

The Complexity of Intersectionality

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## The Complexity of Intersectionality

Since critics first alleged that feminism claimed to speak universally for all women, feminist researchers have been acutely aware of the limitations of gender as a single analytical category. In fact, feminists are perhaps alone in the academy in the extent to which they have embraced intersectionality—the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relations and subject formations—as itself a central category of analysis. One could even say that intersectionality is the most important theoretical contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far.<sup>1</sup>

Yet despite the emergence of intersectionality as a major paradigm of research in women’s studies and elsewhere, there has been little discussion of *how* to study intersectionality, that is, of its methodology. This would not be worrisome if studies of intersectionality were already wide ranging

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<sup>1</sup> A crucial note on terminology: it is impossible to find a term that is both recognizable and merely descriptive of the kind of work that is the focus of this article. Many scholars will not regard *intersectionality* as a neutral term, for it immediately suggests a particular theoretical paradigm based in identity categories (see, e.g., Brown 1997). This is not the only sense in which I use the term here; rather, I intend for it to encompass perspectives that completely reject the separability of analytical and identity categories. As for the origins of the term itself, it was probably first highlighted by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991). Many other key texts introduced the conceptual framework and offered similar terms: see Davis 1981; Moraga 1983; Smith 1983; hooks 1984; Moraga and Anzaldúa 1984; Glenn 1985; Anzaldúa 1987, 1990; King 1988; Mohanty 1988; Spelman 1988; Sandoval 1991.

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in terms of methodology or if the methodological issues were fairly straightforward and consistent with past practice. I suggest, however, that intersectionality has introduced new methodological problems and, partly as an unintended consequence, has limited the range of methodological approaches used to study intersectionality. Further, both developments can be traced to what arguably has been a defining characteristic of research in this area: the complexity that arises when the subject of analysis expands to include multiple dimensions of social life and categories of analysis.<sup>2</sup> In a nutshell, research practice mirrors the complexity of social life, calling up unique methodological demands. Such demands are challenging, as anyone who has undertaken the study of intersectionality can attest. Not surprisingly, researchers favor methodologies that more naturally lend themselves to the study of complexity and reject methodologies that are considered too simplistic or reductionist. This in turn restricts the scope of knowledge that can be produced on intersectionality, assuming that different methodologies produce different kinds of knowledge. Note that this is equally a problem outside and inside women's studies, though I mainly address the field of women's studies here in order to simplify the argument.

But are these assumptions about the capacity of different methodologies to handle complexity warranted? Scholars have not left a clear record on which to base a reply to this question. Feminists have written widely on methodology but have either tended to focus on a particular methodology (e.g., ethnography, deconstruction, genealogy, ethnomethodology) or have failed to pinpoint the particular issue of complexity. Although it is impossible to be exhaustive, my intention is to delineate a wide range of methodological approaches to the study of multiple, intersecting, and

<sup>2</sup> The terms *complex*, *complexity*, and *complexities* appear frequently and are central in key texts on intersectionality, although no text focuses on complexity as such. A representative early statement, for example, is from the back cover of bell hooks's *Feminist Theory: From Margin to Center* (1984): "Feminists have not succeeded in creating a mass movement against sexual oppression because the very foundation of women's liberation has, until now, not accounted for the complexity and diversity of female experience." Similarly, but from a different theoretical perspective, Wendy Brown writes: "We are not simply oppressed but *produced* through these discourses, a production that is historically complex, contingent, and occurs through formations that do not honor analytically distinct identity categories" (1997, 87). A more recent example appears in the short description of the Consortium on Race, Gender, and Ethnicity at the University of Maryland, which, according to its Web site, is "a university-wide initiative promoting research, scholarship, and faculty development that examines intersections of race, gender, ethnicity, and other dimensions of difference as they shape the construction and representation of identities, behavior, and complex social relations." For more information, see <http://www.umd.edu/crge>.

complex social relations and to clarify and critically engage certain features of the most common approaches. In total, I describe three approaches. All three attempt to satisfy the demand for complexity and, as a result, face the need to manage complexity, if for no other reason than to attain intelligibility. For each approach, I describe how scholars manage complexity and what they achieve and sacrifice in the process.

The three approaches, in brief, are defined principally in terms of their stance toward categories, that is, how they understand and use analytical categories to explore the complexity of intersectionality in social life. The first approach is called *anticategorical complexity* because it is based on a methodology that deconstructs analytical categories. Social life is considered too irreducibly complex—overflowing with multiple and fluid determinations of both subjects and structures—to make fixed categories anything but simplifying social fictions that produce inequalities in the process of producing differences. Of the three approaches, this approach appears to have been the most successful in satisfying the demand for complexity, judging by the fact that there is now great skepticism about the possibility of using categories in anything but a simplistic way. The association of the anticategorical approach with the kind of complexity introduced by studies of intersectionality may have also resulted from the tendency to conflate this approach with the second one, which I will discuss momentarily, despite the fact that the two have distinct methodologies, origins, and implications for research on intersectionality.

Jumping to the other end of the continuum next, the third approach is neither widely known nor widely used, making its introduction a key purpose of this article. This approach, *intercategorical complexity*, requires that scholars provisionally adopt existing analytical categories to document relationships of inequality among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions. I describe my own research methodology as an example of the intercategorical approach. Because it is the lesser known of the three approaches, I spend more time discussing an example of this type of research than I do the other two approaches. I also identify examples of research by other social scientists working with similar methodologies, though my aim is to be illustrative rather than exhaustive.

Finally, although the approach I call *intracategorical complexity* inaugurated the study of intersectionality, I discuss it as the second approach because it falls conceptually in the middle of the continuum between the first approach, which rejects categories, and the third approach, which uses them strategically. Like the first approach, it interrogates the boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself, though that is not its

raison d'être. Like the third approach, it acknowledges the stable and even durable relationships that social categories represent at any given point in time, though it also maintains a critical stance toward categories. This approach is called *intracategorical complexity* because authors working in this vein tend to focus on particular social groups at neglected points of intersection—"people whose identity crosses the boundaries of traditionally constructed groups" (Dill 2002, 5)—in order to reveal the complexity of lived experience within such groups. Since the second approach is sometimes associated (erroneously) with the anticategorical approach, I discuss these two approaches in the same section.

Before proceeding, I must raise four caveats. First, not all research on intersectionality can be classified into one of the three approaches. Second, some research crosses the boundaries of the continuum, belonging partly to one approach and partly to another. Third, I have no doubt misunderstood and misclassified some pieces of research and some researchers, for which I issue an apology up front. Fourth, I do not claim that all research cited in the same category is the same on all counts—only roughly the same on the count that concerns me, which is the researcher's stance toward categorical complexity. For example, there is no seamless overlap between feminist poststructuralists and anticategoricalists. All this being said, the three approaches can be considered broadly representative of current approaches to the study of intersectionality and together illustrate a central element of my argument: 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.

Since my primary goal is a substantive one—to expand research on intersectionality—all other philosophical and methods-related issues are important only to the extent that they impede or facilitate this goal. As philosophical and methods-related issues *have* played a large role in the development of feminist research, they must be considered here as well. To that end, I adopt a fairly expansive view of what a methodology is. Ideally, a methodology is a coherent set of ideas about the philosophy, methods, and data that underlie the research process and the production of knowledge. As is clear from this definition, I am not concerned solely with methods but with the philosophical underpinnings of methods and the kinds of substantive knowledge that are produced in the application of methods. My focus is on the connections among these elements of the research process rather than on identifying any particular philosophy or

method as feminist, as some feminist writings on methodology do.<sup>3</sup> Indeed, I consider all three approaches to be consistent with feminist research.

Given that, my aim is to understand how methodological issues have had a hand in drawing the nebulous line within feminist research between interdisciplinary and disciplinary scholarship. This distinction is extremely consequential, for research that falls on the interdisciplinary side of the line is more likely to constitute the core of women's studies as a new inter/disciplinary field and thus spark new feminist research in women's studies proper as well as in the disciplines. In the end, it is my hope that dispelling at least some of the philosophical and methods-related concerns that have been raised about the interdisciplinary status of the intercategorical approach in particular may help to expand the scope of research on intersectionality.

#### **Anticategorical and intracategorical complexity**

I begin with a very brief and stylized chronology of the development of the field of women's studies. Many overviews and critiques of the stages of development of feminist studies have covered the same ground, so that is not my objective (see, e.g., Sandoval 1991). My emphasis instead is on the convergence of several interrelated but analytically separate developments that led to the current mode of research on intersectionality.

One of the first developments in the emergent field of women's studies was a critique of existing fields for not incorporating women as subjects of research.<sup>4</sup> This critique was substantive in nature, and the solution was equally substantive: women should be added to the leading research agendas across the full range of disciplines. Women's distinctive experiences became important ingredients in the attempt to set the record straight. However, mounting evidence of the pervasiveness of male bias led to a critique that became primarily theoretical in nature; consequently, the simple addition of women to the research process no longer seemed adequate. The introduction of gender as an analytical category, feminism as

<sup>3</sup> In particular, the distinction between qualitative and quantitative methods, which has characterized much feminist writing on this subject, is severely underdeterminative of the philosophical and substantive issues involved in any study of intersectionality.

<sup>4</sup> I will use the term *subject* throughout this article in two quite different ways. First, I will use it to refer to the actual topic of research or the actual individuals or groups who are being studied in any particular research project, as in "the subjects of analysis." Second, I will use it to refer to the more theoretical notion of an implied collective author or speaker or agent, as in "the theoretical subject of feminism."

a theoretical perspective, and male dominance as a major social institution all became necessary to counter the tendency toward neglecting and misrepresenting women's experiences (Scott 1986).

But feminist scholars also took their critique to a much deeper level. They began to question the very edifice of modern society—its founding philosophies, disciplines, categories, and concepts. All of the valued categories that fraternized on the male side of the modern male/female binary opposition became suspect for symbolizing and enacting the exclusion of women and femininity.<sup>5</sup> In particular, the philosophical critique of modernity included a disciplinary critique of modern science and a methodological critique of the scientific method, its claims to objectivity and truth belied by the actual practice of science (see, e.g., Keller 1985; Harding 1986). Finally, these critiques dovetailed with two separate but highly influential developments: first, the postmodernist and poststructuralist critiques of modern Western philosophy, history, and language (see, e.g., Foucault 1972; Derrida 1974), and second, critiques by feminists of color of white feminists' use of *women* and *gender* as unitary and homogeneous categories reflecting the common essence of all women.<sup>6</sup>

The methodology of anticategorical complexity was born in this moment of critique, in which hegemonic feminist theorists, poststructuralists, and antiracist theorists almost simultaneously launched assaults on the validity of modern analytical categories in the 1980s, though, as I said, often from differing perspectives and with different consequences for the course of feminist theory's intellectual trajectory. I will return to these differences in a moment, but for now it is important to recognize that some similarities in the positions of all three groups compounded and reinforced the conflation of the anticategorical and intracategorical approaches into a single widely received approach. More specifically, writings by feminists of color, which were more oriented toward the intracategorical approach, were often assimilated into and then associated with the writings of feminist poststructuralists, which were more oriented toward the anticategorical approach.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>5</sup> See, e.g., Pateman 1988; Scott 1988; Fraser 1989; Fuss 1989.

<sup>6</sup> Although I use *feminists of color* to refer to the authors of this perspective, not all feminists of color adhere to the same theoretical position or this position, and not all feminists writing from this perspective are feminists of color.

<sup>7</sup> It is impossible to prove this point, but others have made it. See especially Moya 1997 for specific examples of conflation. In terms of the hegemony of the deconstructive position, Nancy Fraser (1998) implies it, as does Kay Armatage in speaking about institutionalizing women's studies as a department: "The transformative, self-critical nature of women's studies,

At least initially, the emphasis for both groups was on the socially constructed nature of gender and other categories and the fact that a wide range of different experiences, identities, and social locations fail to fit neatly into any single “master” category. Indeed, the premise of this approach is that nothing fits neatly except as a result of imposing a stable and homogenizing order on a more unstable and heterogeneous social reality. Moreover, the deconstruction of master categories is understood as part and parcel of the deconstruction of inequality itself. That is, since symbolic violence and material inequalities are rooted in relationships that are defined by race, class, sexuality, and gender, the project of deconstructing the normative assumptions of these categories contributes to the possibility of positive social change. Whether this research does in fact contribute to social change is irrelevant. The point is that many feminist researchers employ this type of analysis because of their belief in its radical potential to alter social practices—to free individuals and social groups from the normative fix of a hegemonic order and to enable a politics that is at once more complex and inclusive. Feminist researchers take this stance even with the acknowledgment that it is impossible to fully escape the normalizing confines of language because new relations of power/knowledge are continuously reinscribed in new systems of classification, and yet it is impossible to avoid using categories strategically for political purposes.<sup>8</sup>

The primary philosophical consequence of this approach has been to render the use of categories suspect because they have no foundation in reality: language (in the broader social or discursive sense) creates categorical reality rather than the other way around. The methodological consequence is to render suspect both the process of categorization itself and any research that is based on such categorization, because it inevitably leads to demarcation, and demarcation to exclusion, and exclusion to inequality. At the anticategorical end of the continuum I have developed, these philosophical and methodological consequences have been fully embraced.

How, then, are intersectionality and the complex social relations it embodies analyzed substantively in an anticategorical framework? Methodologies for the study of anticategorical complexity crosscut the disci-

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combined with the emphasis on postcolonial and poststructural approaches that ceaselessly question the established canons and canonicity itself, is seen as the check against retrograde institutional tendencies” (Armatage 1998, 315).

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Riley 1988; Fuss 1989; Butler 1990, 1995; Gamson 1996. See also Fraser 1998 for a cogent, if controversial, summary of this position and its dominance in feminist studies.



plinary divide between the social sciences and the humanities. The artificiality of social categories can be illuminated in history with the method of genealogy, in literature with deconstruction, and in anthropology with the new ethnography. In each case, the completeness of the set of groups that constitutes a category is challenged. For example, the category of gender was first understood as constituted by men and women, but questions of what distinguishes a man from a woman—is it biological sex, and if so what is biologically male and female?—led to the definition of “new” social groups, new in the sense of being named but also perhaps in the sense of being created. There are no longer two genders but countless ones, no longer two sexes but five (Fausto-Sterling 2000). Other examples abound. In a remarkably short period of time, bisexual, transgendered, queer, and questioning individuals have been added to the original divide between gay and straight sexuality groups, and the social groups that constitute the category of race are widely believed to be fundamentally indefinable because of multiracialism (see, e.g., Fuss 1991; Omi and Winant 1994). And, theoretically, eventually all groups will be challenged and fractured in turn. As these examples make clear, this approach has been enormously effective in challenging the singularity, separateness, and wholeness of a wide range of social categories.

As stated in the anticategorical approach above, these vexing questions about *how* to constitute the social groups of a given social category, which have often arisen in the context of empirical research, have inevitably resulted in questions about *whether* to categorize and separate at all.<sup>9</sup> But we can still go a step further. In psychoanalytic versions of the anticategorical approach, complexity is contained within the subject and therefore the very notion of identity on which categories are based is fully rejected: “Locating difference *outside* identity, in the spaces *between* identities, [ignores] the radicality of the poststructuralist view which locates differences *within* identity. In the end, I would argue, theories of ‘multiple identities’ fail to challenge effectively the traditional metaphysical understanding of identity as unity” (Fuss 1989, 103). Given theories of the “irreducible heterogeneity of the other” (and self), even single individuals, let alone social collectivities, cannot be given voice as they had been in the days of “‘innocent’ ethnographic realism” (Lather 2001, 222, 215).

Thus new practices of ethnographic representation have been developed to allow feminist research to proceed while the authenticity of both the subject and the researcher—as if either had a single, transparent voice—

<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, as part of their critique of multiculturalism, universalists have also seized on the problems of defining social groups (see, e.g., Offe 1998).

is questioned.<sup>10</sup> Ruth Behar's *Translated Woman* (1993) is a well-known example of this new style of research in which the complexity of a single individual's life and the complicated nature of the researcher's relationship to the individual/subject are the central themes of the book. Another example is given by Patti Lather and Chris Smithies (1997), who self-consciously split their book on women with HIV/AIDS into three separate panels, first for their analysis and interpretation as researchers and authors, second for the voices of the subjects, and third for other relevant issues such as information and facts about HIV/AIDS. Not surprisingly, these authors are careful to resist claims of having transcended the crisis of representation that they see as essentially irresolvable in epistemological terms (Visweswaran 1994).

While broadly influential in feminist studies, these methodological interventions follow directly only from the anticategorical critiques of categorization and not from many of the critiques of categorization by feminists of color. It is probably more appropriate to describe much of the literature emerging from the latter group as critical of broad and sweeping acts of categorization rather than as critical of categorization per se. Certainly feminists of color have been critical of a certain version of essentialism that has defined women as a single group, but virtually all feminists now share this criticism. Feminists of color have also rejected the individualistic project of a politics based on identification and opposition, as have poststructuralists.<sup>11</sup> But while taking such positions, many feminists of color have also realized that such a critique does not necessitate a total rejection of the social reality of categorization.<sup>12</sup> In other words, one

<sup>10</sup> For a recent methodological discussion of the complicated relationship between the identity of researchers and subjects that does not reject categories as a basis for research and is oriented toward the other two approaches, see Twine and Warren 2000.

<sup>11</sup> Norma Alarcón, building on Gloria Anzaldúa's writings, argues that "consciousness as a site of multiple voicings is the theoretical subject, par excellence, of [*This Bridge [Called My Back]*]. . . . Indeed, the multiple-voiced subjectivity is lived in resistance to competing notions for one's allegiance or self-identification. It is a process of disidentification with prevalent formulations of the most forcefully theoretical subject of feminism. . . . Thus, current political practices in the United States make it almost impossible to go beyond an oppositional theory of the subject, which is the prevailing feminist strategy and that of others; however, it is not the theory that will help us grasp the subjectivity of women of color" (1990). For an insightful analysis of how the "politics of ambiguity" plays out in several different types of social movements, see Foster 2000.

<sup>12</sup> Crenshaw writes, for example, "Recognizing that identity politics takes place at the site of where categories intersect thus seems more fruitful than challenging the possibility of talking about categories at all" (1991, 377). Similarly, M. Jacqui Alexander and Chandra Talpade Mohanty argue that "postmodernist discourse attempts to move beyond essentialism

cannot easily lump these critics in with either deconstructionists, on the one hand, or multiculturalists and proponents of identity politics, on the other, which Nancy Fraser and others have distinguished as the two main and opposing perspectives on the conceptual and political status of excluded groups (Fraser 1998). Whereas the multicultural and identity-politics perspective tends to maintain group boundaries uncritically in order to revalue them and the deconstructive perspective seeks to eliminate them, the alternative perspective described here seeks to complicate and use them in a more critical way. Feminists of color have steered a middle course, consistently engaging in both theoretical and empirical studies of intersectionality using finer intersections of categories. It is these studies that inaugurated the study of intersectionality and what I call the intra-categorical approach to complexity. They and their intellectual descendants are the primary focus of the remainder of this section.

Interest in intersectionality arose out of a critique of gender-based and race-based research for failing to account for lived experience at neglected points of intersection—ones that tended to reflect multiple subordinate locations as opposed to dominant or mixed locations. It was not possible, for example, to understand a black woman's experience from previous studies of gender combined with previous studies of race because the former focused on white women and the latter on black men. Something new was needed because of the distinct and frequently conflicting dynamics that shaped the lived experience of subjects in these social locations. To take just one example from the earliest explorations, black women seemed to achieve greater equality with men of their race relative to white women because the conditions of slavery and white supremacy forced them to work on par with black men, yet black women also were more vulnerable to sexual violence because whites did not consider them worth protecting “as women” (see, e.g., Davis 1981). The potential for both multiple and conflicting experiences of subordination and power required a more wide-ranging and complex terrain of analysis. How was this to be achieved? The primary subject of analysis was typically either a single social group at a neglected point of intersection of multiple master categories or a particular social setting or ideological construction, or both. To il-

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by pluralizing and dissolving the stability and analytic utility of the categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality . . . but the relations of domination and subordination that are named and articulated through the processes of racism and racialization still exist, and they still require analytic and political specification and engagement” (1997, xvii).

lustrate, I discuss only the first of these approaches, which I also take to be the most common of the three, particularly in earlier writings.<sup>13</sup>

This prototypical approach was set out in the early narrative essays that defined the field of intersectionality.<sup>14</sup> Narratives take as their subject an individual or an individual's experience and extrapolate illustratively to the broader social location embodied by the individual. Often such groups are "new" groups in the sense of having been named, defined, or elaborated upon in the process of deconstructing the original dimensions of the master category. A key way that complexity is managed in such narratives is by focusing on the single group represented by the individual. How does this minimize complexity? Individuals usually share the characteristics of only one group or dimension of each category defining their social position. The intersection of identities takes place through the articulation of a single dimension of each category. That is, the "multiple" in these intersectional analyses refers not to dimensions within categories but to dimensions across categories. Thus, an Arab American, middle-class, heterosexual woman is placed at the intersection of multiple categories (race-ethnicity, class, gender, and sexual) but only reflects a single dimension of each. Personal narratives may aspire to situate subjects within the full network of relationships that define their social locations, but usually it is only possible to situate them from the partial perspective of the particular social group under study (i.e., if an Arab woman is the subject of analysis, then issues of race and nationality are more fully examined from the perspective of Arab women than from the perspective of Arab men).

In personal narratives and single-group analyses, then, complexity derives from the analysis of a social location at the intersection of single dimensions of multiple categories, rather than at the intersection of the full range of dimensions of a full range of categories, and that is how complexity is managed. Personal narratives and single-group studies derive their strength from the partial crystallization of social relations in the identities of particular social groups. Whether the narrative is literary,

<sup>13</sup> Authors who provide excellent examples of the second approach are Patricia Hill Collins (2000), who traces "the family" as a site of intersectionality; Nancy Fraser and Linda Gordon (1998), who trace historically the various dimensions of the concept "dependency"; and Leela Fernandes (1997), who examines the "politics of categories"—the political production and mutual constitution in everyday practice of the categories of class, gender, caste, and community. See also Haraway 1989; Mink 1995; and the contributions to Alexander and Mohanty 1997.

<sup>14</sup> Though narrative, these writings ushered in a theoretical revolution in women's studies and therefore should be considered central texts in feminist theory.

historical, discursive, ideological, or autobiographical, it begins somewhere, and that beginning represents only one of many sides of a set of intersecting social relations, not social relations in their entirety, so to speak.

The intracategorical approach to complexity can also be extended to include more recent studies. In particular, there are similarities between those narrative and theoretical interventions that essentially created the study of intersectionality and a longer tradition of social scientific research that focuses on the intensive study of single groups, or “cases.” Case studies are in-depth studies of a single group or culture or site and have long been associated with the more qualitative side of the divide between qualitative and quantitative methods in the social sciences. Case studies and qualitative research more generally have always been distinguished by their ability to delve into the complexities of social life—to reveal diversity, variation, and heterogeneity where quantitative researchers see singularity, sameness, and homogeneity (Ragin 2000). As is well known, anthropologists are the exemplary practitioners of multivocal, interpretive, and qualitative research, with their method of ethnography or “thick description” (Geertz 1994), which explains the popularity and widespread influence of anthropology in women’s studies.

Many feminists who are trained in social science methods and who are interested in intersectionality use the case study method to identify a new or invisible group—at the intersection of multiple categories—and proceed to uncover the differences and complexities of experience embodied in that location. Traditional categories are used initially to name previously unstudied groups at various points of intersection, but the researcher is equally interested in revealing—and indeed cannot avoid—the range of diversity and difference *within* the group. Although broad racial, national, class, and gender structures of inequality have an impact and must be discussed, they do not determine the complex texture of day-to-day life for individual members of the social group under study, no matter how detailed the level of disaggregation.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>15</sup> For example, in writing about migration patterns between Mexico and the United States, Pierette Hondagneu-Sotelo argues that “macrostructural factors alone do not explain how people respond to new opportunities and pressures . . . political and economic transformations may set the stage for migration, but they do not write the script” (1994, 187). Writing from a different methodological perspective, one that is more genealogical, Alexander and Mohanty express a similar sentiment, even though they too highlight the importance of structural transformations: “Analytic centrality [is] given to the experiences, consciousness, and histories of Third-World women” (1997, xxx).

In this incarnation of the study of intersectionality, which can be considered an intellectual descendent of narrative studies, categories have an ambivalent status. Once again, such studies tend not to fall strictly into either the anticategorical or the intercategorical approach. On the one hand, some feminist scholars explicitly use categories to define the subjects of analysis and to articulate the broader structural dynamics that are present in the lives of the subjects. In addition, although a single social group is the focus of intensive study, it is often shown to be different and therefore of interest through an extended comparison with the more standard groups that have been the subject of previous studies. This strategy is evident in the comparison of working-class women to working-class men (Freeman 2000), the black middle class to the white middle class (Pattillo-McCoy 1999), Latina domestic workers to an earlier generation of African American domestic workers (Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001), and black female victims of domestic violence to white female victims of domestic violence (Crenshaw 1991). In each of these studies the former group is the focus of study and the latter group the source of background comparison and contrast.

On the other hand, scholars also see categories as misleading constructs that do not readily allow for the diversity and heterogeneity of experience to be represented. While the standard groups are homogenized as a point of contrast, the social group that is the subject of analysis is presented in all its detail and complexity, even though in the end some generalizations about the group must be made. These studies, then, avoid the fully deconstructive rejection of all categorization, yet they remain deeply skeptical of the homogenizing generalizations that go with the territory of classification and categorization. The point is not to deny the importance—both material and discursive—of categories but to focus on the process by which they are produced, experienced, reproduced, and resisted in everyday life (Fernandes 1997; Glenn 2002).

These, then, are the two main methodologies that have led the study of intersectionality. In addition to delineating these methodologies, it is important to take a moment to reflect on how the trajectory of their development has had an impact on the production of knowledge about intersectionality. To begin with, the social construction of all new knowledge tends to have a particular structure to it.<sup>16</sup> In this structure the

<sup>16</sup> In this section I develop a line of argument that both draws and deviates from the work of Andrew Abbott (2001), Pierre Bourdieu (1988), and others on the social construction and structure of academic fields and disciplines. The deviations stem from my inter-

development of a new field is celebrated on the tomb of the old. Since the new field cannot possibly supersede immediately the expansive terrain of its predecessors, it advances in some directions but not in all. Where it lags behind may be due to several different factors: either those areas were buried willfully or were more intransigent or were undeveloped and unclaimed. Where it advances and where it lags might be considered the starting conditions for the new field's eventual structuring. These starting conditions perpetuate gaps in reciprocal directions, where the old fields fall relatively farther behind new intellectual trends and the new field itself grows more impervious to new issues arising in the established disciplines. Ironically, one measure of how far feminism has come might be the distance between it and its most distant disciplinary cousins, which may be greater now than ever. Importantly, this has as much to do with research on new and timely subjects in the older disciplines as it does with the growth and sophistication of feminist studies itself. In other words, the older fields have not been standing still.

Interdisciplinary progress is deeply structured by these developments and so therefore are substantive fields of research (e.g., intersectionality) because substantive topics are often given shape in the disciplines. Judith A. Allen and Sally L. Kitch put it well: "When disciplinarity is the only institutional framework, progress is made one discipline at a time; and uncertainty, unevenness, and time lags are inevitable. Thus the field of women's studies grows increasingly fragmented" and ends up being more multidisciplinary than interdisciplinary (1998, 286). I have tried to make the dynamics of this process more explicit—at least for the topic of intersectionality—as a way to help lessen that fragmentation, or at least some of the unintended consequences of it. With that in mind, I offer a third approach to the problem of complexity in the study of intersectionality, one that permits an examination of substantive issues that are far less prominent in women's studies than they are in the social science disciplines and in contemporary society more generally.

### **Intercategorical complexity**

The intercategorical approach (also referred to as the *categorical approach*) begins with the observation that there are relationships of inequality

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pretation of what has happened in women's studies in particular, rather than what has happened in other fields. For example, Abbott (2001) argues that new fields attempt to take over old fields in their entirety, whereas I argue that women's studies has been selective in its appropriation.

among already constituted social groups, as imperfect and ever changing as they are, and takes those relationships as the center of analysis. The main task of the categorical approach is to explicate those relationships, and doing so requires the provisional use of categories. As Evelyn Nakano Glenn writes, in advocating for a greater emphasis on relationality in studies of intersectionality, scholars can treat race and gender categories as “‘anchor’ points—though these points are not static” (2002, 14). The concern is with the nature of the relationships among social groups and, importantly, how they are changing, rather than with the definition or representation of such groups per se, though some scholars like Glenn (2002) engage in both practices to great effect.<sup>17</sup> Finally, the type of categorical approach I am developing here goes further in exploring whether meaningful inequalities among groups even exist in the first place. Perhaps inequalities were once large but now they are small, or in one place they are large but in another they are small. This perspective leaves open the possibility that broad social groupings more or less reflect the empirical realities of more detailed social groupings, thus minimizing the extent of complexity. In the formulation of Irene Browne, whether there are complex differences and inequalities between groups is treated as a hypothesis.<sup>18</sup>

Some may counter that an interest in relationships among groups underlies the first two approaches as well. How is it possible to deconstruct definitions of social groups without reference to the relational dynamics underlying them? What is more, in terms of the emphasis on change, the reason why categories and the social relations they articulate can be deconstructed in the anticategorical approach is precisely because they can be shown to change across cultural and historical boundaries, that is, to have no underlying essence. Is the categorical approach’s emphasis on relationships and change really all that different from the emphasis of the other two approaches?

I would contend that each approach shares the premise that relationships among social groups are containers of definable and indeed measurable inequalities. However, to empirically chart the changing relationships among multiple social groups defines the goal, rather than the premise only, of the categorical approach. Relationships of inequality among social groups do not enter as background or contextual or dis-

<sup>17</sup> I want to be clear, however, that both relational and representational forms of inquiry have empirical aspects, so that is not the relevant distinction. Changes in representation can be documented in empirical terms just as well as changes in relationships of inequality can be.

<sup>18</sup> Personal correspondence, May 15, 2002.



cursive or ideological factors, as they often do in the other two approaches, but as the focus of the analysis itself.<sup>19</sup> If structural relationships are the focus of analysis, rather than the underlying assumption or context of the analysis, categorization is inevitable. The only question is whether such an approach can adequately respond to legitimate, and often quite fatal, critiques of the homogenizing and simplifying dangers of category-based research. In short, can the categorical approach respect the demand for complexity?

The categorical approach focuses on the complexity of relationships among multiple social groups within and across analytical categories and not on complexities within single social groups, single categories, or both. The subject is multigroup, and the method is systematically comparative.<sup>20</sup> What is the source of complexity in such designs? The categorical space can become very complicated with the addition of any one analytical category to the analysis because it requires an investigation of the multiple groups that constitute the category. For example, the incorporation of gender as an analytical category into such an analysis assumes that two groups will be compared systematically—men and women. If the category of class is incorporated, then gender must be cross-classified with class, which is composed (for simplicity) of three categories (working, middle, and upper), thus creating six groups. If race-ethnicity is incorporated into the analysis, and it consists of only two groups, then the number of groups expands to twelve. And this example makes use of only the most simplistic definitions. If researchers want to examine more detailed ethnic groups within racial groups—say, Cubans, Mexicans, and Puerto Ricans within the broader category of Latino/as—it becomes necessary to limit other dimensions of the analysis, such as the gender or class dimensions, for the sake of comprehension. In this respect, intercategory researchers face some of the same trade-offs between scale and coherence or difference

<sup>19</sup> For example, Alexander and Mohanty describe a key set of studies that arguably fall in the intracategorical approach: “Central to our theorization of feminism is a comparative analysis of feminist *organizing, criticism, and self-reflection*; also crucial is deep contextual knowledge about the nature and contours of the present political economic crisis. Individual analyses are grounded in the contemporary crisis of global capitalism, suggesting that these particular contexts are the ones which throw up very specific analytic and political challenges for organizations” (1997, xx; emphasis added). Though very much informed by macrostructural processes, and defined as “comparative and relational” (xvi), the primary empirical subject of analysis tends to be located at a more micro level (i.e., a single group or organization).

<sup>20</sup> In contrast, one could say that the method of the intracategorical approach is single case intensive rather than comparative.

and sameness that intracategorical researchers face in determining the appropriate level of detail for their studies.

Unlike single-group studies, which analyze the intersection of a subset of dimensions of multiple categories, however, multigroup studies analyze the intersection of the full set of dimensions of multiple categories and thus examine both advantage and disadvantage explicitly and simultaneously.<sup>21</sup> It is not the intersection of race, class, and gender in a single social group that is of interest but the relationships among the social groups defined by the entire set of groups constituting each category. The categorical approach formally compares—say, in terms of income or education—each of the groups constituting a category: men and women, blacks and whites, working and middle classes, and so on. Moreover, the categorical approach takes as its point of departure that these categories form more detailed social groups: white women and black women, working- and middle-class men, and so on.

The comparative and multigroup characteristics of such designs create a form of complexity that differs significantly from the anticategorical and intracategorical forms. Complexity is managed in comparative, multigroup studies of this kind by what at first appears to be a reductionist process—reducing the analysis to one or two between-group relationships at a time—but what in the end is a synthetic and holistic process that brings the various pieces of the analysis together. Whereas the intracategorical approach begins with a unified intersectional core—a single social group, event, or concept—and works its way outward to analytically unravel one by one the influences of gender, race, class, and so on, the categorical approach begins with an analysis of the elements first because each of these is a sizable project in its own right.

In fact, the size and significance of each element is perhaps why current quantitative social scientific research is divided, regrettably, into separate specialties on gender, race, and class, with little overlap among them. It is also why it is nearly impossible to publish grandly intersectional studies in top peer-reviewed journals using the categorical approach: the size and complexity of such a project is too great to contain in a single article. Indeed, there is much hostility toward such complexity; most journals are devoted to additive linear models and incremental improvements in already well-developed bodies of research. In the language of statistics, the

<sup>21</sup> In practice, the number of social groups within categories can also be limited by the available data. As new racial and ethnic categories have become available in the U.S. census, researchers have incorporated increasing numbers and combinations of racial, ethnic, and national groups in their analyses.

analysis of intersectionality usually requires the use of “interaction effects”—or “multilevel,” “hierarchical,” “ecological,” or “contextual” modeling—all of which introduce more complexity in estimation and interpretation than the additive linear model. Such models ask not simply about the effect of race on income but how that effect differs for men versus women, or for highly educated men versus poorly educated men, and so forth.<sup>22</sup>

My own research provides a concrete example of how the methodology of categorical complexity is informed by feminist work on intersectionality and yet applicable in other interdisciplinary sites (McCall 2000, 2001a, 2001b).<sup>23</sup> In terms of subject matter, I took the emphasis on differences among women as a call to examine structural inequalities among women, especially among different classes of women, since much less attention is devoted to class than to race in the new literature on intersectionality.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, a major new social issue was becoming the subject of intense research and political debate. Beginning in the late 1970s, earnings inequality between the rich and poor, and also between the college educated and non-college educated, rose significantly (see, e.g., Wilson 1997). Since gender inequality was virtually the only type of inequality to have declined during the same period, men were often seen as the primary victims of the new economy and women as the beneficiaries. Since the new inequality was seen as afflicting mainly white men, there was a

<sup>22</sup> It is very common for discussions of quantitative research to point to these types of models as the proper vehicle for introducing complexity into the analysis (Byrne 1998; Ragin 2000; Abbott 2001), but there may be more promising alternatives on the horizon (see, e.g., Lieberman and Lynn 2002).

<sup>23</sup> I focus on my research for two reasons: first, because the burden of proof (to satisfy the demand for complexity) is presumably higher with quantitative data than with qualitative data; and second, because I can share firsthand knowledge of trying to publish research that was widely regarded as “too complex.” For qualitative examples, see Glenn (1992, 2002), who analyzes how relationships among different class and racial-ethnic groups of women and men have varied historically across different regions and racial-ethnic groups in the United States; Michèle Lamont (2000), who compares beliefs about work and morality for working-class white men and working-class black men, and compares these in turn with the beliefs of middle-class men in the United States vs. in France; Linda M. Blum (1999), who compares beliefs about and practices surrounding breast-feeding for black working-class women and white working-class women; and Mary S. Pardo (1998), who compares community activism among Mexican American women in working- and middle-class communities. Quantitative work that aims at unraveling the multiple and conflicting effects of race, class, and gender is still rare, but for an excellent set of studies, see Browne 1999, and for an excellent review, see Browne and Misra 2003. See also Manza and Brooks 1999.

<sup>24</sup> The recent literature on rising wage inequality focuses on disparities between college- and non-college-educated workers. For the sake of consistency, I use education as a marker of class distinctions.

revolt against gender-based and race-based forms of redistribution (Kahlenberg 1996).

In such an environment, there was a clear need to supplement the focus on inequality among men with a detailed analysis of the changing structure of class and racial inequality among women. Were *all* women better off and *all* men worse off in the new economy? What was happening to class inequality among women? Was it as high and growing as much as it was among men? Had greater equality between men and women come at the price of greater inequality among women? Were the causes and thus solutions the same for rising class inequality among women and among men? If the causes were the same, did this mean that gender and racial differences were no longer important? Not only were the answers to these questions unknown, but this line of inquiry had natural affinities with the emphasis in women's studies on differences among women. Such an inquiry would also answer criticisms of feminist and multicultural scholarship for seeming to valorize differences among women without interrogating systemic inequalities among women, while at the same time intervening in an arena of political and public policy importance.

In keeping with the multigroup and comparative nature of the categorical approach, and to add a further contextual component, my analysis examined the roots of several different dimensions of wage inequality in regional economies in the United States. I examined each dimension of inequality first (between men and women; between the college educated and non-college educated; among blacks, Asians, Latino/as, and whites; and among intersections of these groups) and then synthesized this information into a configuration of inequality—a set of relationships among multiple forms of inequality, the underlying economic structure that fosters them, and the anti-inequality politics that would make most sense under such conditions. Four different configurations of inequality emerged from the analysis and are summarized in table 1. The main finding to note is that patterns of racial, gender, and class inequality are not the same across the configurations. For example, heavily unionized blue-collar cities with a recent history of deindustrialization such as Detroit exhibit relatively modest class and racial wage inequality among employed men but elevated gender wage inequality and class inequality among employed women (relative to average levels of wage inequality in the United States as a whole). In contrast, a postindustrial city such as Dallas exhibits the opposite structure of inequality—it is marked more by class and racial inequality than gender inequality.

If we dig a little deeper into the complexity of these configurations, we find that the average levels of gender inequality that I just reported

**Table 1.** Wage Inequality by Gender, Class, and Race in Four Cities Relative to the National Average for Urban Areas, 1989

Type of Wage Inequality	St. Louis	Miami	Dallas	Detroit
	(High-Tech Manufacturing)	(Immigrant)	(Postindustrial)	(Industrial)
Class inequality among men	Lower	Higher	Higher	Lower
Class inequality among women	Lower	Higher	Lower	Higher
Racial inequality among men	Higher	Higher	Higher	Lower
Racial inequality among women	Higher	Higher	Higher	Lower
Gender inequality (average level)	Higher	Lower	Lower	Higher
Gender inequality among college educated	Higher	Lower	Higher	Lower
Gender inequality among non-college educated	Higher	Lower	Lower	Higher

are somewhat misleading. If gender inequality is broken down by class, we find that it is higher among the college educated and lower among the non-college educated in Dallas, and vice versa in Detroit. This indicates that the same economic environment creates advantage for some groups of women and disadvantage for other groups of women relative to similarly situated men. This conclusion can also be reached by looking at the configuration of inequality in immigrant-rich cities such as Miami, where gender inequality is lower for both college-educated and non-college-educated groups, but racial and class inequality among both men and women is much higher. Based on such systematic comparisons of levels of gender, racial, and class wage inequality across hundreds of cities, these configurations suggest that deindustrialized regions are ripe for comparable worth and affirmative action approaches to reducing earnings inequality, whereas in postindustrial and immigrant-rich regions, more universal or non-gender-specific strategies (e.g., minimum- and living-wage campaigns) may be more appropriate.

Although configurations of inequality illustrate how the sources and structures of economic inequality are multiple and conflicting, I would not want to go so far as to say that the resulting complexity is inherent to the subject, unless one takes the social ontological position that social relations are always by nature complex, or that gender inequalities always

conflict with class inequalities and with racial inequalities. Rather, the complexity derives from the fact that different contexts reveal different configurations of inequality in this particular social formation. The point is not to assume this outcome a priori but to explore the nature and extent of such differences and inequalities. In short, having used traditional analytical categories as a starting point, classified individuals into those categories, and examined relationships of wage inequality among such groups of individuals, I arrived at the complex outcome that no single dimension of overall inequality can adequately describe the full structure of multiple, intersecting, and conflicting dimensions of inequality. Indeed, in the spirit of the anticategorical approach, I question whether so-called general indicators of inequality, such as family income inequality and male earnings inequality, can be used as the standard indicators of the new inequality. My findings suggest not only that no single form of inequality can represent the rest but that some forms of inequality seem to arise from the same conditions that might reduce other forms, including, potentially, a conflict between reducing gender inequality and reducing inequality among women.

If the underlying contributions of feminist scholarship to this project are (I hope) obvious by now, then the question remains: Why is this methodology not the primary one in the study of intersectionality in women's studies? Since this type of research falls outside the core of current feminist theory and research practice in women's studies, it can be used to explore many of the more general issues involved in the establishment of any new intellectual field that I raised at the end of the first section; hopefully, it can also diffuse at least some of the reasons why women's studies has not embraced this type of approach to the study of intersectionality.

First, the substantive issue of rising economic inequality between the rich and poor is a new trend, one that gained widespread recognition only in the early 1990s, well after the establishment of women's studies. This raises perhaps the most important question: What happens when new social issues of potential interest to the new field arise in older fields far (and moving farther) from the new field's center? Second, almost all of the research on this subject uses advanced quantitative techniques and large data sets from impersonally administered survey questionnaires. These are data and methods that many in the anticategorical and even intracategorical camps associate negatively with the legacies of positivism, or empiricism, or both when the two are collapsed in the three-category typology of feminist epistemologies (i.e., postmodern, standpoint, and empiricist) formulated by Sandra Harding (1986). This raises the question:

What happens when particular methods, appropriate to the subject at hand and unlikely to change dramatically, become conflated with particular philosophies of science and potentially prevent freer flows of knowledge across disciplines and among members of the new field as a consequence? This limits knowledge in all relevant disciplines but is especially a problem for new fields such as women's studies, which aspires to be interdisciplinary. And, finally, the new feminist theories themselves (e.g., those based on anticategorical approaches to complexity) were not necessarily developed to address these issues. This should not be taken as a unique critique of women's studies; most social theories are not universal theories. I treat feminist theory as I would any other social theory and judge it based on the adequacy of its rendering of social life (in this case the new social inequality). What happens, then, when vanguard theories are not universal theories capable of fully covering the territories they hoped to supersede?

I have already responded to the first concern—about the substantive disconnect between new and old fields when new issues arise in the old fields—by describing a way (i.e., the categorical approach to complexity) to better integrate insights from women's studies on complex intersectionality, on the one hand, with the study of inequality in the social sciences, on the other. More generally, this kind of ongoing interaction between feminist theory and new issues arising in the disciplines needs to occur with greater regularity and consistency across disciplines. In terms of the methods-related, philosophical, and theoretical issues that inform the broader methodology of categorical complexity, my aim, given the range of issues covered and limited space, is simply to introduce alternative perspectives that many feminists have overlooked rather than to provide a comprehensive definition and defense of them.

In my research, I began with the subject matter of changing and intersecting forms of structural inequality and selected the methods and data that were most appropriate to it. However, these choices did not necessitate a positivist stance, which feminists and others have rightly criticized for setting unbiased empirical observation as the only valid basis for the construction of true scientific knowledge.<sup>25</sup> In my research and that of many social scientists, a postpositivist stance is often taken for granted.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>25</sup> Positivism has other defining characteristics besides the possibility and primacy of unbiased observation, including rules for the correspondence of regularities of observation with universal generalizations and laws and the predictability of human and natural behavior based on such laws (see, e.g., Keat and Urry 1975).

<sup>26</sup> In fact, as Jennifer Platt (1996) argues, the social scientists who first developed or extensively used survey-based methods did so without any knowledge of or allegiance to positivist philosophies.

In addition to feminist epistemologies, though, other postpositivist epistemologies are just as relevant. The one I will discuss is critical realism, which steers a middle course between positivism and postmodernism (Bhaskar 1989). As a philosophy of science and social science, critical realism is particularly apropos here because some realists have tried to integrate recent advances in complexity and chaos theory into it.

What is critical realism, and how does it differ from positivism, empiricism, and postmodernism? There are many different variants of realism (as there are of positivism), but what binds them together is a predilection for ontological over epistemological concerns and a critique of both positivism and postmodernism for being overly concerned with epistemological issues and overly pessimistic about what can be known about the world in the absence of unmediated access to it (Outhwaite 1987; Alcoff 1996). In contrast to other philosophies, realism does not subordinate knowledge of the natural and social worlds only to that which can be derived from the application of value-free observation and deductive logic, as in positivism. Nor does it subordinate knowledge of the world only to that which can be derived from direct sensory perception, as in empiricism. Nor does it pronounce ontology dead because all knowledge of the real world requires human interpretation and the truth claims of one human interpretation cannot be distinguished from those of another, as in postmodernism.

Rather, realism's basic premise is that the real world puts limits on knowledge so that not all interpretations are equally plausible.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, in positing that some scientific explanations are more plausible than others, and yet maintaining that the real world is not knowable in any absolute sense because of the role of human interaction and interpretation, realism maintains a prominent place for the development of theoretical knowledge about unobservable phenomena. This position on theoretical knowledge is in contrast to both positivism and empiricism, which are skeptical at best of theoretical knowledge. In fact, because many fields of science are either highly theoretical or rely on sophisticated methods to mediate and interpret evidence about the real world, realism is frequently put forward as the best account of actually existing scientific practice (see, e.g., Barad 1996).

Some realists have gone even further in their argument against positivism, asserting that the lawlike, linear, reductionist, and predictable world that positivism describes does not offer a plausible account of the real

<sup>27</sup> This fundamental point is consistent with much of what feminists from various perspectives have repeatedly argued about the need to reject the opposition between nature and culture because both are at work (see, e.g., Baker, Shulman, and Tobin 2001).



natural or social world, which is actually more contingent, nonlinear, organic/holistic, chaotic, and, in a word, complex than the positivists assume.<sup>28</sup> However, as N. Katherine Hayles (1991) has been at pains to emphasize in her writings on chaos theory and literature, abandoning such hallmarks of positivism as predictability and linear explanation does not mean that anything goes: reality is complexly patterned but patterned nonetheless. We can determine the source of the complexity, we can describe it, and we can theorize it. In this view, changes in patterns of inequality and in the underlying structural conditions of society are dynamic, complex, and contingent but also amenable to explanation.

This is not the place to advance a philosophical defense of a strong social ontology of this kind, but it is important to highlight these efforts at developing a scientific and social scientific practice that is postpositivist and consistent with feminist theories of intersectionality in their emphasis on complexity.<sup>29</sup> Just as methods must fit the substantive question, so this philosophy seems to fit the project of analyzing complex and intersecting social relations. Even though many of the central concepts, modes of explanation, methods, and philosophies of science and social science may develop and evolve in welcome ways (e.g., critical realism), many of their core features nevertheless remain rooted in particular disciplines. This is because the disciplines have been and continue to be well suited to the study of particular subject matters, not because they are stuck in an antiquated era (i.e., of positivism). In order to be wide-ranging and effective, feminist analysis requires “extensive knowledge in aspects of a person’s home discipline that appear to have little to do with women,” and this is as true of deconstruction as it is of statistics (Friedman 1998, 314–15).

### **Conclusion: A first step in defining interdisciplinarity**

Both the new and old fields are inadequate to the task of studying intersectionality in all its complexity. Older fields in the social sciences, from which I have been drawing examples throughout this article, have yet to deal fully with the complexity inherent in intersectional studies, while women’s studies has yet to fully open up to the kinds of complex intersectionalities that are so much a part of systemic inequality in contem-

<sup>28</sup> See, e.g., Reed and Harvey 1991; Byrne 1998; Steinmetz 1998. See also Stanley Lieberson and Freda B. Lynn (2002), who favor evolutionary models because of their greater complexity.

<sup>29</sup> See also Ragin 2000 for a comprehensive methodological (as opposed to philosophical) discussion of how to incorporate complexity into the practice of social science research.

porary society. There is a disconnect between theory and social reality in both fields, with current theories unable to fully grasp the current context of complex inequality. Each field (i.e., the old and new) has changed and developed without insights from the other, and the upshot is that little feminist or mainstream work is being done on new and important topics at the intersection of both fields. In my mind, both fields suffer from not being interdisciplinary enough, even though women's studies is the only one of the two that makes strong claims to interdisciplinarity. It is appropriate, then, to hold women's studies to a higher standard.

This brings us back to the nebulous line between disciplinary and interdisciplinary feminist research (the latter representing the core of women's studies as an inter/disciplinary site). Where does the categorical approach fall? Is the subject matter—intersections of structural inequality—narrowly disciplinary? Not in broad terms, but perhaps in terms of the particular way in which it is studied in the social sciences, an important distinction to which I shall return in a moment. Is the underlying philosophy of science—realism—narrowly disciplinary? No. Are the underlying theoretical motivations of the project—feminist theories of intersectionality—narrowly disciplinary? No. Is the method—quantitative and large scale—narrowly disciplinary? Perhaps yes. Hence, what is restricting feminist research on intersectionality comes down primarily to methods—not substance, theory, or philosophy. Substance is the only other possible candidate. But if one were to dismiss structural inequality as being primarily of disciplinary interest, one would have to argue that there is no room for the particular kind of structural analysis described under the categorical approach. To advance this argument, one also would have to defend the central place of alternative forms of structural inequality in women's studies (e.g., discursive regimes). In other words, why should women's studies favor one over the other a priori?

The pressing issue then is to overcome the disciplinary boundaries based on the use of different methods in order to embrace multiple approaches to the study of intersectionality. Just because parts of a methodology are more akin to one discipline than to another does not mean that the methodology as a whole is not part of an interdisciplinary program. The overall methodology is feminist and interdisciplinary in orientation, but the methods and specific subject matters will be, to a certain extent, shaped by the disciplines—because of the division of substance that the disciplines support and because particular methods are appropriate to particular subject matters. There is nothing wrong with this; in fact, it is a much more expansive and radical notion of what interdisciplinarity means since it is not limited by default to those disciplines that have methods that travel

easily (or, according to their practitioners, do not have a method at all). Feminism's development as a new field has been partial, perhaps unintentionally so, but this is a matter of course in the development of any new field and something that the new field must continually resist.

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