimized by power but can also exercise power over others. Collins highlights the contradictory nature of oppression suggesting that few "pure victims" or "pure oppressors" exist. Penalty and privilege are distributed among individuals and groups within the matrix of domination such that none are marked exclusively by one or the other.

5. Changing Conditions

Julia Jordan-Zachery (2007) reminds us that from the earliest conceptualizations of intersectionality, embedded in the theory is a liberatory agency possessed by those experiencing the effects of life at

the intersection. The imperative to change existing conditions and take action from their location at the intersection toward impacting the lives of those both within and between social identity categories is an important theme woven throughout. So as much as researchers categorize intersectionality as a descriptive framework or research paradigm, it is very much a political concept grounded in an emancipatory politics with social justice-based outcomes as the goal. Intersectionality is understood as rooted in efforts to change societal conditions that create and maintain oppressive power hierarchies. In addition to recognizing the differences that exist among individuals and groups, intersectionality is invested in modes of institutional change designed to remedy the effects of inequalities produced by interlocking systems of oppression.

In summary, the version of intersectionality to which I subscribe is informed by a plethora of scholarly thinking on the parameters of intersectionality. It can apply to everyone, as we all have a race, gender, sexuality, and social class, whether we experience our social locations as inequalities or privileges. However, intersectionality is at its best when used to uncover patterns of privilege and marginalization as opposed to focus on familiar understandings of privilege. Our social locations are not fixed such that we are construed permanently as oppressors or the oppressed.[6] Intersectionality is context specific; structural and dynamic (Weldon, 2006). The relevant axes of power for investigation are determined by the situation and site under study. As Hancock (2007a) surmises, the intersectional approach "changes the relationship between the categories of investigation from one that is determined a priori to one of empirical investigation" (2007a, 67). It asserts that categories are relevant and have an impact on understanding material lives and at the same time it is interested in disrupting the impetus to render categories as fixed and mutually exclusive. Intersectionality offers a means to contest the power arrangements between categories and even embraces and envisions a futuristic intellectual politics in which categories are stripped of any deterministic powers.[7]

Intersectionality, Agency, Institutions, and Institutional Processes

So, what does political science and other fields that center on institutions, institutional processes, and structures contribute to the

ongoing development of intersectionality as a research paradigm? Such disciplines as political science can help intersectionality studies gain greater balance between the individual and structural levels of analysis. By virtue of intersectionality's development as a response to the law's treatment of individuals, it is borne out of a politics of recognition. As such, it demands that the law recognize the ways in which *individuals'* multiple identities matter to their treatment. While the law necessitates this focus on the individual, intersectionality theorists have pushed against the reliance on the individual as the fundamental level of analysis for intersectional analyses (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Conaghan, 2009). With such an approach, the structures, institutions, processes, and systems that generate and mediate the experiences of individuals are elided in favor of a focus on the individual or particular groups.

The potential contributions of political scientists to the study of intersectionality lie precisely in illuminating the *structural* effects and the processes by which institutions contribute to identity constructions and mobilizations. In her discussion of the salience of structure to intersectionality, political scientist S. Laurel Weldon aggressively situates structural analysis as the core of intersectionality offering that the focus on identity itself is a misguided understanding of intersectionality. She argues, "It is not often recognized that structural analysis is *required* by the idea of intersectionality. It is the intersection of social *structures*, not identities, to which the concept refers. We cannot conceptualize 'interstices' unless we have a concept of the structures that intersect to create these points of interaction" (Weldon, 2006, 239). Such considerations of structure necessitate a focus on institutions and institutional processes, necessitating engagements with the law, public policy, and governing bodies.

Rather than advocate the primacy of one level over the other, I am arguing that intersectionality scholarship has gone so far in the direction of centering its analysis at the level of the individual and the individual's agency that it overlooks the powerful role of institutions and structures in mediating the individual's behavior and structuring the range of available choices. It is from this perspective that I suggest political science's contribution to intersectionality as potentially restoring some balance and tempering the explanatory value of individual agency in intersectional analysis.

To be clear, I do not draw the types of distinctions as Baukje Prins (2006) does between an intersectionality grounded in structural analysis with subjects being constituted through static systems of domination and marginalization and a constructionist version of intersectionality in which the subject is understood as the primary factor determining identity. For Prins, the constructionists approach treats identity as more a point of narration in which the subject is "both actor in and co-author of our own life story" (2006, 281) and understands the individual's identity as a matter of choice and as constituted through the individual's "own acting and thinking" (2006, 280). In contrasts, she interprets the structural approach to treat identity as a matter of recognition, naming, and categorization that is predetermined by systems of domination and profoundly stable and predictable. Such a constructionist vision of intersectionality is deeply invested in the power of individual agency. The emphasis on the subject's free will to become a subject by their own determination, on their own terms, dismisses the myriad of ways that the "isms" (racism, sexism, heterosexism, and classism) interplay with the subject's possibilities. More so, it reflects a failure to understand the ever-evolving processes of institutions and structures. Far from static, institutions are shifting constantly, but with particular goals in mind—to protect the values of the institution, ensure its survival, and extend its values and ideas of appropriateness.

A more integrated vision of intersectionality that articulates roles for both the structure and the individual offers a closer approximation social reality. Understanding institutions and structures not as static and overly deterministic but as evolving often in relation to the resistance politics and strategies of intersectional actors, reflects the complex relationship between individual and structural levels of analysis. Resistance strategies are understood in larger contexts of institutional processes and historical events that can facilitate as well as curtail opportunities for changing categorizations and dismantling dominant frameworks. Such an integrated model appreciates the weight of institutional and structural forces as well as the transformative potential of resistance strategies employed by intersectional actors.

Intersectionality, particularly as it interfaces with other political projects that uplift individual agency, threatens a move toward suppressing the role that institutions and structures play in modifying individual behavior and ordering choices. Such approaches to

intersectionality theorizing overstate the agency of individuals and their freedom to act independently with the power to shape their own political understanding of their identities. As Gill Valentine (2007) concurs, "the existing theorization of the concept of intersectionality overemphasizes the abilities of individuals to actively produce their own lives and underestimates how the ability to enact some identities or realities rather than others is highly contingent on the power-laden spaces in and through which our experiences are lived" (2007, 19).

Political scientists and others who focus on institutions such as the law, public policy, governing bodies, and social movements understand that individual agency is subject to and enacted within institutions and as such is always bounded and beholden to strong institutional forces that can render groups visible or invisible, beneficiaries or pariahs, in relation to the state. Advancing an appreciation for the role of institutions in relation to individual agency allows us to engage more fully with the political and material *implications of* multiply constituted identities, the institutional processes by which identities are made meaningful, as well as the conditions under which institutions offer to recognize identities as multiply constituted.

For an example of this kind of research approach, I turn to my own work on US state legislatures to reflect on how an attentiveness to intersectionality produces new insights on institutional processes that are unavailable through a focus on either dominant groups or through the focus on a singular axis—race *or* gender. As well, I seek to show the ways political science scholarship can contribute to extending intersectionality's reach beyond traditional identity politics.

By examining the legislative experiences of African American women, I explore the effects of race and gender on the meanings of legislative power and influence. Dominant understandings and narratives of legislative power are disrupted when viewed from an intersectionality perspective, which highlights the way in which legislative power is a deeply gendered and racialized construct. Race and gender impact the paths to power and influence available to legislators, as well as the types of influence they are even afforded in the eyes of their colleagues.

These are critical concerns as US state legislatures have become increasingly diverse. The key questions are: How are these

institutions incorporating women and men of color and white women—all relative newcomers to these lawmaking bodies? How are the traditional politics of these institutions changing in light of a more diverse group of legislators? I focus on the experiences of African American women legislators, but the goal is not simply to document their experiences as African American women, though admittedly that would indeed be a contribution given the sparse research on the experiences of women of color in US electoral politics. The questions engendered from this research center on how institutions respond to difference: How do race and gender interact with commonly held assumptions about institutions and legislative behavior? Does race and gender impact the power that is commonly understood to emanate from holding positions in the legislative leadership, having seniority, and high levels of legislative activity? What happens when African American women legislators occupy the leadership positions or have the legislative attributes that traditionally confer power and influence? Are these institutional norms gendered and racialized?

The effects of race and gender on legislative power arrangements are substantial. The formal leadership structure is evidence of race and gender hierarchies in the legislature. Few African American women hold the top leadership positions or chair the powerful committees that are commonly associated with increasing a legislator's influence. Their exclusion from these leadership posts only partially accounts for their more limited influence among their colleagues. The challenge for African American women legislators is more complex than gaining access to legislative leadership positions. Their limited access to legislative power is complicated by their exclusion from informal power structures that exist in the legislature. African American women who hold positions in the formal leadership repeatedly report that they are not included among the inner circle of confidents hand selected by top party leaders, even though their positions suggest they would have access to these inner circles. This exclusion precludes them from participating in critical policy discussions that impact their constituents. Such informal circles of power become a parallel power structure that contests the power of the official party leadership structure and undermines the power of some formal leaders.

Even when African American women legislators occupy the same political spaces, share similar positions, and political titles, they are

regarded differently by their colleagues. Influence that would have otherwise been associated with individual legislators in alignment with traditional institutional norms regarding the power of leadership positions is not equally conferred upon African American women. What it means to be a party leader or a committee chair is mediated by the legislator's race and gender. These traditionally powerful positions neither hold the same meaning nor do they lead to the same outcomes for African American women. African American women's legislative performances are bounded by such deeply racialized and gendered institutional processes and structures in the legislature.

My findings, along with other scholars working on race and gender in legislative institutions, are showing how gender and race problematize even the most stable categories such as party leader and committee chair.[8] What it means to hold these positions and the outcomes these positions produce differ when African American women occupy these positions. These stable categories are transformed by race and gender, producing outcomes that are, as Crenshaw argues, "qualitatively different" (Crenshaw, 1991, 1245). Gender and race are not merely identity categories, but act as mediating forces that serve to limit avenues that would lead traditionally to institutional influence. The gender and race hierarchies prevalent in US society more broadly compete with well-established norms of legislative behavior. Adherence to these power arrangements ultimately impact policy outcomes and raise questions on the quality of representation, particularly for communities of color. When traditional paths to power and influence are either unavailable to them or fail to yield the desired outcomes, African American women are forced to devise alternative strategies to remain relevant and effective representatives on behalf of their constituents.

If we were to employ only an individual level of analysis, focused on evaluating individual African American women's effectiveness, we miss the institutional norms and characteristics that structure legislative behavior. African American women's individual agency is intertwined with the formal and informal structures and processes that render some legislators influential and others less so, much on the basis of race and gender preferences and hierarchies. The presence of African American women in state legislatures challenges and expands our understandings of legislative norms

and behavior. Centering their experiences counters previous studies that constructed narratives of institutional power relying solely on the experiences of white men, the dominant majority group in US state legislatures. Through examining African American women lawmakers' location within the legislative institution, we have new understandings of how power is constituted in the legislature. When we assume an intersectional vantage point that embodies both the individual and structural levels of analysis, it teaches us more regarding the full workings of institutions and forces us to reexamine traditional understandings of institutional norms, processes, and behaviors.

UNRESOLVED TENSIONS

Although intersectionality presents as an exciting, groundbreaking theoretical framework and emerging research paradigm, several issues remain unresolved and can stymie the progress of intersectionality in political science and other social science disciplines. For scholars interested in applying intersectionality to empirical projects, a number of tensions emerge around methodological issues. Notably, as Kathy Davis (2008) details, the very elements of intersectionality that make it so attractive to scholars across disciplinary locations are the very issues that also make it contentious. Intersectionality lacks a clear, concise definition; it lacks parameters; it does not specify which categories should be theorized as intersecting; the relationship between the categories; how many categories can be included; and when to stop adding categories of analysis. There are no established hard and fast rules about when intersectionality should and should not be applied and there is no methodology associated with it. All the elements that make it attractive to scholars across disciplines also make for an uneasy alliance with political science and other social sciences given the dominant methodological strands in these disciplines.

These issues all reflect methodological concerns that are particularly salient for social scientists. However, we might question why these concerns move to the center when previously marginalized voices and issues are gaining traction in the academy.[9] Nevertheless, intersectionality scholars are responding to these critiques and tensions. Two issues have dominated social scientists' concerns and have limited their engagement with intersectionality.

The first issue is the uneasiness with identifying which are the appropriate categories for analysis to constitute an intersectional approach and second the quantitative methodological biases that currently dominate many social sciences and encourage scholars to become consumed with appropriate statistical models that might accurately reflect the theoretical concept of intersectionality. While these research considerations have their place, becoming mired in these debates detracts from opportunities to address the very systems of inequality that intersectionality illuminates. As the chapters in this volume attests, across geographic spaces the political moment is ripe for engaging policy frameworks that reflect intersectional solutions; however with scholars of intersectionality focused elsewhere there is a risk missing the possibilities of this policy window.

The dominant paradigms of political science methodology sit in opposition to the concerns of intersectionality as I have defined it. One of the most significant barriers to the advancement of intersectionality within political science and other social science disciplines is the appropriate methodological modeling of intersectionality (Hancock, 2007a, 2007b; Simien, 2006, 2007; Orey and Smooth, 2006; Weldon, 2006). What is most familiar to political scientists interested in speaking to the effects of race, gender, or class is to employ an additive approach, particularly in quantitative analyses. Political scientist Evelyn Simien (2007, 266) argues that adding dichotomous variables to regression models and controlling for their effects fail in relation to two aspects of intersectionality theorizing. One, in treating variables as dichotomous, it fails to capture the range of possibilities within each variable category. For example, race is conceived as black *or* white and gender is conceptualized in terms of men *or* women. So, it fails to capture the simultaneous nature of identity that intersectionality asserts. In other words, such methodological approaches fail to capture the ways gender is racialized and race is gendered. Further, such insistence on binaries limits opportunities to explore the fluidity of sexual identity that scholars in this volume, particularly Miles, Combs, Monro, and Richardson take up in relation to the state in this volume. To extend Simien's concerns, such quantitative methodologies fail to take into account how categories such as race, gender, sexual identity vary over time and across geographical location. Overall, the existing approaches most familiar to political

scientists and other social scientists are not adept at capturing all the ways that intersectionality seeks to move away from static, essentialist understandings of categories.

Political scientists are not alone in raising such questions. In a special issue of the journal *Sex Roles*, guest editor Stephanie Shields writes:

> Some social sciences have been more open to the transformative effects of an intersectionality perspective than others. The intersectionality perspective has had more impact in academic specializations already concerned with questions of power relations between groups. Disciplines/specializations whose conventional methodologies embrace multidimensionality and the capacity to represent complex and dynamic relationships among variables are more open to the intersectionality perspective. (Shields, 2008, 302)

While Shields is most concerned with the field of psychology, her assessment is quite applicable to political science and other social sciences. Given the central concerns and values of political science, particularly its emphasis on discerning the operations of power in society, we might assume it to be ripe for intersectional analyses. However, Shields's fears for intersectionality's advancement in psychology parallel my own fears for its advancement in political science. The realization of intersectionality's potential is at risk of succumbing to our preoccupations with what is cast as the "methodological challenges" of intersectionality.

As much as political scientists can offer intersectionality, in return, intersectionality can offer political science an expanded appreciation for varied methodological tools and approaches. Given the critical potential of political science voices to enhancing the development of intersectionality, it is useful to challenge methodologists to become innovative in pursuit of strategies that meet the demands of complexity that intersectionality requires. To this end, Hancock (2007a) encourages an openness among intersectionality scholars to the potential innovations that quantitative scholars working with large data sets can offer the study of intersectionality. She cautions that true innovation will surface when scholars engage in data collection techniques that more fully account for the dynamism among and between categories of identity (2007a, 66). She strikes an important balance between eschewing quantitative analyses and locating intersectionality as

exclusively the purview of ethnographies and other qualitative methodologies. The balance she encourages is most possible when all methodological approaches available to intersectionality scholars are valued equally. This necessitates confronting what I term the "tyranny of the quantitative" in the discipline and creating spaces for academic production open to the range of methods that allow scholars to deeply engage the political context, suspend their predetermined categorizations, and fully explore the relationships between identity categories.

Seizing the Moment: Intersectionality and Equity Policies

Resisting these methodological divides that stand to mire the advancement of intersectionality is especially important at this political moment. Political scientists and other scholars of policy, institutions, and institutional processes are poised to make substantial contributions toward shaping the emerging policy debates on intersectionality. Institutions of governance increasingly are expressing interests in employing intersectionality as a tool in policy making and, as I detail in this section, they benefit from engagement with scholars well versed in intersectionality as well as structures, institutions, and policy making.

National and international governing bodies including the United Nations and the European Union are turning increasingly to intersectionality approaches to articulate and develop ideal responses to concerns for equality and a more sophisticated awareness of diversities across and within identity groups. For example, the United Nations' Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (CERD) embraces Crenshaw's definition of intersectionality to articulate the nature and processes of racism. Squires (2008) identifies intersectionality debates emerging in the creation of Britain's Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), noting the ways intersectionality is troubling the EHRC's approaches to inequality. The EHRC's debates between addressing inequalities along singular axis using multiple, yet separate equality laws versus more integrated approaches that address multiple forms of inequality by constructing a single policy intervention are debates that certainly reflect the essence of intersectionality's concerns. In response, intersectionality scholars are weighing in on

these state posed remedies to existing inequalities (Squires, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Verloo, 2006; Lombardo and Verloo, 2009; Raj, Bunch, and Nazombe, 2002; Bassel and Emejulu, 2010).

Verloo (2006) advises, and scholars in this volume confer, that intersectionality scholars must carefully monitor and critically evaluate purported articulations of intersectionality masked as equity policies. Taking the case of intersectionality and public policies in Uruguay, Erica Townsend-Bell argues in this volume that we must distinguish between policies aimed toward fostering equity and inclusion and those calling for interventions that reflect the principles of intersectionality. She points out that states are becoming increasingly responsive to group claims and are designing affirmative action programs and gender quotas, for example as a means of addressing group claims. However, these remedies address inequality only along a singular axis. Such policies fall short of an intersectionality framework in that in addressing only a singular aspect of difference they maintain the race *or* gender approach. Rather than locate shortcomings with the state, instead Townsend-Bell finds that advocacy groups in Uruguay seldom frame issues as intersectional problems requiring intersectional solutions. Townsend-Bell's assessments make the connections between the state's actions on intersectionality and the work of advocacy groups, pointing out the interconnectedness of the two. However, as other scholars denote, advocacy and interest groups too find it difficult and politically confining to deploy intersectional frames in their work.

In studying US advocacy groups, Dara Strolovich's (2007) work further illustrates Townsend-Bell's conclusions as Strolovich makes the case that the political environment and nature of legal frameworks limit advocacy groups' embrace of intersectionality. Advocacy groups that we might imagine as best situated to represent intersectional groups and their interests actually fail to do so as these groups are organized to represent issues along a single axis. US civil rights-based groups organized to advocate around race issues, for example, find it difficult to advocate for intersectional race issues focused on race and class (welfare reform debates in the 1990s), race and gender (gender pay equity issues), or race and sexuality (marriage equality). This reality, as Strolovich argues, is not necessarily due to lack of will but more so because the political environment seldom supports organizations addressing the

complexity of intersectional issues. A range of factors contribute to an environment that works against intersectional representation by advocacy groups from funding organizations casting advocacy groups in narrow terms to legal provisions that fail to acknowledge intersectional realities. Both Townsend-Bell and Strolovich's work illustrate the potential pitfalls of states adopting policies that focus on a single axis of inequality masked as intersectional frameworks. When states take such approaches, the status quo is maintained and intersectional groups and their interests continue to go unrepresented. Moreover, their work demonstrates the need to have intersectional policy advocates both inside and outside the state.

Scholars examining the deployment of intersectionality as a policy tool point to strong tendencies on the part of states to adopt equity remedies organized around a singular axis such as gender in the case of gender mainstreaming policies.[10] In addition to the arguments Strolovich and Townsend-Bell offer regarding advocacy groups failing to adopt intersectional frameworks, fundamental misunderstandings and misrepresentations of intersectionality also contribute to the insistence on singular inclusion policies. Even well-intentioned equity and inclusion policies fall short in that they so often assume all inequalities share the same ontological history and internal logic. In doing so, they violate the premises of intersectionality. Such approaches to remedying inequality and fostering inclusion ignore the historical and contextual realities that race, gender, class, and sexual inequalities emanate from different sources, produce different effects, and are understood as coconstitutive. Equality policies that favor a single-strand approach to equality reflect an assumption of virtual sameness among groups and such assumptions run counter to the scholarship on intersectionality, which asserts the varying historical roots and effects of differing types of inequality (Squires, 2008; Verloo, 2006).

These efforts to build more robust equality-centered institutions and structures using the framework of intersectionality are confronting an array of challenges. As I have discussed throughout this chapter, on some level these challenges are inherent to operationalizing the level of complexity that intersectionality demands theoretically, and in part these challenges speak to the lack of specificity associated with theoretical treatments of intersectionality. These challenges to using intersectionality are reflective of deeply entrenched, institutionalized understandings of inequality

as existing along a singular axis. However, through studying structures such as the United Nations, legislatures and other governing bodies, organized advocacy and interest groups, as well as gender quotas with a focus on their internal logics and politics, we better understand the process through which they advance or curtail the adoption of intersectional policy frameworks. Combining an understanding of the internal logics of institutions with an understanding of the principles of intersectionality, we are better positioned to construct institutions, structures, and policies that actually increase equality and foster greater inclusion (Bassel and Emejulu, 2010). From the earliest assessments of intersectionality's arrival in these policy discussions, it was clear that where the voices of intersectionality scholars are absent, these debates easily stagnate or worse revert to competitive struggles between identity groups over limited resources (Yuval-Davis, 2006; Lombardo and Verloo, 2009; Hancock, 2011).

The questions and debates raised in our scholarly discussions will filter into these public policy windows of opportunity. Through increased dialogue between scholars across geographic contexts in forums such as this volume, we will be able to capitalize on the political potential of the moment and move toward the creation of public policies that more accurately reflect and address the ways that individuals and groups experience equality and inequality. This focus on the search for more equitable institutions and structures that bring recognition to those rendered invisible, those who are in need of government redress for discrimination, is reflective of intersectionality's origins that sought to articulate a means of social change that substantially challenged and transformed existing hierarchies. Those trained to study power situated in institutions are equipped to seize upon this political moment.

NOTES

1. I am grateful to the Shifting Agendas conference participants who shared their thoughtful comments during my keynote address. I am also grateful to Angelia Wilson for organizing the conference and offering sage advice and feedback on this chapter. I owe a special thanks to my fall seminar students in "Operationalizing Intersectionality" at The Ohio State University, as several ideas discussed here were refined during our intense debates during the seminar. My thoughts on intersectionality are far more clear as a result

of our collective reading. Finally, elements of the sections on the principles intersectionality and the genealogy of intersectionality are detailed in W. Smooth, "Intersectionality and Women's Leadership," in *Gender and Women's Leadership: A Sage Series Handbook*, edited by Karen O'Conner (New York: Sage Publications, 2010).

2. Which categories are to be included in intersectionality analyses is a source of debate among scholars. From the onset of the terms' usage, the categories most interrogated in tandem were race, gender, and to a lesser extent, class. However, as intersectionality scholarship has evolved, categories taken as central to the intersectionality approach have more often included sexuality and ability.
3. In fact, several treatments of the intersectional realities of African American women's political representation in policy debates are illustrative of political scientists building linkages between cultural representations and policy discourse. For example see Ange Marie Hancock's *The Politics of Disgust* (2004); Julia Jordan-Zachery's *Black Women, Cultural Images and Social Policy* (2008); and Michele Tracey Berger's *Workable Sisterhood: The Political Journey of Stigmatized Women with HIV/AIDS* (2004).
4. For contrasting views on the deployment of intersectionality to study privileged groups, see: Jessica Holden Sherwood "The View from the Country Club: Wealthy Whites and the Matrix of Privilege," in *The Intersectional Approach*, edited by Berger, Michele Tracey, and Kathleen Guidroz (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010).
5. In Crenshaw's writings, she is clear that intersectionality does not refer only to the categories of race and gender. See: "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics and Violence against Women" in which she explicitly states that "the concept can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color" (1991, 1245).
6. Jennifer Nash (2008) raises salient points regarding the coexistence of power and privilege in intersectionality scholarship.
7. McCall (2005) offers a compelling framework for understanding the range of ways intersectionality engages with categories and the range of treatments present among intersectionality scholars.
8. Similar observations are discussed regarding African American women serving in the US Congress. Mary Hawkesworth (2003) details how processes of "race-gendering" impact African American women's positions in Congress and the ways the issues to which they speak are marginalized precisely because of constructions of power in relation to the intersecting constructions of race and gender.
9. As Zuberi and Bonilla-Silva argue in *White Logic, White Methods: Racism and Methodology* (2008), prevailing notions of "white logic"

insist that in the Western imagination logic, reason, and objectivity and the tools and methods through which they are exercised are the sole purview of elite white men. Essentially, these methodological questions are deployed precisely to maintain control over established ways of knowing, who produces knowledge and who has a rightful claim to knowledge production.

10. Emanuela Lombardo and Mieke Verloo (2009) offer a detailed discussion of gender and gender mainstreaming as an entrenched institutionalized policy system in Europe. They employ a thought exercise that considers the possibilities of expanding (stretching to use their language) the gender equality policy frame to be more inclusive of different types of inequality. Across the EU states, gender mainstreaming, after much feminist activism, is the familiar frame for conceptualizing inequality, and many would argue it constitutes a primary policy frame for understanding inequality. A challenge is presented to this "gender as inequality" frame when activists and scholars interested in policy frameworks that understand and process inequalities from the perspective of intersectionality assert competing frameworks that decenter gender as the primary inequality. Lombardo and Verloo's thought exercise forces us to consider what happens when the primacy of gender is challenged with reconceptualized equality policies.

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