Gender: An Intersectionality Perspective

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Stephanie A. Shields

Abstract Intersectionality, the mutually constitutive relations among social identities, is a central tenet of feminist thinking and has transformed how gender is conceptualized in research. In this special issue, we focus on the intersectionality perspective in empirical research on gender. Our goal is to offer a "best practices" resource that provides models for when and how intersectionality can inform theory and be incorporated into empirical research on psychological questions at individual, interpersonal, and social structural levels. I briefly summarize the development of the intersectionality perspective, and then review how the realization of its promise has been diverted by preoccupation with intersectionality as a methodological challenge. I conclude with a discussion of why intersectionality is an urgent issue for researchers invested in promoting positive social change.

Keywords Feminist psychology · Social identity · Intersectionality theory · Hybridity · Feminist theory

Introduction

Intersectionality, the mutually constitutive relations among social identities, has become a central tenet of feminist thinking, one that McCall (2005) and others have suggested is the most important contribution of feminist theory to our present understanding of gender. Indeed, at the level of theory, intersectionality has transformed how gender is

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discussed. Feminist theorists reveal and challenge the taken for granted assumptions about gender that underlie conventional theoretical and methodological approaches to empirical research as, for example, psychology's homogenization of the category of gender. The intersectionality perspective further reveals that the individual's social identities profoundly influence one's beliefs about and experience of gender. As a result, feminist researchers have come to understand that the individual's social location as reflected in intersecting identities must be at the forefront in any investigation of gender. In particular, gender must be understood in the context of power relations embedded in social identities (Collins 1990; 2000).

Understanding that social location is important and discerning how to apply that knowledge in the course of conducting research, however, are not the same. Despite recognition of the significance of intersectionality, empirical application of this perspective has lagged behind, particularly in psychology and related disciplines that prize methodological approaches that do not easily lend themselves to empirical study of intersectionality. In this special issue we ask: How is the research process itself transformed by adoption of an intersectionality perspective?

Before I turn to the substance of this introductory piece, I first want to say a bit more about definitions of intersectionality and the standpoint from which I have approached development of this special issue.

Most important, by *identity* I mean social categories in which an individual claims membership as well as the personal meaning associated with those categories (Ashmore et al. 2004). Identity in psychological terms relates to awareness of self, self-image, self-reflection, and self-esteem. In contemporary American society, identity is emphasized as a quality that enables the expression of the individual's authentic sense of self. The specific definition of

intersectionality varies by research context, but a consistent thread across definitions is that social identities which serve as organizing features of social relations, mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize one another. By *mutually constitute* I mean that one category of identity, such as gender, takes its meaning as a category in relation to another category. By *reinforce* I mean that the formation and maintenance of identity categories is a dynamic process in which the individual herself or himself is actively engaged. We are not passive "recipients" of an identity position, but "practice" each aspect of identity as informed by other identities we claim. By *naturalize* I mean that identities in one category come to be seen as self-evident or "basic" through the lens of another category. For example, in the contemporary U.S., racial categories are construed as containing two genders. This suggests that gender categories are always and everywhere similarly understood and employed, thus "natural" and without other possibilities (e.g., multiple genders; "temporary" gender categories). To this definition we might add the acknowledgment that these meanings are historically contingent. See, for example, Shields and Bhatia (in press).

It is also widely agreed that intersections create both oppression and opportunity (Baca Zinn and Thornton Dill 1996). In other words, being on the advantaged side offers more than avoidance of disadvantage or oppression by actually opening up access to rewards, status, and opportunities unavailable to other intersections. Furthermore, an intersectional position may be disadvantaged relative to one group, but advantaged relative to another. The White lesbian may be disadvantaged because of divergence from the heterosexual norm and standard, but relative to other lesbians she enjoys racial privilege. Last and not least, identities instantiate social stratification. That is, identity, such as gender or social class, may be experienced as a feature of individual selves, but it also reflects the operation of power relations among groups that comprise that identity category.

In this issue we specifically focus on bringing the intersectionality perspective to bear on empirical research on gender. We focus on social subdisciplines of psychology in their broadest sense, that is, the individual in social context. To the best of my knowledge, the emerging body of empirical research on gender using an intersectionality perspective has not yet been brought together in a single volume. We intend this special issue to offer a kind of "best practices" resource that provides models for when and how intersectionality can inform theory and be incorporated into empirical research methods. We are particularly concerned with the potential for intersectionality perspectives to address psychological questions at individual, interpersonal, and social structural levels.

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. Psychology, which as a discipline and as a subject matter *should* be fundamentally concerned with intersections of identity, has lagged behind. There are, however, some signs of forward momentum. There is growing interest in employing the intersectionality perspective to transform and advance empirically based research in psychology and allied disciplines, especially through using conventional empirical strategies in innovative ways to investigate intersectionality (e.g., Settles 2006). Thus, the time is ripe for our special issue.

Following an overview of the historical development of the intersectionality perspective, I consider how intersectionality has developed as a perspective on research, arising first from researchers' awareness of the reality of intersectionality in their own and their research subjects' lives, and how the realization of its promise has been diverted by preoccupation with intersectionality as a methodological challenge. I then turn to the focus of our special issue in a summary of the contributions to this collection. A concluding section addresses why intersectionality is an urgent issue, especially so for researchers invested in promoting positive social change. To locate my perspective: I write as a second wave feminist, trained as psychologist, but with cross-disciplinary perspective even in my undergraduate years. I have been deeply involved in women's studies my entire career. I am epistemologically parochial in the sense that I come to this project with a belief in the usefulness of scientific methods (quantitative and qualitative) for studying intersectionality and a strong belief in the possibilities of using science as a vehicle for promoting positive social change. I undertook this project because I believe in the importance and urgency of adding an intersectionality perspective to psychology's work so that the psychology of gender not become socially irrelevant.

Intersectionality of Social Identities: A Brief History

When second wave academic feminism began to shine light on women's experience as women in the early 1970s, a companion question soon arose: "*Which* women's experience?" The origins of the intersectionality framework grew out of feminist and womanist scholars of color pressing the position that most feminist scholarship at that time was about middle-class, educated, white women, and that an inclusive view of women's position should substantively acknowledge the intersections of gender with other signif-

icant social identities, most notably race (e.g., Moraga and Anzaldúa 1981; Hull et al. 1982; Dill 1983).

These specific critiques were strong voices in a widely expressed concern that feminist scholarship should more explicitly acknowledge the ways in which social positions and group membership overlap and change the experience of social identity. An early solution was the development of a model of layered oppressions. In general, it was a more or less additive model of the effects of marginalized identities based on the idea that the more marginalized statuses that the individual identified with (or was identified as occupying), the greater the oppression (Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach 2008). Empirical research born of this view focused on urging inclusivity of topics and populations previously overlooked, but transformation of research processes themselves came later.

The theoretical foundation for intersectionality grew from study of the production and reproduction of inequalities, dominance, and oppression. The evolution of intersectionality as a theoretical framework has been traced to Black feminist responses to the limitations of the accumulated disadvantage model (e.g., Mullings 1997; Nakano Glenn 1999) and the recognition that the intersections of gender with other dimensions of social identity are the starting point of theory (Crenshaw 1994/2005). A fundamental assumption in every influential theoretical formulation of intersectionality is that intersectional identities are defined in relation to one another. That is, intersectional identities, as Spelman (1988) famously observed, are not a "pop bead metaphysics," that is, not a set of discrete identities like beads on a string, but, rather, they are relationally defined and emergent (e.g., Anthias and Yuval-Davis 1983; Collins 1990).

Since the 1980s, feminist critique of essentialist assumptions about gender increasingly has employed an intersectionality perspective to understand gender in relation to other social identities, such as race, class, ethnicity and sexual orientation. In contrast to models that suggest for each minority status there is a simple accumulation of disadvantage, such that the Black woman is doubly disadvantaged compared to the Black man, the intersectionality framework emphasizes the qualitative differences among different intersectional positions. For example, "the very meaning of *manhood* may vary when applied to one's own racial group as compared to another group; similarly the meaning of a given racial category may vary for men and women" (Mullings and Schulz 2006, p. 5).

In sum, the construct of intersectionality has assumed a significant position in thinking about gender. As the foundation for theory it promised a more accurate and tractable way of dealing with two issues. First, it promised a solution, or at least a language for the glaring fact that it is impossible to talk about gender without considering other

dimensions of social structure/social identity that play a formative role in gender's operation and meaning. In the U.S., the most obvious, pervasive, and seemingly unalterable are race and social class. Second, intersectionality seemed a generally applicable descriptive solution to the multiplying features that create and define social identities. It is not race-class-gender, but also age, ableness, sexual orientation, to name the most salient.

Risman (2004) sums up the impact that concern with intersectionality has had on feminist work: "there is now considerable consensus growing that one must always take into consideration multiple axes of oppression; to do otherwise presumes the whiteness of women, the maleness of people of color, and the heterosexuality of everyone" (p. 442). Indeed, Knapp (2005) asserts that the rapidity with which ideas of intersectionality gained purchase was "the political and moral need for feminism to be inclusive in order to be able to keep up its own foundational premises" (p. 253). At the same time, the impulse toward inclusivity was challenged by the "postfeminist" controversies of the late 1980s and early 1990s which either threatened to fragment feminism in a re-radicalized identity politics or reject the meaningfulness of identity categories (Knapp 2005). Butler's (1990) *Gender Trouble*, for example, posed a challenge to "theories of feminist identity that elaborate predicates of color, sexuality, ethnicity, class, and able-bodiedness" which "invariably close with an embarrassed 'etc.', at the end of the list" (p. 143). Indeed, Butler and others critique the very notion of "woman" as a stable category.

The intellectual and moral imperatives of intersectionality notwithstanding, the prevailing approach to understanding individuals in the context of groups is to focus on comparison of group differences and similarities. The naturalization of gender categories has fostered an approach to gender research in psychology in which the goal is to identify gender differences (and occasionally, similarities). Within this gender-as-difference framework, the status of gender as a category remains outside the spotlight. The question "In what ways do women and men differ?" does not seem that it will ever go away. Simplistic catalogs of difference resist theory's demonstration that focus on the descriptions of difference and similarity do not aid us in understanding when and how gender operates as a system of oppression or as an aspect of identity.

We have long known that "difference" is a seductive oversimplification (e.g., Hare-Mustin and Marecek 1988; Bacchi 1990; Eagly 1998). Gender-as-difference predominates in lay and popular culture discourse on gender and thereby demands its attention and inclusion in scientific and scholarly discourse. The end result is further reification of gender-as-difference which, in turn, endows it with the status of explanation (difference-as-explanation). One need

look no further than recent neuroscience publications on gender differences in fMRI responses for examples of this process. Difference-as-explanation, in turn, reaffirms the legitimacy of gender stereotypes. (See also Richards 2002.) In the case of racial categories, a similar misattribution to the category occurs. For example, Helms et al. (2005) point out that the combination of imprecise definition of racial categories with their easy quantification leads researchers to attribute more meaning to race categories than is merited.

Moving from the description of difference/similarity to explanation of processes is a challenge for most researchers. In adopting an intersectionality perspective, the question of how to approach empirical work without falling back into the *status quo* approach of testing for difference takes enormous effort. After all, conventional quantitative research designs and statistical analyses are constructed to test for differences between groups. It is neither an automatic nor easy step to go from *acknowledging* linkages among social identities to *explaining* those linkages or the processes through which intersecting identities define and shape one another.

Conversations by feminist researchers with different disciplines of origin are as difficult here as in any other situation that bears on theory and the methods to test those theories or otherwise establish truth claims. While there may be broad agreement as to the fundamental features of a definition of "intersectionality," the relation of the construct to research practice varies considerably. Different ways of construing "intersectionality" within and between disciplines and individual investigators make it difficult to establish that the conversation begins from the same point of reference. My own discipline of origin (psychology) amplifies confusion because much of the concern within psychology has simply revolved around methodological questions: How best to "capture" intersections of identity within an analytic framework that allows for additive, but not emergent properties. In the following sections I consider the different ways that intersectionality has been construed by researchers, particularly those dealing with psychological questions.

Intersectionality as a Perspective on Research

Most behavioral science research that focuses on intersectionality, especially research using quantitative techniques, employs intersectionality as a perspective on research rather than as a theory that drives the research question. That is, intersectionality is construed in terms of multiple group membership, but its emergent properties and processes escape attention. Gamson and Moon (2004), for example, point out that sociologists of sexuality were attending to intersections of sexuality and gender in the 1990s, but only

recently have begun to ask "how" questions. Thus, work that aims to take an intersectionality perspective often does not succeed in fully integrating the idea of mutually constituted categories into the work, and "intersectionality" looks much more like independent factors within a conventional factorial research design. This is not to say that the researchers fail to grasp the idea, but available methodological tools can impede a view of just how radical a transformation of thinking about research processes is needed to incorporate intersectionality meaningfully (Bowleg 2008). Psychology is not alone. Other fields are similarly grappling with incorporating an intersectionality perspective into a tradition of empirical work (e.g., Barker 2005 on feminist economics; Kennedy 2005 on feminist science and technology studies).

Intersectionality: From Fact of Identity to Theory

Intersectionality first and foremost reflects the reality of lives. The facts of our lives reveal that there is no single identity category that satisfactorily describes how we respond to our social environment or are responded to by others. It is important to begin with this observation because concern about intersectionality from a theoretical or research perspective has grown directly out of the way in which multiple identities are experienced. Identities are fluid in that they can change over time; at the same time, however, they are experienced as stable, giving the self a sense of continuity across time and location. Some identity categories, perhaps most notably gender, are found in all historical periods and cultures, though how and to whom the identity category applies can vary as do the social meanings attached to the category.

Which components of intersectionality are in the foreground and which in the background and how those constituent identities are seen to articulate is, to some degree, dependent on the investigator's level of analysis. In her landmark paper on intersectionality and violence against women of color, for example, Crenshaw (1994/ 2005) differentiated structural intersectionality from political intersectionality. Structural intersectionality reflects the ways in which the individual's legal status or social needs marginalize them, specifically because of the convergence of identity statuses. Crenshaw cites the example of rape counseling for women of color, noting that the specific convergence of socioeconomic status, race, and gender makes it less likely that poor women of color will receive the assistance they need if resources are allocated according to the standards of need of racially and economically privileged women. Political intersectionality, in contrast, highlights the different and possibly conflicting needs and goals of the respective groups from which an individual draws her or his identity. Crenshaw here uses the example of 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 of Black women themselves. Crenshaw's analysis reminds us that the nature of the experience varies by domain. Her analysis also highlights the fact that the individual's experience of intersecting identities must be distinguished from the ways that intersection is broadcast in the larger culture. (See also Nakano Glenn 1999, and Weber 2004.)

Another way to conceptualize intersecting identities emphasizes the unique form of identity created out of intersections. From this point of view emergent identity is experienced as a uniquely hybrid creation. The concept of hybridity grew out of postcolonial studies emphasizing the impact of colonizing influences on indigenous cultures. The idea is that at any point where cultures make contact, whether this is involuntary as through colonization or voluntary as through immigration, new cultural forms are created. Applying this idea to identity emphasizes the impact that invading, colonizing, or dominant cultures can have on group identity and the individual's simultaneous and innovative expression of these new intersections. The notion of hybridity further suggests that there is stability in this newly formed intersectional category. Interviews of first-generation, middle-class Indian immigrants to the U.S., for example, reveals how this group made up primarily of skilled professionals, through the specific racial dynamics of American society, as a group, have been transformed into "people of color" (Bhatia 2007).

Intersectionality as a Methodological Challenge

In conventional social and behavioral research, intersectionality frequently becomes redefined as a methodological challenge. Although feminist psychologists have urged serious consideration of intersectionality (e.g., Reid 2000), psychological scientists have typically responded to the question of intersectionality in one of three ways: excluding the question; deferring the question; limiting the question.

It's Not Psychology

The simplest and least tenable way that intersectionality has been dealt with is to define it as outside disciplinary boundaries. Intersectionality is excluded by defining questions of interlinking identities as sociological, as being about social stratification rather than the psychology of individual experience.

This "solution" is not taken defensively, but as a kind of naive circling of the disciplinary wagons. If we say "yes, but that's not psychology" it is unnecessary to recognize that in defining the subject population in one way, "college students," for example, that it might make a difference who

those college students are. In some ways, psychology's solution is to add categories of "special" subject populations. Early on, the solution was to add women to the sample and leave race unspecified—why? Because the college student population from which most research participants were drawn was predominantly White. When specific populations are studied, they are identified as nonnormative (Reid 1993).

Not Enough Information

The social/developmental/personality/clinical psychologist who does see the need to acknowledge intersectionality has found little theory or empirical work within psychology to serve as a guide or resource. So the second strategy is to defer the question to a future day because relevant data/ theory does not yet exist. I know I am not alone among feminist psychologists who have relied on inserting a self-excusing paragraph that simultaneously acknowledges the central significance of intersectionality and absolves oneself of responsibility for attempting to incorporate it into the work. The paragraph typically goes something like this:

> In this book I limit my discussion to the contemporary U.S., a westernized post-industrial society. There are important limitations in how I can represent "contemporary westernized post-industrial society." In nearly all of the research I draw on here, neither racial ethnicity nor class is considered... rarely are these important features of peoples' social selves accorded a role in the theory that drives the research question. Focusing on gender while bracketing social class, racial ethnicity, and other within-gender differences, what Mary Parlee (1995) calls "gender-with-brackets-on," acknowledges the issues raised, but sets them outside the "normal" course of inquiry. I will try to resist that impulse and to make special note of those areas or topics in which there already is or could be sophisticated (i.e., beyond the merely additive) inclusion of race, class, or ethnicity in the theory framing the work. My goal is to move the discussion about gender and emotion beyond the discussion of differences, not only to advance theory on gender and emotion, but also to set the stage for a more sophisticated discussion of the intersections of gender and emotion with racial ethnicity, historical period, culture, and social class. That said, I can be only partially successful; real progress would require placing these variables at the center, not the periphery, of the inquiry. (Shields 2002, p. 25)

I'm particularly discomfited by the passage's tone of apology loaded with self-justification because I wrote it; it is taken from my book on gender and the social meaning of

emotion! Maybe apologies were still acceptable at the turn of the 21st Century, but now, nearly 10 years along, the bar should be set higher.

Knapp (2005) takes us to task for settling for mention of race-class-gender as opposed to actually using it. Mentioning, she notes, offers the dual message of being well-informed and politically correct. Yet, mentioning alone leaves the work of actually incorporating intersectionality into one's work to others (or "others," in Knapp's terms). The end result is to mention the newer view of difference, but to continue to work in the same way as always, not to change a thing about how difference is theorized or studied. The introduction of intersectionality, Knapp argues, changes all of that—now the gaps are revealed and one cannot successfully continue in old ways simply by acknowledgement in passing.

A Perspective in Search of a Method

A third strategy is to view intersectionality in limited terms, such as a 2×2 study of sexual orientation and gender. Within the analysis of variance framework we can get a picture of how one variable (gender, for example) influences and is influenced by the effects of another variable, such as age or social class. The problem is that it does not go far enough and we settle for identification of points of mutual effect without appreciation of the dependence of one category's very definition on the other and vice versa. In psychological research, intersectionality often simply takes the form of predicted interactions in additive-model analysis of variance designs. That is, for example, the gender comparison becomes the gender X race (or sexual orientation or cross-national cultural comparison), which requires the assumption that gender and race are independent of one another. At the level of the category, yes, the assumption of independence is warranted. At the political, interpersonal, and experiential levels, however, it is not. The limits of a highly constrained approach as an end in itself become more apparent when we move beyond basic demographic categories. For example, intersections with immigrant status are complicated by the ways in which the network of related identity categories (e.g., legal/illegal, culture of origin) define it.

The elephant in the room, of course, is the question of the match between research methods and research goals. Can a quantitative approach ever work? And what would that look like that would not simultaneously oversimplify or disaggregate the very relational, emergent properties of identity that intersectionality theory captures? Audre Lorde famously asserted that you cannot dismantle the master's house with the master's tools, which has spurred ongoing debate, not only in psychology (e.g., Unger 1983; Riger 2000), but in all areas of the social and behavioral sciences

that have a strong tradition of relying on quantitative methods (e.g., McCall 2005; Walker 2003).

One methodological solution is to rely more heavily on qualitative methods because they appear to be more compatible with the theoretical language and intent of intersectionality. Most qualitative researchers have the goal of describing the forms and processes of relations among categories of phenomena and the themes and units of meaning relevant to these relations. This stance makes the qualitative researcher more open to emergent phenomena than the quantitative researcher whose work is driven by hypotheses determined *a priori*. Moreover, guides to qualitative research (e.g., Silverman 2001; Camic et al. 2003) encourage the investigator to choose research questions that explore constructs that are linked in language or in practice (hyphenated phenomena) in order to reveal the processes that create that linkage and the functions that it serves. This view of the work of research meshes comfortably with prevailing conceptualizations of intersecting identities in a way that conventional quantitative research strategies do not (e.g., Stoppard and McMullen 2003; White 2008). In general, feminist theory that is the most fully developed theoretical orientation to intersectionality has a more comfortable relation to qualitative than quantitative work, particularly when that quantitative work is grounded in experimental method and hypothesis testing. That said, in psychology, at least, it is difficult for qualitative work to find entry into the top "mainstream" journals which, for better or worse, are the benchmarks of quality required for professional advancement. Only a very small proportion of qualitative research is published in psychology journals, a fact that led Marchel and Owens (2007) only half facetiously to title their article "Qualitative Research in Psychology: Could William James Get a Job?"

The theoretical compatibility and historic links between intersectionality theory and qualitative methods imply that the method and the theory are always already necessary to one another. Intersectionality theory, by virtue of its description of multidimensional nature of identity makes investigation through qualitative methods seem both natural and necessary. Different levels of analysis, however, may require radically different strategies. For example, Acker (2006) employs qualitative research to examine processes of inequality reproduction in the work place. The qualitative approach enables her to zero in on workplace behaviors and customs that comprise "inequality regimes," which sustain inequalities in work organizations (p. 441). Acker contrasts her approach with McCall's (2005) demographic analyses which use large scale data sets to identify the patterns of gender, race, and class inequality that characterize economic activity in individual regions of the United States. As Acker observes, both McCall's approach and her own advance our understanding of intersectionality of

social identities. Whereas McCall's yields a macro-level view of patterns of inequality connected to identity status, Acker's gives a close-up of how social practices operate to create and sustain inequality between intersectional categories. (See also Warner 2008.)

An Intersectionality Perspective on Gender: Best Practices in Behavioral Research

There is clearly no one-size-fits-all methodological solution to incorporating an intersectionality perspective. A both/and strategy both pragmatically and conceptually seems the best way forward (Collins 1998; Risman 2004). The both/and strategy entails both comparing individual identities to each other as well as considering intersections and their emergent properties. An intersectionality perspective requires that identity categories be studied in relation to one other—the facts of intersectionality at the individual, interpersonal, and structural level compel us to. At the same time, however, we must be mindful of the specific historical and contextual features of individual identity categories.

Some research questions may be more usefully addressed by an intersectionality model than others. We should not, however, expect that the processes underlying systems of inequality will be equivalent when examined at a structural level. Risman (2004), for example observes that race and socioeconomic status, for example, always intersect as axes of domination, but the social processes that create and maintain them are not necessarily identical. This is true for gendered intersections as well:

> Gendered images support racial domination, but racial domination can hardly be attributed to gender inequality. For example, Black men's inferiority gets promoted through constructions of hypersexuality (Collins 2004), and Black women's inferiority gets promoted through sexualized images such as Jezebel or welfare queen (Collins 2000). Similarly, Asian American men's autonomy and even citizenship rights were abrogated by constructions of effeminacy (Espiritu 1997). Yet it is implausible to argue that racial domination is nothing but a product of gender oppression. (Risman 2004, pp. 443–444)

In other situations, forms of intersectionality create unique situations of disadvantage and marginalization, yet gender may be a significant explanatory through-line. For example, different mechanisms may be at work to depress the wages of working poor women compared to men, and women professionals compared to men, and the experience of marginalization may be quite different for the two groups of women. The end result of different local mechanisms, however, is the fact that women across occupations are

paid, on average, less than men of comparable training, skill, productivity, and seniority.

As a social structural institution, gender constructs and maintains the subordination of women as a group to men as a group across time and culture (Lorber, 1994). This is the primary reason that we use gender as the starting point in our analysis of intersectionality in this special issue. We do not suggest that gender is always and everywhere the most important social identity, but it is the most pervasive, visible, and codified.

Our special issue brings together researchers who are conducting innovative empirical study of gender from the perspective of intersectionality of social identities. The special issue illustrates the complex ways in which empirical research using an intersectionality perspective has shaped different disciplinary approaches to the study of gender. In assembling the contributions, we have been particularly attentive to bringing in contributions that exemplify the heterogeneity in methodological approaches (e.g., qualitative, experimental, survey) that are employed within the intersectionality framework. With this special issue we wish to foster cross-fertilization of ideas promoting interdisciplinary approaches to intersectionality as an analytical lens in the study of gender.

Contributions to this special issue cover many topics that have garnered attention in treatments of intersectionality: quantitative and qualitative empirical work; intersectionality as the individual experiences it and as a set of social categories that others respond to; empirical work in a variety of settings, especially those emphasizing connection of individuals and their communities; models for and discussion of bridges between intersectionality approaches and conventional psychology; ways in which an intersectionality perspective requires rethinking old and comfortable ways of thinking about gender, especially gender-as-difference. Contributors do not have all of the answers, but this special issue is designed to be a useful roadmap toward those answers.

We have made a special effort to invite contributions from newer researchers because their graduate training (and sometimes undergraduate as well) in the younger interdisciplines, such as women's studies, has made them acutely aware from day one of intersections. They began their careers in research drawing from an already maturing body of theory and critique concerned with intersectionality and have been concerned with finding ways to implement this perspective in their empirical research. Our special issue provides a critical look at intersectionality as a theory/practice. We can only provide a sampling of the promising research being conducted today. Thus, we do not aim to include all intersections of significance nor all of the innovative methodological strategies for investigation of intersectionality.

In the first contribution Lisa Bowleg (2008) addresses the methodological challenges that confront a researcher who takes intersectionality seriously. Bowleg instantiates what many of us struggle with—What do we lose when we fail to take intersectionality into account? How can we best incorporate an intersectionality perspective into our empirical work? How do interpret what we get? She argues that a key dilemma for intersectionality researchers is that the additive (e.g., Black+Lesbian+Woman) assumption of most approaches to measurement and data analyses runs counter to the central tenet of intersectionality. Using her own research with Black lesbians as a foundation, she demonstrates how an investigator might think about their work from a perspective that elicits the most from an intersectional perspective.

The next set of papers focuses on individuals' experience of intersectional identity and how that experience is reflected in their belief structures, their self-narratives, their understanding of community, and even the fluidity of their own identity. Mahalingam et al. (2008) examine the relation between intersectionality of immigrant status and gender, and the willingness to endorse ideologies pertinent to those intersecting identities, even ideologies that may be at odds with other core values. Mahalingam and his colleagues argue that the marginalized status of Asian Americans fosters, on the one hand, endorsement of idealized patriarchal beliefs, but, on the hand, these beliefs can act as something of a buffer to the vulnerabilities associated with the marginalized immigrant position. Testing Mahalingam's (2006) idealized cultural identities (ICI) model in a sample of Asian Americans, they report support for the model such that idealized patriarchal beliefs regarding femininity, as well as masculinity, were positively related to model minority pride, which, in turn, was positively related to resilience.

Aida Hurtado and Mrinal Sinha (2008) focus on the experience of self-identified feminist Latinos. Individual depth interviews revealed that the men's definition of manhood more often referenced socially devalued identities than those that are unproblematic (e.g., heterosexuality), a reminder of the invisibility of privilege. The complexity of interviewees' identification with hegemonic masculinity was evident, too, in the selective ways in which the men's accounts of themselves drew on positive attributes of hegemonic masculinity, such as being respectful and standing up for one's word, while simultaneously rejecting other prominent features of hegemonic masculinity.

Andrea Dottolo and Abby Stewart (2008) explore the relation between self-narrative and how recalled interactions with the police figure in the construction of racial identity. Their analysis focuses on responses to interview questions about race and racial identity in a small group primarily of African American adults. For respondents who described encounters with the police, especially Black respondents, Dottolo and Stewart found that questions about racial identity elicited a specific discourse that constructs and stereotypes criminals as occupying intersectional marginalized social positions defined by race, class and gender, particularly for Blacks. Importantly, they show how institutional structures, as manifested in racialized encounters with police, are embodied in racial identity.

An intersectional approach can also facilitate an understanding of the fluidity in and between and within identity categories. Lisa Diamond and Molly Butterworth (2008) use a case study-based approach to apply an intersectionality framework to the study of sexual identity development. They focus on four respondents in an ongoing longitudinal study of sexual identity development who have begun to identify as transgendered. Diamond and Butterworth use these individuals' descriptions of their experience of gender to demonstrate the value of intersectionality as an analytical approach for understanding not only multiplicity across identity constructs (e.g., race, gender, etc.) but also within identity constructs, in this case, female and male.

The following three papers turn to perceptions of others' intersectionality. Valerie Purdie-Vaughns and Richard Eibach (2008) explore the hypothesis that possessing two or more intersecting subordinate identities renders a person "invisible" relative to those with a single subordinate identity. They develop a social psychological model of *intersectional invisibility* that aims to specify the distinctive forms of oppression experienced by those with intersecting subordinate identities. They draw on evidence from historical narratives, cultural representations, interest group politics, and anti-discrimination legal frameworks to illustrate the disadvantages that accrue because of intersectional invisibility.

Phillip Goff, Margaret Thomas, and Matthew Jackson (2008) examine how perception processes are affected when the individual perceived occupies the space of intersectional invisibility described by Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach. Employing a predominantly White sample, they obtained ratings of Black and White women and men in two studies. Goff and his colleagues found that "Blackness" and "maleness" are highly associated, leading to higher ratings of masculinity for Black male and female targets, especially those who are highly racially stereotypical. Racialized perceptions of Black women apparently contributes to the erasure of their gender—a core facet of their intersectional identity.

Ronni Greenwood and Aidan Christian (2008) consider whether increasing perceivers' awareness of intersectionality affects perception of others whose intersectional position differ from one's own. They ask specifically whether consciousness of the intersection of White privilege with gender discrimination affects White women's

appraisals of Muslim women. They found that participants primed with intersectional consciousness reported more positive attitudes toward a Muslim woman described in a brief vignette, an effect that was moderated by participants' political orientation. Thus, it appears that heightening sensitivity to intersectionality can enhance positive views of difference, but individuals' own identity status nevertheless serves as a filter to their appraisals of and responses to difference in others.

The final three papers bring forward a theme that runs through nearly every paper in our special issue, namely the connections between individuals' experience of intersectionality and their communities. Jacqueline Mattis and her colleagues, Nyasha Grayman, Sheri-Ann Cowie, Cynthia Winston, Carolyn Watson, and Daisy Jackson, (Mattis et al. 2008) use intersectionality theory to explore the complex ways in which social identity and social structures combine to influence altruism among African American adults in an urban, economically distressed housing community. By framing their inquiry in terms of intersectionality, Mattis and her colleagues reveal the ways in which the interplay of gender, race, ethnicity, class, age, and urbanicity create differential patterns of vulnerability, differential needs, differential commitments to caring for particular subgroups, and informs how altruists are perceived by others.

Tiffany Townsend (2008) considers the individual-community relation in the context of developing a model of sexual risk for low-income African American adolescent girls. Using a framework of intersectionality and Black feminist thought, Townsend describes the armoring process, the socialization practices through which African American mothers prepare their daughters to cope with racism and sexism. Importantly, she gives special attention to the ways in which African American girls become aware of their mother's attitudes and beliefs concerning romantic relationships, demonstrating the superiority of this model to one-size-fits-all social cognitive models for predicting sexual behavior for this population.

Several of our contributors discuss the tensions between intersectionality as an emergent process and the limitations associated with construing intersectionality as based on categories of identity. Elizabeth Cole (2008) uses the concept of coalition to theorize an alternative to categorical approaches to intersectionality. Her analysis of feminist activists' accounts of their experiences in coalitional work suggests the utility of political intersectionality as an analytic tool that can be used to understand race and gender as social processes, and to find and make use of similarities arising from social and historical processes that cross-cut identity groups.

Our final contributor, Leah Warner (2008), completes our special issue by drawing on contributors' conceptual and methodological contributions to provide a "best practices" guide for applying an intersectionality perspective to psychological research.

Why Intersectionality Is an Urgent Issue

Naomi Weisstein is a psychologist whose work on the basic processes of visual perception is highly regarded by peer scientists. Among feminists, however, she is far better known for her influential paper, first delivered in 1968, which jump-started contemporary feminist psychology. "Kinder, Küche, Kirche, The Fantasy Life of the Male Psychologist" (Weisstein 1968) was an exposé of experimental psychology's reliance on androcentric theory and white, male college student research participants to map the "facts" of human behavior. Her paper was a powerful call to change fundamentally the questions that academic psychology identified as important. Nearly 25 years later she lamented that the wave of feminist research of the 1970s had been tamed (Weisstein 1993). Adopting an unreformed feminist empiricist position she argued for the revival of feminist activist science (Shields 1998). Asserting that good scientific method *is* the way forward, she urged a "return to an activist, challenging, badass feminist psychology" (1993, p. 244). Intersectionality is an urgent issue because it is critical to the effective, activist science that feminist psychology should be.

The goal of activist science itself is not to create policy, but to inform it. Research undertaken from an intersectionality perspective does originate from a point of view which includes an agenda for positive social change, but the agenda requires data to support it. This approach reflects a belief that science can be beneficial to society and that it is our obligation to study scientifically those problems and issues that bear on real people's lived experience. Intersectionality has consequences for how social issues are construed and the construction of systematic explanation, including empirical strategies with a foundation in scientific method. Bograd (1999), for example, describes how focusing on gender alone as the central issue in domestic violence hindered theory development and empirical research. In another vein, Burman (2005) shows how prevailing research approaches to cultural psychology, such as multiculturality, each in their own way marginalize or erase gender.

Intersectionality is urgent because it gets us as researchers to go beyond the individually informed perspective that we each inevitably bring to our scholarship and science. Walker (2003) points out that "the attempt to understand intersectionality is, in fact, an effort to see things from the worldview of others and not simply from our own unique standpoints" (p. 991). The intersectionality perspective is thus an invitation to move beyond one's own research comfort zone.

The intersectionality perspective is especially relevant to enhancing those research methods that seem to be least amenable to adopting it. Laboratory experiment and large-scale survey research, as removed as they are from tapping the subjectivity of participants, can benefit from ways to formulate research questions that allow for and can reveal the responses of individuals as a reflection of the identities that form them. If one adopts an intersectional perspective, one will look at research problems from that perspective and not be satisfied until some sort of research strategy is developed that enables one to answer the question. That's what scientists do.

Lastly, intersectionality is urgent because it should be a central concern of contemporary feminist psychology. Connections between feminist psychology and feminist research in other fields have moved far beyond where they were in 1975 when *Sex Roles* was inaugurated. The influence of feminist research in psychology is quite notable in some areas, such as in the study of violence against women and gender in the workplace, to name just two. Over the past two decades a generative and vital feminist psychology has become broadly and less apologetically interdisciplinary in perspective, theory, and method (Morawski 1994; Stewart and Dottolo 2006). That said, both the presumed mainstreams of clinical and experimental psychology have largely been resistant to the transformative influences of feminist research, theory, and method. The task facing new generations of feminists in the behavioral and psychological sciences is something of an engineering challenge: How to build better and stronger bridges between these two important and vital fields, particularly in research endeavors. One of the most important and promising means to do so is to bring the intersectionality perspective to "mainstream" psychology by developing a theoretically informed, methodologically sound body of research on this significant and enduring concern.

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