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## **INTERSECTIONALITY AT THE INTERSECTION: PARADIGMS, METHODS, AND APPLICATION – A REVIEW**

The term intersectionality made its entrance in the research community just over two decades ago. Since that time, many approaches to intersectionality have arisen that differs in discipline, methodology, epistemology, and conceptualization. Unfortunately, little research has examined how to study/apply intersectionality. While the broad research community has created various conceptualizations of intersectionality less has been done on its application. This paper examines the messiness and controversy of intersectionality, arguing that the problematic nature of the ‘operationalization,’ or application, of intersectionality is integrally linked to its conceptualization across varying paradigmatic approaches.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Over twenty years ago, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) introduced the idea that civil rights laws lack the ability to address the type of inequality and discrimination faced by people with multiple forms of oppression (Best et al., 2011; Crenshaw, 1989). Her work has inspired many researchers, of various disciplines, to take on intersectionality in all its complexity. In simple terms, intersectionality is the idea that various forms of oppression interact with one another in multiple, complex ways (Garry, 2011).

Although the concept of intersectionality is widely used across a multitude of disciplines and was rarely criticized for nearly two decades, conflicts are arising. There are issues related to the limitations, implications and slipperiness of intersectionality as a whole (Garry, 2011). Rasky (2011) states “it [intersectionality] both explodes into a proliferation of identity categories and

implodes into a distillation of such categories into a simplistic model. This tension thoroughly penetrates the concept and is reflected in the way it informs its methodology” (p. 239). The problems continually arise in an often failing effort to conceptualize and operationalize intersectionality.

This paper seeks to address the messiness and controversial views of intersectionality. In particular, it explores the various definitions of intersectionality and the challenges involved. We begin with an overview history of intersectionality<sup>1</sup> then comment on the implications of the link between paradigmatic approach, conceptualization, and operationalization of intersectionality.

## **THE (CONTESTED) HISTORY OF INTERSECTIONALITY**

Simply put, the term intersectionality – which focusses on the idea that various forms of oppression interact in multiple complex ways- has been advancing through feminist studies and critical race studies for over two decades (Garry, 2011). The term intersectionality was initially used by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her work on violence against women of color. Initially, she used the concept of intersectionality to denote the various ways in which race and gender interacted to shape multiple dimensions of Black women’s employment experiences (Crenshaw, 1989). Her objective was to demonstrate that many of the experiences black women faced were not confined within the traditional boundaries of race or gender discrimination, and that the intersection of race and gender factors into Black women’s lives must be captured interdependently with one another (Crenshaw, 1991). She later built on this observation by

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<sup>1</sup> We do not suggest that this is the history of intersectionality but one version of past developments (see Durepos & Mills, 2012, on the problems of historical representation in social sciences research).

examining the many ways in which race and gender intersect in shaping structural, political and representational aspects of violence against women of color (Crenshaw, 1991).

Although Crenshaw is credited with being the first, or one of the first, to use the term intersectionality (Gary, 2011) the idea of intersecting identities and discrimination has a long history in the social sciences (Collins, 2000). In developing her case for intersectionality and interlocking systems of oppression, Patricia Hill Collins (2000, p.42) argued that the seeds of the idea can be traced back to the work of W.E.B. Du Bois who “saw race, class, and nation not primarily as personal identity categories but as social hierarchies that shaped African American access to status, poverty, and power.” She notes, however, that Du Bois omitted gender from his theorizations, reducing it to a personal identity category. In her book ‘Black Feminist Thought’ (1990) Hill Collins sought to define black feminism as including women who theorize the experiences and ideas shared by ordinary black women that provided a unique angle of vision on self, community and society. More specifically, Hill Collins (1990) conceptualized the structural dimension of intersectionality as a ‘matrix of domination’ in which sex, race and other ‘axes of oppression’ operate together to produce diverse experiences of domination within a structured whole. She found that intersectionality does not engage in an analysis of separate systems of oppression like gender, race and class as separate entities but explores how these are mutually constitutive and how they interconnect (Hill Collins, 1990; Boogard & Roggeband, 2010).

Choo and Ferree (2010, p.132) sum up the past work of Crenshaw and Hill Collins thus::

“By emphasizing the differences among women, these scholars not only countered the unwarranted universalizing of white, middle-class, American women’s experiences as women but began a highly productive line of theorizing how lived experiences of

oppression cannot be separated into those due to gender, on the one hand, and race, on the other, but rather simultaneously and linked (Brewer, 1993; Espiritu, 2000; Glenn, 2002; Chooe & Ferree, 2010: 132).”

The last 30 years have seen a growing number of challenges to categorization by race, gender, class, and sexuality from critical feminists (Butler, 1990; Reay, 2005; Cole, 2009). Many scholars who have taken up intersectionality have generated studies that incorporate data from women of different racial-ethnic and class backgrounds (Naples, 1998). Today, feminist scholars believe that race, class, and gender are closely intertwined and argue that these forms of stratification need to be studied in relation to one another (Chooe & Ferree, 2010; Rasky, 2011). While the concept of intersectionality significantly advanced research on women of color, it has also lead to the realization that all social identity groups can experience multiple forms of oppression in society (McCall, 2005).

## **DEFINING INTERSECTIONALITY**

Since Crenshaw’s work in the early nineties, intersectionality has been emerging in a wide range of disciplines as a framework that more accurately captures the complexities of identities by explicitly linking individual, interpersonal, and social structural domains of experiences (Dill & Zambrana, 2009; Shields, 2008; Jone, Kim & Skendall, 2012). As stated by Magnusson (2011):

“No single identity category or social category can satisfactorily account for the meanings a person places on his/her social relations, life events and social surroundings, nor for how he or she is responded by those surroundings. Human identity is inherently complex. The meaning content of each of the social categories [sexuality/sexualities, social class,

ethnicity and race] I have described here is from the very outset intertwined with each of the other categories; this term is entitled intersectionality” (p. 94).

For example, being a female may mean very different things depending on what other social categories a particular female belongs to. Similarly, belonging to the social category ‘working-class’ may have different implications for a man than for a woman (Magnusson, 2011). According to Rasky (2011), identity can be viewed as experience that is not composed of objective attributes but as a subjective set of dynamics. Identity is therefore multiple and complex and contingent upon a variety of social, political and ideological factors (Rasky, 2011). Shields (2008) notes that intersectionality should begin with a reflection of the reality of our lives due to the fact that there is no one single identity category that describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to by others (p. 304).

Thus, it has been argued that intersectionality should no longer be approached simplistically in a two or three part model. The term has moved well away from the initial analysis of double and triple oppression of race/class/gender identities. From Rasky’s (2011) perspective, it is better to conceptualize how the multiple axis of differentiation intersect in specific contents. In other words, intersectionality must be examined interchangeably at the micro-level and the macro-level. First, the notion of interlocking oppressions refers to the macro-level connections linking systems of oppression such as race, class and gender. Second, the notion of intersectionality describes micro level processes, namely, how each individual and group occupies a social position within the interlocking structures of oppression (Hill Collins, 2000; Hurtado & Sinha, 2008). These compounded intermeshed systems of oppression in our social structures help to produce:

- Our social relations
- Our experiences of our own identity
- The limitations of shared interests among members of the same oppressed group (Garry, 2011)

Chooe & Ferree (2010) analyzed the work of several past scholars (McCall, 2005; Prins, 2006; Hancock, 2007; Davis, 2008) in an effort to highlight dimensions of theorizing that have become part of what intersectionality signifies. They developed three dimensions in total:

- 1) The importance of including the perspectives of multiply-marginalized people, especially women of color
- 2) An analytic shift from addition of multiple independent strands of inequality towards a multiplication and thus transformation of their main effects into interactions
- 3) A focus on seeing multiple institutions as overlapping in their co-determination of inequalities to produce complex configurations from the start, rather than extra interactive processes that are added onto main effects (Chooe & Ferree, 2010: 131).

Similarly, Collins (2007) and Dill & Zambrana (2009) have created characteristics used to define intersectionality research. They believed that one must center the lived experience of individuals; complicate the identity and examine both individual/group identities; explore identity salience as influenced by systems of power and unveil power in interconnected structures of inequality; and finally, advancing intersectionality as a larger goal of promoting social justice and social change (Jones, Kim & Skendall, 2012: 702).

As complex and ambiguous intersectionality is, “with each new intersection, new connections emerge and previously hidden exclusions come to light (Davis, 2008: 77).”



## **CONFUSING INTERSECTIONALITIES**

Scholars of all disciplines have embraced the call for an intersectional analysis but its definition is still questioned, leading Kathy Davis (2008) to title intersectionality as a ‘buzzword’ with as yet unrealized analytic bite (Chooe & Ferree, 2010). While the concept of intersectionality has advanced significantly since its introduction over two decades ago, there continues to be controversy about what intersectionality is, how it should be conceptualized, whether it concerns individual experiences, theorizing or identity, or if it is a property of social structures and cultural discourses (Davis, 2008: 68). In psychology for example, intersectionality may be better understood as a framework rather than a theory. Cole (2009) states that intersectionality “is a paradigm for theory and research offering new ways of understanding the complex causality that characterizes social phenomena” (pg. 179).

It was not until September 2001 that Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) was invited to introduce the notion of intersectionality before a special session at the World Conference against Racism (WCAR) in Durham, South Africa. According to Yuval-Davis (2006), it was in the expert meeting on Gender and Racial Discrimination that took place in 2000 as part of the preparatory process to the WCAR conference that a more specific analysis and proposal for a specific methodology for intersectionality was attempted. It was discovered that the analytical attempts to explain intersectionality in the reports were very confusing. For example, Crenshaw (2001) stated that intersectionality is “what occurs when a woman from a minority group...tries to navigate the main crossing in the city...the main highway is ‘racism road’. One cross street can be colonialism, then Patriarchy Street...She has to deal not only with one form of oppression but with all forms... (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 196). The metaphorical description of intersectionality is very different from the one that appeared in the Australian Human Rights and Equal

Opportunities Commission Issue Paper that stated “An intersectional approach asserts that aspects of identity are indivisible and that speaking of race and gender in isolation from each other results in concrete disadvantage (Yuval-Davis, 2006: 197).” The nature of these definitions are quite opposing, Crenshaw seems to focus on structural intersectionality whereas the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission use a definition that is strongly linked to the notions of identity.

It is apparent that the concepts of intersectionality continue to remain unstable. However, a number of scholars do not realize that it is not enough to call one’s study intersectional. Analysis of intersectionality is both problematic and difficult to operationalize because of the diversity of conceptualization and disciplinary approaches, it is often difficult to identify the most effective intersectional models for one’s own research (Naples, 2009).

### **Conflicting methodological approaches to Intersectionality**

Several kinds of intersectionality theories, concepts or approaches exist. Many aim at large-scale, structural process, while some focus on social interactions and individual identity processes. The meaning given to terms such as ‘intersecting’ and ‘category’ vary among researchers dependent on their approach to intersectionality and continue to be heatedly debated (Magnusson, 2011). Arguably, both old and new approaches continue to be inadequate to the task of studying intersectionality in all its complexity (McCall, 2005).

When Crenshaw and other early researchers first introduced the topic of intersectionality, it tended to offer an individualistic approach, emphasizing the ways in which women’s social location intersect with race, class, gender and sexuality and shape their lived experiences (Naples, 2009). Writings in this regard sought to theorize difference by category as they shaped individual

experiences and oppression. More specifically, the theory of intersectionality as used by Crenshaw (1989) and Hill Collins (1990) was used as a way of making sense of interlocking societal oppression experienced by subordinate groups. Syed (2010) stated “for these scholars, intersectionality served as an analytic frame for highlighting the complexities of oppression” (p. 61). In later studies, Crenshaw (1995) defined the terms structural intersectionality (also known as categorical intersectionality) and political intersectionality. Structural intersectionality represents the ways that the experience of membership in a category varies qualitatively as a function of other group membership one holds (Cole, 2008). For example, Crenshaw (1995) stated that the specific convergences of socioeconomic status, race, and gender make it less likely that poor women of color will receive rape counseling if resources are allocated according to the standards of need of racially and economically privileged women (Shields, 2008: 304). In contrast, political intersectionality describes the way that those who occupy multiple subordinate identities may find themselves caught between the sometimes conflicting agendas of two political constituencies to which they belong (Cole, 2008). The example Crenshaw (1995) uses here is black women whose political energies are often split between social action agendas based on race and on gender, neither of which alone may adequately address the specific concerns or most pressing needs to Black women themselves (Shields, 2008: 305). Intersectionality has become strongly linked to the notions of individual identity and identity formation, but it often fails to explore the dimensions of structural intersectionality central in Crenshaw’s work (McCall, 2005; Verloo, 2006; Boogard & Roggeband, 2010).

Subsequent work has tended towards a relational approach to intersectionality. The relational approach to intersectionality offers a more historical and regional variation of the earlier themes of difference (Naples, 2009). There continues to be controversy towards this approach dependent

upon the researcher. For instance, Weldon (2008) describes the relational approach as the ‘intersection-plus’ model focusing on a process-centered understanding where interaction effects of categories come to play, but only in selected cases. In contrast, McCall (2005) argues that a core element of this approach is comparative analysis, seeing how the interplay among different structures of domination varies must use a methodology that uses comparisons above the individual; she titles her version of a relational approach as ‘inter-categorical’ which will be discussed in detail below.

McCall’s (2005) contribution is the contention that the notion of intersectionality has introduced new methodological problems and has a limited range of methodological approaches used for studying intersectionality. She uses three intersectionality approaches that are defined in terms of their stance toward categories (i.e. Individualistic versus Relational models). More specifically, as to how they understand and use analytical categories to explore the complexity of intersectionality. The approaches are referred to as ‘anticategorical complexity’, ‘intracategorical complexity’ and ‘intercategorical complexity’ and it must be emphasized that not all research on intersectionality can simply fit within one of the three approaches as some research belongs partly to one approach and partly to another (McCall, 2005). McCall (2005) concludes

“The three approaches can be considered broadly representative of current approaches to the study of intersectionality and together illustrate the fact that different methodologies produce different kinds of substantive knowledge and that a wider range of methodologies is needed to fully engage with the set of issues and topics falling broadly under the rubric of intersectionality” (p. 1774).

The first approach is called anticategorical complexity because it is based on a methodology that seeks to deconstruct categorical divisions (McCall, 2005). Basically, nothing fits neatly into any single master category due to the fact that categories, including gender and race, are too simplistic to capture the complex social life and lived experiences of individuals (McCall, 2005). More generally, the process of categorization itself may lead to exclusion and then, ultimately, inequality. For example, there would be no longer a category of ‘gender’, no longer two genders but countless genders eliminating the singularity and separateness of social categories (McCall, 2005).

The next approach is “intercategorical complexity” and is quite the opposite of ‘anticategorical complexity’ in that it addresses the fact that inequalities exist in society and will continue to be imperfect and ever changing (McCall, 2005). Proponents of this methodology focus on using analytical categories to document societal inequalities and the relationships that exist. More specifically, the approach focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups and not divided into single categories or groups (McCall, 2005).

The final approach-‘intracategorical complexity’- falls neatly in the middle of the two other approaches. The former rejects the use of categories while the latter uses categories complexly and strategically. Like the first approach, ‘intracategorical complexity’ interrogates the boundaries of distinction and recognizes the shortcomings of social analytical categories (McCall, 2005). Yet, like the second approach, it acknowledges the stable relationships that social categories represent but remains critical of them at all times. McCall (2005) calls it ‘intracategorical complexity’ because “authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups and neglected points of intersection in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups” (p. 1774).

The association of anticategorical approach with the complexity introduced by studies on intersectionality may also have resulted from the tendency to combine this approach with ‘intra-categorical’ (McCall, 2005). McCall (2005) rejects the ‘anticategorical’ and ‘intracategorical’ approach to intersectionality because she sees them as inadequate, leaving the ‘intercategorical complexity’ approach as the most realistic option (Naples, 2009). Similarly, other critics (i.e. Garry, 2011) also state that intersectionality does not abolish identity categories; instead they become more complex and messy. This is not to say that the use of identity categories in intersectional analysis is not problematic due to the fact that not all situations are intersectional to the same extent; this alone causes researchers confusion because the appropriate intersectionality methodology is not set in stone.

The approaches to intersectionality methodology and analysis continue to conflict. McCall’s (2005) three approaches are not the only ones. Many other scholars have developed their own take on studying intersectionality as it is dependent on the way they theorize and analyze research. For example, Naples (2009) developed an approach called the epistemological approach of intersectional analysis, which is rooted in the insights from different theoretical perspectives developed to analyze gender, race, and class inequalities as well as sexuality and culture. Similarly, an epistemological view is evident in Hill Collins (2000) work as it centers on the construct of the matrix of domination. The difficulties to operationalize intersectionality stem from the various theories, types or approaches. Naples (2009) states “Each approach to intersectionality...offers a different angle of vision on the complex processes, relationships, and structural conditions that shape everyday life, relations of ruling and the resistance strategies of diverse actors” (p. 574).

### **Methodological Design in Intersectionality Analysis**

Despite the emergence of intersectionality as a major paradigm of research, there has been little discussion pertaining to intersectionality methodology. Studies of intersectionality are limited in terms of methodology and the methodological issues are quite complex and inconsistent with past practice (McCall, 2005).

Many scholars state that intersectionality is not a methodology, just as it is not a theory of oppression or power (Garry, 2011; Hurtado & Sinha, 2008). Intersectionality is more of a framework, and methods or methodologies can be developed that support it. More specifically, intersectionality directs one to the appropriate design and analysis. The problematic part of the design is determining the most appropriate method for “digging into the details of the ways that the full range of oppression and privileges interact in our societies, life and theories” (Garry, 2011, p. 844).

More often than not, the methodological demands of intersectionality research are quite challenging no matter what research method is chosen. So far, approaches to intersectionality have mostly been used in qualitative field studies. As stated by Shields (2008) “Intersectionality theory by virtue of its description of multidimensional nature of identity makes investigation through qualitative methods seem both natural and necessary (p. 311).” The theoretical compatibility and historical links between intersectionality and qualitative methodologies imply that one does not go without the other (Syed, 2010; Shields, 2008). However, different types and levels of analysis may require different qualitative methods. For example, Dorothy Smith (1987; 1990) uses an institutional ethnographic methodology that is considered one of the most powerful methodologies for intersectional research (Naples, 2009). The use of narratives and theoretical interventions essentially created the study of intersectionality but the use of case studies is considered as well (McCall, 2005). However, both can get problematic. In the case of narratives,

it can get confusing due to the problems of representation and othering. Questions can lead to personal bias (Butt et al., 1992) and there is the issue of the researcher misinterpreting or construing the stories (Denzin, 1989). Cole (2009) explained that this raises the issue of representation and how lives can be represented through text in all their complexity, “will any story do? (Phillips, 1994).” Using case studies as a methodology to study intersectionality can also work dependent on the complexity of the research. Case studies focus on the intensive study of single groups. For example, many feminists who are trained in social science and study intersectionality use the case study method to identify a new or invisible group (McCall, 2005).

Although using qualitative methods to study intersectionality is gaining momentum, it is more difficult to use quantitative methods in intersectionality research (Shields, 2008). Using quantitative research is very problematic when studying intersectionality because it oversimplifies and separates the very relational and complex intermeshing that intersectionality captures (Shields, 2008). Shields (2008) describes the difficulty with using a quantitative method such as analysis of variance (ANOVA). For example, a 2x2 study of sexual orientation and gender allows an analysis of how one variable influences another but it does not allow appreciation of the dependence of one category’s definition on the other (Shields, 2008). In psychological research, using an ANOVA framework leads to an additive approach of the intersectionality categories as they are seen as independent from one another. Similarly, McCall’s (2005) intersectionality approach ‘intercategorical complexity’ uses a quantitative methodology to analyze how categories influence one another.

The question of whether to interpret intersectionality as an additive or as a constitutive process is still a central debate (Yuval-Davis, 2006). An additive approach means that social inequality increases with each additional stigmatized identity (Bowleg, 2008). One of the problematics of



the additive intersectionality model is that it often remains on one level of analysis, the experiential, and does not differentiate between different levels (Yuval-Davis, 2006). It conceptualizes people's experience as separate, independent and summative (Bowleg, 2008). For example, Bowleg (2008) used past studies related to black lesbians to determine the intersections of race, sex/gender and sexual orientation. What she found was that none of the literature review sections of these past studies reference a single intersectionality theorist or mention the word intersectionality. Instead, the "triple jeopardy approach" to black lesbians' experiences was used in that all identities were seen as separate entities. Bowleg (2008) realized that every methodological choice made in the past studies represented an additive approach, Black+lesbian+women (p. 314). The point of this discussion is that in designing the methodology, the wording of the questions shape how participants respond to them. Unfortunately, it can be quite difficult to create the proper questions for intersectionality research (Bowleg, 2008). The main issue is how to ask questions about experiences that are intersecting and mutually constitutive without resorting to an additive approach (Bowleg, 2008). Often times, the way the questions are asked imply that the experience is to be recounted serially and the identities as separate. Bowleg (2008) sums up the issue at hand quite well:

"While several studies focus on race, age gender, ethnicity...these studies tend to have limited abilities to answer important questions about intersectionality. First, they often develop meaningful constructs to measure experiences based on intersections of these social identities, relying instead on the erroneous assumption that variables such as race sex...class... are explanatory constructs in and of themselves (Bowleg, 2008: 322; Helms et al., 2005; Krieger, 1999; Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Krieger et al., 1993)."

There is obviously no one-size-fits all methodological solution to incorporating an intersectionality perspective. Not only do the controversial methods and questioning lead to difficulties in operationalizing intersectionality, but the data analysis can cause problems as well. One key issue is how to handle intersectionality data that is implicit rather than explicit. This is especially an issue when the intersectional approach requires a more complex analysis than in more familiar and accessible additive approaches (Bowleg, 2008). More specifically, in the case of narratives, there is always the question -what counts as data (Cole, 2009)?

In all of the complexity that comes with intersectionality, there are two suggestions to put forth. First, questions about intersectionality should focus on meaningful constructs rather than typical identity categories. For instance, a study with participants who are ethnically diverse and includes demographic measures such as socioeconomic status and sexual orientation is not intersectionality research. A similar study that focuses on the dimensions of participants experience related to socioeconomic status and sexual orientation would be considered intersectional research (Betancourt & Lopez, 1993; Bowleg, 2008; Helms et al., 2005; Weber & Parra-Medina, 2003). Second, questions should be intersectional in design, that is, the identity categories must be relational and show interdependence rather than additive in nature (Bowleg, 2008).

### **Intersectionality and Practice: Paradigms and Applications**

Intersectionality has come a long way since its introduction a couple of decades ago. It is now possible to chronicle many approaches to intersectionality that differs by discipline, epistemology, and conceptualization (Naples, 2009). Despite this emergence, there has been little development in how to study intersectionality, that is, of its methodology (McCall, 2005). The

problematization lies within the fact that there is such a diverse way of conceptualizing and approaching intersectionality. Attempting to operationalize intersectionality may be a daunting and impossible task because- “Intersectionality can point us to locations where we need to begin identifying issues and constructing our theories...It does not do the work for us, but tells us where to start and suggests kinds of questions to ask. It sets the stage... (Garry, 2011: 828).

The various ontological, epistemological, and methodological aspects of different paradigmatic positions (Burrell & Morgan, 1979) arguably influence the application of intersectionality.

### ***Positivism***

From a positivist perspective (Johnson & Duberley, 2000) the emphasis on a natural science approach is likely to encourage a focus on more-or-less fixed categories (gender, race, etc) and an additive approach whereby different categories (often expressed as variables) can be studied and measured to assess their cumulative impact (see, for example, Glauber, 2008; Lovell, 2000). Here operationalization requires the codification of a great number of data that will be analyzed with regression analysis showing correlations among categories or variables. To conduct research in this tradition implies to be able to see the impact of one type of oppression onto another, in a linear and simplifying way. This approach has proven useful in drawing attention to the fact that anti-discriminatory policies may actually miss the mark where a person faces multiple discriminatory factors. The work of Best, Edelman, Krieger, and Eliason (2011), for example, helped United States court cases on discrimination to support the argument that race and gender disadvantages are interrelated and that antidiscrimination law provides less protection where intersected categories are involved.

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Nonetheless, some researchers have decried this approach as “body counting” (Alvesson & Billing, 2002), arguing that it serves to reinforce essentialist notions of gender and race (Hearn, 2011) as relatively fixed categories (McCall, 2005). On the other hand, it has been argued that, regardless of methodological issues, categorization is the basis for discriminatory practices (people do politically categorize others and discriminate based on such categorizations) and that political engagement against discrimination often needs to appeal to people – at least initially – as categories of social actors. Calás and Smircich (1992), for example, contend that feminist poststructuralism needs to take into account the appeal of categorization (e.g., collectives of women) for political action while simultaneously encouraging the deconstruction of the very same ‘master’ category of gender (see also McCall, 2005).

### ***Postpositivism***

Beyond positivism there are a disparate number of ‘intellectual traditions’ that share a common reaction to positivism in questioning ‘social reality and knowledge production from a more problematized vantage point, emphasizing the constructed nature of social reality, the constitutive role of language, and the value of research as critique’ (Prasad, 2005, p.9, cited in Bryman et al., 2011, pp.57-18). These various approaches focus to different degrees on language (e.g., poststructuralism), narrative (e.g., postmodernism), context/history (e.g., postcolonialism), socio-psychological interactions (e.g., Critical Sensemaking), and relationships (e.g., Actor Network Theory). In the process, we suggest, there are very different implications for the study of intersectionality (or the intersection of different identity formations). We will briefly look at some of the issues involved in selected methodological approaches to the study of the intersections of identity, including critical hermeneutics, critical discourse analysis, critical sensemaking, actor-network theory (ANT) and postcolonialism.

Critical hermeneutics focusses largely on textual analysis (Anshuman Prasad, 2002), seeking to derive meaning from such things as the socio-historical context in which selected texts were produced, the situated location of the reader-as-interpreter, and recognition of the role of translation as the researcher attempts to bring both her location and that of the text under review. This approach has been used, among other things, to show how corporate documents have served to shape images of the Arab as Other (Anshuman Prasad & Mir, 2002). It has been less used to understand issues of multiple identity projects.

One immediate problem of this approach is the issue of text itself. In the literal sense of text the researcher is very much stuck with the boundaries of written documents that may or may not deal with how a person is being viewed, imaged or employed: any intersecting (discriminatory) identities/structures may be unclear (e.g., a person's name may give little clue as to their ethnic background, gender, age, etc.) and there may be little or no clue as to selected persons' experiences of discriminatory practices (e.g., the intent of the text may serve to reduce the clues to certain experiences). On the positive side, it can be argued that texts can provide important clues to 'naturally occurring' discourse (Phillips & Hardy, 2002) that allow the researcher to avoid pre-fixed categories – allowing the character of discriminatory experiences to emerge from the text. This still does not get the researcher past the problem of discriminatory practices that serve to exclude certain people from a given text or set of texts. For example, Mills' (1995, 2006) study of British Airways found that women of colour were largely excluded from corporate texts over much of the first fifty years of the company's operation. Potential ways forward may be to undertake an extensive case study of a single organization over time that has an established archive of materials. Various documents (e.g., newsletters, corporate letters, annual general reports) could then be interrogated and cross-referenced in attempts to understand

the way in which discriminatory practices are structured and experienced as named people are followed in the array of materials. While this may be limited to the people referred to in the various texts (discrimination, for example, is likely to exclude certain people from the texts) it has the advantage of providing clues to the contexts of discrimination and how they may change over time (see Hartt, Mills, Helms Mills, & Durepos, 2012).

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) involves a focus on the relationship between language and practice that mutually reinforce a sense of the world that is experienced as knowledge (Weedon, 1997). Drawing on Foucault (1979), the inter-relationships between language, practice, and knowledge are seen as discursive (i.e., the process of producing a discourse). In other words, a discourse can be seen as “an interrelated set of texts, and the practices of their production, dissemination, and reception, that brings an object into being” (Phillips & Hardy, 2002, p.3). From this perspective, “social reality is produced and made real through discourses, and social interactions cannot be fully understood without reference to the discourses that give them meaning” (Ibid): it has been used in a number of studies of the production of gender (Thomas & Davies, 2002) and avoids the problem of fixed categories. Thomas and Davies (2002), for example, focus not so much on gender as a fixed category but rather the fluidity of notions of gender and the discursive processes through which they are constructed as seemingly fixed categories.

The contribution of poststructuralism to the study of intersectionality is to move attention away from fixed categories of discrimination to the study of if, how, and where overlapping experiences of discriminator occur and differ over time and across different contexts. The challenges include finding ways to unravel specific discourses of discrimination and how, at times, they might overlap and at other times and, in different contexts, do not. The size of the

challenge is rooted in the various problems of establishing/identifying discourses. For example, in their study of interviews of female executives of multi-national companies in Latin America, Paludi and Helms Mills (2011) were able to identify discourses of gender (both notions of masculinity and femininity) and ethnicity (the women's identities as Latin American coupled with issues of race and localized ethnicity). However, these identity clues had to be explored beyond the text to uncover aspects of the context and history of gender relations in Latin America but also the complex history of the discursive nature of 'Latin America' itself: a vast undertaking in terms of time and the ability to build plausible accounts of emergent discourses.

Critical sensemaking (CSM) draws on the work of Weick (1995) by attempting to ground sensemaking in a series of structured (i.e., organizational rules; formative contexts) and discursive contexts. Yet the focus is not only on how people make sense *in* context but how, in the process, they *enact* a sense of context (Helms Mills, Thurlow, & Mills, 2010). To date, CSM has been used to understand how the development, maintenance and change in gendered situations have been rendered plausible (Mills & Helms Mills, 2010). More recently the approach has been used to explore the creation of a sense of race and ethnicity in the development of immigration policies in Canada (Hilde, 2013; Hilde and Porter, 2014). With a focus on the socio-psychological properties that people bring to bear on creating a sense of a situation, the challenge for CSM to find ways of studying the same or similar people across a range of situations. Hilde (2013), for example, interviewed Hong Kong Chinese immigrants to Canada to gain an understanding of how they made sense of the experience. Although gender was not a specific aspect of her study she began to realize as she analyzed the data that there appeared to be difference between respondents in terms of their gendered identity work. The challenge of future work, however, would not be to assume gender differences but rather to track

the same group of people across varying situations to see how – in situations not directly linked to immigration status – they feel identified, which identity is prevalent, and to what extent it is experienced negatively.

Actor-network Theory (ANT) is, for feminists, arguably one of the more controversial approaches to discrimination (Corrigan & Mills, 2012) yet, it continues to attract a number of feminist researchers (Haraway, 2004; Hunter & Swan, 2007; Singleton & Michael, 1993). In its focus on actor-networks as the site/process of the production of knowledge ANT (Callon, 1999; Latour, 2005; Law, 1999) refuses to privilege human actors over non-human actors (e.g., computers, texts, laboratory coats) nor to start with a study of knowledge production that sets out to trace a prefixed category of thought. Its focus is on tracing (“reassembling”) how an initially disparate assembly of actors comes to produce a particular knowledge. To understand that knowledge is to understand it as an effect of a particular set of networked relations. For example, the notion of intersectionality would not be seen as a form of universalized or even generally understood knowledge of the world but rather as something that has various (localized) meanings or even lack of meaning across different actor networks. Much like we have argued throughout this chapter, the idea of intersectionality differs across paradigmatic networks of scholars.

A central problem leveled at ANT in this regard is the practice of trying to ‘follow the actors’ (Latour, 2005) in the process of selected network formation, etc. Thus, for example, many of ‘the actors’ in studies of mainstream organizations may not include selected people because of their skin colour, assumed ethnicity, age, etc. Pan American Airways, for example, was dominated by so-called white, American-born men and, to a lesser extent white, middle-class, and American-born women: making the search for intersecting identities very limited and/or restricted to narrowly defined groups (Hartt et al., 2012). Regardless, one way forward is



to consider the role of exclusion (or exclusions) as part of the effects of a particular actor-network. The challenge would be to extrapolate from the exclusions to assess any intersecting experiences of discrimination.

Postcolonial theory draws on the work of Said (1978) in a focus on the role of colonial (and post-colonial) relationships in the construction of images of the Other. In the process, it focusses on issues of power, cultural representation, and geo-political relationships. As Spivak (1988) argues “if you are poor, black and female you get it [discrimination] in three ways. If, however, this formulation is moved from the first-world context into the postcolonial (...) context, the description ‘black’ or ‘poor’ loses persuasive significance.”(p. 90). This statement summarizes the complexity of a postcolonial-intersectionality approach. When intersectionality is approached through postcolonialist lenses, the notions of cultural representation, nation and First-world/Third world countries, emerge as key components to be problematized and contested. Postcolonial theory is linked to the notion of identity in two ways. On the one hand, it problematizes the idea of identity as a fixed construct. On the other hand, identity cannot be seen without culture and how it is represented in each society (Kailo, 2001).

Through this focus postcolonial theory adds a complex series of levels to the debate on intersectionality that ultimately challenges the (Western) culture-bound character of the term itself (Holvino, 2010). It broadens the focus away from simple categories, individuals, relationships, and structural rules to the broader context of culture and socio-economic practices and histories. Thus, intersecting identity work, it is argued, will vary across socio-political relationships of colonial-and colonized positions.

The challenges here include the sheer amount of work it takes to ‘uncover’ aspects of the various layers involved. For example, understandings of extant identity work in any of a number of countries in Latin America would require extensive research on the history of South (and North) America – its people’s before and after European conquest; the shaping of particular people’s into national identities (Eakin, 2007; Ibarra-Colado, 2008), and the “idea” of Latin America itself (Mignolo, 2005). Another challenge is to capture the inter-relational aspect of intersecting identities. Said (1979), for example, while able to capture the images of Other in the writings of British and French novelists, does not reveal how those images were understood, translated and/or resisted by those so othered. Similarly the (textual) voice of the oppressed, while revealing reactions to colonial images, does not necessarily capture the interactive character of the process of postcoloniality (Amoko, 2006). Finally, postcolonialist approaches also face the challenge of unraveling the construction of different identities across various situations when faced with largely textual traces.

Despite these various challenges in implementing a focus on intersecting discriminatory practices/experiences, postcolonial theory draws attention to the complex and far-reaching problems of reducing intersectionality to categorization and to studying it out of context (in terms of both culture and past events). Possible ways forward include longitudinal case studies where there is access to various participants across the colonizer/colonized divide and the possibility of both archival and ethnographic study.

## **Summary and Conclusion**

In this chapter we have discussed the relationship between epistemology, methodology, methods

and application in the study of intersectionality. Our intent was x fold: First, we wanted to draw attention to the heuristic value of a focus on intersectionality, in so doing we have attempted to reveal the widespread and growing interest in framing discriminatory practices through an intersectionality lens as well as some of useful outcomes associated with it. Second, we wanted to reveal the gap between the widespread theorization of intersectionality and the much more limited application (and discussion of the application) of intersectionality. Third, we set out to say something about the discursive – as opposed to universalist – nature of the concept and ensuing debates. We contend that intersectionality cannot be treated as a term that is commonly accepted (or understood) across various research communities, including feminist communities. Fourth, in focusing on the discursive nature of the idea of intersectionality, we explored the links between the concept and its possible understanding across different epistemological and methodological stances. Our central argument that the understanding and use of the term intersectionality differs markedly across different paradigms of thought and thus had profoundly different implications for if or how it is applied. Fifth, through an exploration of selected paradigmatic approaches, we attempted to present some of the issues and challenges in studying intersectionality from a specific approach. In the process, we tried to show that issues of ontology, epistemology, and methodology shape the very issues and challenges as starting points of enquiry. For ease of discussion and space we restricted our discussion to selected approaches and also to cases where one particular method or methodology was prevalent. Obviously a number of researchers employ more than one way of studying a specific problem of discrimination. Sixth, and our final point, was to reveal the rich but diverse nature of the debates around intersectionality and to encourage further engagement with issues of implementation.

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