Intersectionality, Inc.: A Dialogue on Intersectionality's Travels and Tribulations

Patrick R. Grzanka is an Assistant Professor at the Department of Psychology at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, where he serves as core faculty in the Counseling Psychology Program and the interdisciplinary program in Women, Gender, and Sexuality. His research explores emotions, attitudes, and mental health at the nexus of social inequalities, particularly race, gender, and sexuality. His first book, *Intersectionality: A Foundations and Frontiers Reader* (Westview Press/Perseus Books 2014), traces the origins and contemporary frontlines of international scholar-activism that critiques how social inequalities are organized along multiple dimensions of difference, power, and inequity. His research has been funded by the National Science Foundation and the American Psychological Association and his work has been published in a wide range of scholarly journals, including *Sexualities*, *Women's Studies Quarterly, Sexuality Research & Social Policy, Symbolic Interaction, Journal of Counseling Psychology, The Counselling Psychology,* and *American Journal of Bioethics: Neuroscience.* He holds a PhD in American Studies from the University of Maryland.

Rajani Bhatia is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies at the University at Albany-State University of New York (SUNY). Her research interests lie in developing new approaches to feminist theorizations of reproduction and feminist science and technology studies with a focus on reproductive technologies, health, bioethics, and biomedicine. Through engagement as a scholar-activist in international women's health and reproductive justice movements, Dr. Bhatia has contributed to feminist analysis of global population control, right-wing environmentalism, and coercive practices and unethical testing related to contraceptive and sterilization technologies both inside and outside the United States. Her forthcoming book, *Gender Before Birth: Sex Selection in a Transnational Context* , will be released by University of Washington Press in spring 2018. She holds a PhD in Women's Studies from the University of Maryland.

Mel Michelle Lewis is Associate Professor and Program Director of Ethnic Studies at Saint Mary's College of California. Dr. Lewis completed her Ph.D. in Women's Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park, and she was formerly an assistant professor in the Department of Women, Gender, and Sexuality Studies and affiliate faculty in Africana Studies at Goucher College in Baltimore, Maryland. Originally from the Alabama Gulf Coast, Dr. Lewis is a Black feminist queer studies interdisciplinary scholar working at the nexus of intersectional queer critical race studies and pedagogies of social justice praxis. Her research publications and course offerings reflect this positioning. Her current project, Femme Query: Pedagogy, Pleasure, and Queer of Color Possibility, engages social justice educators, activists, cultural workers, and artists who articulate the power and possibility of femme pedagogies of liberatory praxis.

Sheri L. Parks is Associate Dean for Research, Interdisciplinary Scholarship, and Programming in the College of Arts and Humanities and Associate Professor in the Department of American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is also the author of *Fierce Angels: The Strong Black Woman in American Life and Culture* (Ballantine/Random House 2010) and a new revised and expanded edition, *Fierce Angels: Living with a Legacy from the Sacred Dark Feminine to the Strong Black Woman* (Lawrence Hill Books 2013). Her general research area is public aesthetics, or the ways in which people find and create meaning and beauty in their everyday lives, with specific emphasis on race, gender, and social class. She is a well-known Black academic feminist and she has appeared frequently in national and international media, including the BBC, NBC News, Anderson Cooper 360, *Newsweek*, and the *Los Angeles Times* as well as Polish, Chinese, and German media.

On stage, she has interviewed and moderated discussions with a number of prominent figures, including Angela Davis, David Simon, and David Alan Grier. As founding director of the Arts and Humanities Center for Synergy, Dr. Parks facilitates collaborations of scholars inside and outside of the university.

Joshua C. Woodfork is the Executive Director of the Office of the President and Coordinator of Strategic Initiatives at Skidmore College in Saratoga Springs, New York. He was formerly the Director of The Consortium on High Achievement and Success (CHAS) at Trinity College in Hartford, Connecticut. Prior to joining CHAS, Dr. Woodfork was Assistant Professor of American Studies at American University (2010-2012) and Assistant Professor of American Studies at Skidmore College (2005-2010) where he co-founded Skidmore's Black Faculty and Staff Group. He earned his PhD from the University of Maryland, his MA from Michigan State University, and his BA from Colby College where he has served on the Board of Trustees since 2009. His scholarly interests and teaching center on U.S. history, ethnography, intersectional analysis, popular culture, multiraciality, African Americans, whiteness, and social justice. He recently finished the manuscript of a book project entitled *Shifting Whiteness: White Parents of Biracial and Black Children.*

Michael Casiano is a doctoral candidate and Flagship Fellow in the Department of American Studies at the University of Maryland, College Park. In 2012, he received double bachelor's degrees from the University of Maryland in English and American Studies. His research analyzes the development of financialized geographies in Baltimore City over the course of the twentieth century using multi-disciplinary methods, including archival research, oral history, and political economy. As a graduate student, Michael has been active in efforts to unionize graduate assistants on the University of Maryland campus. As an instructor, he has taught intersectionality theory to undergraduates in both introductory and intermediate American Studies courses.

Abstract

In a roundtable discussion held at the American Studies Association's annual meeting in 2013, the authors interrogate intersectionality's uptake in diverse settings, considering how its radical potential may be coopted and conflated with "diversity," "multiculturalism," "inclusion," and similarly neoliberal institutional imperatives. The authors also discuss opportunities for resistance and transformation.

Résumé

Lors d'une table ronde tenue dans le cadre de la réunion annuelle de l'American Studies Association en 2013, les auteurs s'interrogent sur l'adoption de l'intersectionnalité dans divers contextes, en considérant comment son potentiel radical peut être coopté et confondu avec « la diversité », « le multiculturalisme », « l'inclusion » et des impératifs institutionnels également néo-libéraux. Les auteurs discutent également des occasions de résistance et de transformation.

In November 2013, on the eve of the American Studies Association's (ASA) decision to boycott Israeli universities and formally join the BDS (Boycott, Disinvestment, and Sanctions) movement, a group of scholars convened a roundtable at the ASA's annual meeting in Washington, D.C. to discuss the state(s) of intersectionality. Amid the cacophony of discourse on BDS, settler colonialism, and the aftermath of the Global Economic Crisis, we considered how the complexity of contemporary inequalities necessitates an active and activist-oriented intersectional critique. From across disciplines, institutions, and career stages, we offered experimental and even contentious cartographies of intersectionality as the field of intersectionality studies confronts and is confronted by post-Crisis re-orderings of power, privilege, and inequity. What follows is an abridged transcript of our two-hour conversation organized around intersectionality's precarious travels into disciplinary and institutional spaces. We do not reach consensus—it was not our goal nor the outcome of the dialogue—but, in different ways, we all consider how intersectionality's critical interventions may be co-opted by and incorporated into neoliberal social and institutional formations. Finally, we interrogate how contemporary deployments of intersectionality may or may not resist superficial "multiculturalism," "diversity," and other forms of symbolic social transformation that obfuscate the material reality of deep—and exacerbating —inequities.

Linked by a commitment to the critical study of how race and intersecting social systems function as dimensions on which life chances are unfairly and unequally distributed, the following scholars participated in this dialogue: the group's convener, Patrick Grzanka, is an interdisciplinary social scientist whose work investigates social inequalities at the intersections of race, gender, and sexuality. His research explores how both scientists and the lay public transform affect into knowledge and practices. Rajani Bhatia is trained in women's studies and brings a transnational feminist perspective to science and technology studies where her research has investigated the complex politics of assisted reproduction. Mel Michelle Lewis has spent her entire career in women's studies and is an expert on the embodiment of intersectionality in pedagogical spaces, specifically the undergraduate-level classroom. Sheri Parks, originally trained in mass communication studies, is an interdisciplinary scholar and public intellectual whose definitive work on the figure of the strong Black woman is internationally renowned. Joshua Woodfork, who moderates the dialogue, is an academic administrator and qualitative researcher whose dissertation project explored the life histories of parents of biracial children. Finally, our dialogue was recorded and transcribed by University of Maryland doctoral candidate Michael Casiano who studies the financial practices that produced profoundly racialized poverty in Baltimore, Maryland.

Joshua Woodfork: As we emerge from the wreckage of the Great Recession, we're preoccupied by questions of how to respond to new cartographies of inequality. In the face of emergent, elusive forms of discrimination, displacement, and gentrification, how do we chart the frontiers of intersectionality so we might disrupt the neoliberal commodification of diversity and a simultaneous disinvestment of marginalized communities? How does intersectionality support marginalized communities and marginalized people? In Patrick Grzanka's book *Intersectionality: A Foundations and Frontiers Reader,* Bonnie Thornton Dill (2014) states: "The new frontiers are new not because there are new inequalities, although there certainly are some, but because old inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, among others, are manifested in new ways and require new tools to examine, expose, and dismantle them" (342). Each of you has forged unique sets of tools to do the work of dismantling complex inequalities, which reflects the diversity of ways in which scholars and activists can both conceptualize and do intersectionality. My first question is: how did you arrive at intersectionality in your work, scholarship, teaching, and activism and was there a particular text or event that catalyzed this kind of thinking for you or was it always there?

Sheri Parks: I basically *am* intersectionality. I would argue that we *all* are. That is actually how I arrived at it, and you'll hear me argue several times that intersectionality is an abstraction and that we really need to be focusing on it as a tool of discourse to explain the lived life where we are *all* intersectionality. It's pretty obvious as a Black woman that intersectionality speaks to me, but it speaks to all of us in pretty much the same way. I really did arrive at it as a way to explain me to me, to explain my life, and particularly the way that people

were coming at me in a particular way. I'm the Associate Dean for Research, Interdisciplinary Scholarship, and Programming at the University of Maryland, College Park, and I not only work for the chair of American Studies, but also for Dean Bonnie Thornton Dill. The Arts and Humanities Center for Synergy was launched in December 2013. It has since been recognized by the American Academy of Arts and Sciences as a national leader in advancing the conversation about the roles of the Arts and Humanities in the world. When Joshua said to think about intersectionality and to do this work, for me, an important part of that is to *do*. Often, for those of us in the room who are working on the ground, intersectionality becomes a different thing.

Patrick Grzanka: I'm Patrick Grzanka and my academic career began at the University of Maryland. I was very fortunate to arrive at intersectionality as a paradigm, as a rhetoric, and as a tool early in my graduate school career. The summer in between college and graduate school, I decided to attend the University of Maryland to study with Sheri Parks who ultimately directed my dissertation. I went to graduate school thinking I wanted to study race and representation and I did that for quite some time, but I came into graduate school having recently come out as a queer man and I had a hunch that the questions I was asking about race were more complicated and needed to be more complicated than the way I had initially articulated them. I was very fortunate because at work and at school, then, my life was surrounded by Black feminists who were helping me to understand and to explain—and this echoes Sheri's comment—something that I always felt and I was increasingly feeling as I was coming into myself as a queer person who then had a different relationship to power and privilege than I had had before in my life, which was identifying as a straight white man. That's where it began and it has become an essential tool for me to do the work that I do and that's why this book came about and why it was my first book project. For me, Black feminist thought is its origins and it needs to remain intersectionality's center.

Rajani Bhatia: I am Rajani Bhatia and I situate myself as an interdisciplinary scholar at the cross-sites of women's, gender, and sexuality studies and science and technology studies. I also was a graduate student at the University of Maryland in the Department of Women's Studies. Intersectionality was so taken for granted there because it theoretically undergirded the analyses, assumptions, and ideas of our field as practiced in that particular location. It was something that I didn't explicitly engage with until the arrival of renewed theoretical interest in the term around 2007 with scholars such as Kathy Davis (2008), Jennifer Nash (2008), and Jasbir Puar (2007, 2012) returning back to that concept to think about what it has and has not done and how it has traveled. It's more in this second phase of reassessment that I more actively engaged the term.

Melissa Lewis: I'm Mel Lewis, I'm an assistant professor of women, gender, and sexuality studies at Goucher College in Baltimore, and I situate my work at the intersections of women, gender, and sexuality studies in Black queer studies and Black feminist thought. I work specifically on pedagogy and performing the body-as-text in the classroom around race, gender, and sexuality. Goucher is also my alma mater so I've returned home to teach. I did have a cathartic undergraduate experience with intersectionality that echoes some of what you said, Sheri, about being able to explain myself to myself. In a 100-level class in the reading packet, we had the Combahee River Collective (1977) and I'm sure most of you are familiar with that reading, "The Black Feminist Statement." I learned, for the first time, being from rural, coastal Alabama, that other Black lesbians existed! I did not know that so I went right out to the thrift store and I bought a dashiki and I was running around campus with it on. It was this kind of recognition of the intersection of this experience on the page and recognizing that there was a history for it. Then I also went to graduate school at the University of Maryland working with Bonnie Thornton Dill and these intersectional scholars who are so very well known. As Rajani said, it really was just a part of our framework and so looking and working on scholarship that very specifically fused together the experiential in terms of race, gender, and sexuality really made clear that an intersectional approach was necessary.

Bhatia: Just to add to that, I'm at the State University of New York in Albany and there's a class called "Classism, Racism, and Sexism" that some faculty refer to informally as the "intersectionality" class. It was a little

jarring for me at first, like, what? There's *one* class on intersectionality?

Woodfork: Sumi Cho, Kimberlé Crenshaw, and Leslie McCall (2013) have argued that intersectionality is best thought of as kind of an analytic disposition rather than a singular set of approaches or one particular genealogy. From this perspective, much work that does not use the term "intersectionality" may be thought of as intersectional so long as it takes the relationships among systems of oppression seriously and critically. I'm thinking here of Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham's meta-language argument about thinking about race even though it's not named. Do you use the term intersectionality routinely in your own writing or teaching? Do you feel any type of particular affinity toward the term or does it go by another name in your work, scholarship, pedagogy, or activism? It also may be helpful to think about what categories you define when you're thinking about intersectionality. Are some categories of difference privileged, are they equal, or are they simultaneously active?

Lewis: I do use the term intersectionality based on my training and I think that that feels very comfortable for me. In my teaching, I also use terms, such as "interlocking," which my colleague at Goucher, Kelly Brown Douglas, also uses. In terms of thinking about the way in which identity functions as this kind of lived experience thing that we have initiated, I do also think about "constellations," "axes," and "co-constitution" to highlight the ways different identities intersect and co-constitute one another. Also, asserting contextual identities is important so that we're not always thinking about identity as a fixed experience or a fixed phenomenon, but that we might think about behavior versus identity. When we're thinking about intersections, are we always only thinking about racial categories and these other static social categories or can we also bring in, for instance, men who sleep with men, women who sleep with women, and these other behavior-based categories (if we even want to call them categories) or experiences that might ask us to negotiate what intersectionality is differently?

Bhatia: I don't routinely use the term in my writing, although, like Mel, I'm constantly using terms such as "co-constitution" and "co-construction." There may be ways in which I'm actually saying "intersectionality," but not using that particular term. In any case, I would like, if I may, to give a little bit of background on the use of intersectionality in science and technology studies (STS). I tried to look at the extent to which the word "intersectionality" is explicitly taken up in three main journals of science and technology studies: *Science as Culture*; *Science, Technology, and Human Values*; and *Social Studies of Science*. I did a keyword search covering the past 20 years and found that there were only four articles in that time period that explicitly drew on intersectionality. This doesn't mean that intersectionality wasn't happening—at least, not under that name—but those were the explicit references. Among the authors of those four articles, there was a general consensus that there is a lack of intersectional work within STS. For example, one scholar, Ingunn Moser (2006), states that "There is growing concern that we seem unable to address more than one difference at a time, thus failing to interrogate enactments of class, race, ethnicity, gender, and sexuality in science, technology, and medicine" (537). Like Moser, Ulf Mellström (2009), another Scandinavian scholar, critiques a lack of intersectional work in STS, saying that, "In other words, if, in theory, gender and technology are co-produced, so are ethnicity and technology, age and technology, sexuality and technology, and class and technology. Still, these latter dimensions of cross-cultural comparison and intersectional understanding are generally absent from STS research, and gender and technology studies particularly, with a few notable exceptions" (888). These scholars seem to suggest that intersectionality isn't happening enough in STS. In my own work, I bring a transnational feminist perspective to biomedicalization and only now have begun to wonder about the implications of taking intersectionality for granted. What are the implications of not explicitly mentioning it, especially in a male-dominated field such as STS? After all, I'm drawing on what Kathy Davis (2008) says "has been heralded as one of the most important contributions to feminist scholarship" (67) without naming it. Also, in looking through a lot of work in STS, I see that, if intersectionality is not directly or explicitly referenced, it's often replaced with "feminism"—a sort of deflated and overly expansive proxy. And that has interesting implications as well.

Grzanka: As I was listening to Rajani and Mel, I was reminded of the use of other terms that sometimes func-

tion as placeholders for intersectionality. In STS, they have "co-production." This is a term from a woman of color scholar, Sheila Jasanoff (2004), who gave the field this concept and now it is ubiquitous in STS. Co-production is *not* intersectionality though. Co-production refers to the specific ways in which STS scholars understand knowledge projects as they are made and enacted. It is not a critique of structural inequalities. It does not theorize a matrix of domination. It does not imagine the historicity of shifting oppressions. And so, I also use "co-constitution" in my work, but I rarely use the word "co-production." My disciplinary location now is at the crossroads of sociology, science and technology studies, and psychology. For me, in those disciplines, which have differentially taken up intersectionality, it's very important for me to be expressly clear about what I'm doing and what I mean so as to *not* be confused across those interdisciplinary boundaries where intersectionality might not even have traveled or if it has traveled has changed in ways that might not reflect what it is that I intend for it to do. The biggest trouble that is brought up in psychology in particular is around identity (see Grzanka and Miles 2016). If a psychologist hears you talking about the co-constitution of identity categories, the way that psychologists understand what identity is—as a developmental process, perhaps as a stage that one goes through in life, as a form of identity that can be expressed demographically, or through traditional empirical methods—that's quite different from the way that identity has been used by scholars in intersectionality studies. One of the things that I reflect on in the book is the debates around the word "identity" that Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) have recently reflected on. What they stressed is that intersectionality is *not* a theory of identity; it is a critique of structures. That speaks very much to the sociological origins of intersectionality. For me, I find myself using the word "identity" less and less—not because I'm not talking about identities—but so that when the word "identity" gets deployed, it doesn't lead people to think that I'm doing something different from what I am. The term remains really important. The last thing I'll say is that I think that some potentially dangerous political work happens when intersectionality becomes so mainstreamed or taken up in other disciplines where people say: "Well, yeah, it's a structural critique of power, that's all we need to say. We don't need the word." Unfortunately, I think what that does, intentionally or not, is that it elides, actively, the real genealogy of women of color feminism that produced the theory. I wonder about the long-term ramifications of that decision not to use the word "intersectionality," and by "wonder," I guess I actually mean I'm quite suspicious of the effects that that could have.

Parks: Okay, so maybe you're suspicious of what I'm about to say! I tend to use the term when I'm speaking to an audience like this, of other scholars. In my teaching and in my activism, I tend to find the word "intersectionality" to be complex. I find that it gets in the way of other levels of abstraction. The danger of intersectionality is that it becomes very mechanistic. You heard me use the term "synergy" a minute ago. "Synergy" is a word that's used in philosophy and theology, but also in the sciences; what it means is that when you have multiple things that come together, something happens. There's an interaction and the result is something that you couldn't have gotten by just adding those pieces together. For me, I think that that is often happening when you move away, as Patrick just did, from identity to what moves around identity, to what we say, what we do, what we think, how we live, how we breathe, then I think we have to use it at its most sophisticated level. And I'm not saying that intersectionality prohibits that, but I think if we don't keep all of those balls in the air then it's easy to dismiss it or make it one of those pieces.

Bhatia: First of all, Patrick, I'm not sure that Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) were saying that intersectionality wasn't also a theory of identity. I think that they were saying that it wasn't *only* a theory of identity. They wanted to highlight that there has been an overemphasis on intersectionality as a theory of identity and they're trying to return back to some of the structural elements that were always there. One of the things that I think is interesting again in respect to STS, where we've seen a lot of social constructivism and radical constructivism theories in use, is a tendency to move away from identity completely. To reject identity, to paint it as a category to be wary of in general. I think that intersectionality, in my view, didn't actually do that; it just thought about identity more complexly.

Grzanka: Well put, Rajani. In my book, what I try in the unit on identity is to foreground the debates around

identity, not to foreclose upon them. The most important thing to sociologists is structural analysis and that's a fair position, but I think what we see there are that some of the tensions emerge in these cross-disciplinary elaborations of intersectionality. I think Devon Carbado (2013) and Catharine MacKinnon (2013) make a more explicit critique of identity. Albeit differently, they both go so far as to say that all of these identities we're talking about are the products of structures—oppressions' most ossified effects. I think that I try to take—and this is probably my American Studies background—a little bit more of a multi-directional approach to that and I think that may also speak to what Rajani said: that intersectionality's foremothers were never saying that it was just about identity.

Woodfork: How have the events of the past five to ten years, particularly the Great Recession and the political economy of the Obama presidency, changed the things that you study? How have you responded to these shifts in your work? How have your respective fields been slow to react to transforming landscapes of neoliberal inequalities or have you perceived meaningful innovations? I've worked in a few different institutions over the few years, and the debates in terms of funding, and our pedagogies and the way that students learn in terms of attention spans, etc. are all relevant here. Has this caused anything in your work or teaching to change in the way that you look at some of your scholarship or in terms of making meaning out of the things you do in your activism?

Parks: I think that there's an urgency to my work that I think has always been there, but it's more activist now. I started teaching classes in social activism and popular culture with the idea that students learn how to become change agents—intellectual change agents so that, like this conversation, it's moving from the theoretical to the action. I started out as an English major and didn't feel that I had the luxury to theorize so I added popular culture and so I've realized just recently that I've made the loop again—that I no longer have the luxury to theorize and I no longer have the luxury of teaching students to theorize. Immediately they have to learn—and then you get right back to complexity—the messiness of what happens when you go out to the field. There are people who *need* this and need us to do this *work*. I have a book called *Fierce Angels* (2010, 2013), which started out as an academic book—you know, 300 pages, letter of understanding from an editor—and I was giving talks from it and it was *really* about intersectionality, really about Black women's lived lives. Women were coming up to me in tears saying, "I can't wait to read your book," and I couldn't say, "You won't be able to." So I rewrote it, which was harder than it seemed like it would be in the beginning. I constantly get reminded of the urgency of the work that everybody in this room does. There are people out there *waiting for it* and need it. It makes it more interesting, but it also makes it much more difficult.

Grzanka: I thought that maybe I would just read this line from Bonnie Thornton Dill's (2014) epilogue, "Frontiers," in my book. She closes the book with this: "The challenge for intersectional scholars today is not to trap ourselves in a tower of ideas but to make sure that our scholarly debates about terminology, approaches, and assumptions are meaningful and productive so that we can apply both our old and new insights to generate strategies to address experiences of injustice on the ground. Ultimately, the value in identifying new scholarly frontiers in scholarship and writing about intersectionality is to reveal new understandings and approaches that help us do the work of reducing inequalities and expanding social justice" (343). I think that that reflects, in a beautiful way, the pragmatist origins of intersectionality as a justice project.

Parks: There is work that only *we* will do and only we *can* do and it's important for that work to be done so that we and other people can build on it.

Bhatia: I think I'm also going to defer to Mel to think about what's happening in the classroom. In terms of the last five to ten years, the Great Recession, and impacts on my own particular work—my work has centered on fertility clinics and, as is very typical during economically depressed times, people tend not to have as many children. They defer having children and those who might have sought In Vitro Fertilization (IVF) also put it off, especially given all the financial constraints. A lot of the clinics that I was working with in the past couple of years were trying to find ways to attract new consumers and expand their market bases. Those clinics that

might have, maybe five to ten years ago, shunned off ethically questionable methods, such as sex selection, began offering those services to stay open under conditions of economic restraint. That is a topic that I was focusing on, sex selection in particular. Also many young women finding themselves in debt in these times have also brought a boon to fertility clinics in the sense that they show up in greater numbers to sell or wanting to sell their eggs for cash. These are just some of the trends that I have seen. There are a number of shifts occurring in inequality related to reproduction and these might have been some of the things that Bonnie Thornton Dill (2014) was talking about, some of the frontiers. Part of it is just being aware of how these things are shifting and thinking about how we can apply intersectionality to these changes.

Lewis: I'm at a liberal arts institution so we're absolutely under siege in terms of academic capitalism and this shift in seeing students and parents, in particular, as consumers. All of the interdisciplinary, multi-disciplinary fields are under scrutiny in the current climate because we are looking at bodies in peril and that is not an economically lucrative position or practice. Also, I think we're having a very hard time—and I don't think we should have to do this—but we're having a very hard time articulating what we do as skillset, in economic terms, that goes along with being able to be an intersectional scholar. In terms of faculty, I do research on Black queer feminist pedagogues and, in the course of that—doing case studies, being in people's classrooms, doing in-depth interviews—I think that our bodies are also in peril in terms of being in the academy and having these particular intersections that are very threatening because we have disrupted a particular narrative and so I think that now that the economic status of the institution has really intervened in intellectual practice, in hiring practice, and all of these things. Our diversity is being used in particular ways where we're seeing—not that there wasn't tokenism before—but now we can only afford to have one token. In terms of the job market and in terms of being that two-for, three-for, four-for, however many "fors" person that can be on the panel, to do service, to be on the committee, to perform whatever that labor is—I think that labor is happening on our bodies a little bit differently. When the university imagined itself to be able to have a different kind of population, things changed a bit. Now, the institution can only pay one person to be the diversity quotient and who that person is and what labor their body has to do has shifted a bit too.

Woodfork: What have been the most significant kinds of resistances to intersectionality that you've encountered in your work and teaching? In the past few years, I've been on committees thinking about accreditation and learning goals. What does intersectionality look like in the context of institutional assessment? Although we say we appreciate interdisciplinary, multidisciplinary, and transdisciplinary approaches, we still default to the same categories. But, as Mel was saying, it's different when you're actually *embodying* what you're teaching versus someone else *choosing* to take this approach. Then there are differences, of course, in how intersectionality is received in terms of teaching evaluations, promotion and tenure, etc.

Lewis: Both myself and the faculty that I have researched and worked with do implicate themselves and their bodies as a part of their pedagogical practice. Sometimes suspicion arises that instructors are trying to sway students in some way and that we have a stake in doing that. And, of course, I have a stake in that! When those types of questions arise, I think myself and the other pedagogues kind of jump right in. We say: "Yes, this is about me and this is about you, too." We have to implicate *them* [our students]. In terms of practice, asking them to apply it—asking them to apply an intersectional lens and turn the mirror on themselves—those are some ways in which I think we are addressing the pushback.

Parks: You reminded me of an African-American TA in another department who asked me how she could become neutral in the classroom. It was a very sad moment—she not only did not want to bring all of her categories, she did not want to bring *any* category because she felt that that would make her the most effective instructor and she was not happy when I told her that that was impossible. I think that that tyranny—and even in departments like American Studies where we are multidisciplinary and intersectional, like Women's Studies, by definition—there's still this pull of this image of the "objective"—of the distant, of the "without" category

that has its own kind of tyranny. I think the tyranny of categories themselves become part of the resistance that somebody said very early on, this is hard for people to wrap their heads around. They institutionalize their inability to wrap their brains around it.

Bhatia: I don't know exactly if I can call these resistances—but there appears to be a tension between, on the one hand, the intersectional relationships between sex, gender, and sexuality and, on the other hand, some transactivisms that have a stake in maintaining them separate. For example, my students will insist that "Well, my sex has nothing to do with my gender, which has nothing to do with my sexuality." So it's more of a tension around how we understand and honor the very real stakes in that kind of thinking, teaching, and learning and, at the same time, not view those separations as contradictory to intersectionality.

Woodfork: So we talked a little bit about the pushback in terms of intersectionality in the classroom, but I also want to broaden this to think about how it has become synonymous, in terms of the mainstream, with diversity and inclusion. How can intersectional activists work against "inclusion" and "place at the table" trajectories that divorce minority-led social movements from the political critiques that launched them in the first place?

Parks: I think there's a danger to mainstreaming because intersectionality can become impotent if it doesn't do anything anymore. And, of course, the neoliberal direction would be to shake it and shake it and shake it until there's nothing left. We've seen that over and over again.

Grzanka: We've got never-before-seen levels of attention in the discipline of psychology to diversity and multiculturalism, including what's called "LGBT-affirmative therapy." In applied psychology, which sort of owes it to queer people to be better than it has been, we *need* this—we need people to be prepared to do good therapy with sexual minorities and gender nonconforming clients. But, enter the context of neoliberalism in which this push to "multiculturalize" psychology gets lots of institutional attention for doing very, very little. For example, in this course on basic helping skills, we added to week 15 a unit on all the people of color, all the queer people, and everybody else we can think of—and that's constituting multicultural competency. On the other hand, we have the new "conscience clause," which I would argue is absolutely a neoliberal technology. Psychology graduate students are suing their universities saying, "I should not have to learn that to become a psychologist" and specifically what they're saying is they shouldn't have to learn LGBT-affirmative therapy. They're saying, "I should not have to do this kind of work because it's against my religious beliefs and I'm never going to do it anyway after you license me. I'll never treat a client who wants to talk to me about a sexual orientation or gender identity issue." One might think the conscience clauses would get no ground, but they have made some headwinds in the U.S.—and not just in Red States. We've got some weird stuff going on where LGBT affirmative therapy is becoming this add-on to psychology's understanding of multiculturalism and we absolutely need intersectionality's insights to do some serious critique and activism around that curricular move and about what that means for the discipline in terms of science and how people are actually being treated by psychotherapists. And then, simultaneously, we have people opting out of doing any of this and potentially getting degrees by saying, "I'm not going to learn anything about *that*. I'm going to learn objective, neutral psychology."

Bhatia: There are all kinds of intersectionality training tools that you can find on government websites, such as the government of Australia, which has a whole section that deals with family violence. You can download curriculum modules on intersectionality that include intersectionality exercises. What I find is that most often, once again, there's an overwhelming focus on intersectionality as individual identity. It's an improvement on mainstream notions of multiculturalism and diversity since ideas of privilege and oppression are kind of wedded to intersectionality, but these trainings tend to deplete the political content of the term. These mainstreaming efforts overemphasize, once again, intersectionality as something that only has to do with individuals rather than structures and systems. You just don't see *that* kind of training going on.

Grzanka: Even as just a word, "intersectionality," is not at all like the words "diversity" and "multiculturalism."

Those words are about feeling good. They have an affective tone to them that's about spaces getting better, even if it's just symbolic. But the word "intersectionality" was created as a way to describe *oppression*. So when intersectionality gets pulled into disciplines and institutions—like the training modules Rajani referenced—as a rhetoric through which to describe "diversity," that feels like a moment of danger. That feels like a challenge for us and a key site of neoliberalization.

Lewis: Intersectionality is an active undertaking. When we think of multiculturalism, we have the potluck or have some kind of festival where the students are dancing around in costumes and we're all involved! As Rajani was saying, when intersectionality is approached this way, you can actively *not* do it, or you can deny it or, you know, kind of check the box so that you don't have to do it. Whereas I see intersectionality as an active inquiry, it is also this kind of framework that requires that you have to *do something* with it. It's a working tool. Diversity itself has been framed as: you add a few people and everything's fine. Because intersectionality is a lens, it's a framework, it's a tool—we have to *do* something with it. My hope is that that gives it a particular kind of energy and a particular situatedness within the academy, and also within an activist space, to recognize that we have to deploy it in some ways (to use a really militaristic term). It's something that has to be deployed so that we can't simply add a few people and stir, but that we actually must practice it and that it is an active position to take. I think intersectionality now requires us to go another step so that we are engaging this conversation—not just about power, and privilege, and situatedness. We're very wedded to these individual positionalities, but we can simultaneously engage sexism, racism, and structural oppressions. Then we're not always only talking about these individual locations, but we have a much broader analysis that allows us to go beyond that and recognize the relationships so that intersectionality then is a way to build coalitions or to recognize alliances.

Woodfork: Thinking about the continued structural barriers to teaching complex intersectional research, teaching, and activism that crosses these different disciplinary boundaries, what do you see as the most important frontiers of intersectionality in higher education in general?

Parks: This conference has been about different types of prices, and certainly one of them is in higher education, where there's a coming decline in 18-year olds and people will be scrambling. One of the movements in order to validate our existence has been toward civic engagement—of moving undergraduates into the world. What I see is that when (our) students move into the world, in order just to explain what they're encountering, they come back to intersectionality or something like intersectionality. My student Stephanie Stevenson Akoumany has been doing a three-year longitudinal study in Baltimore City with adolescent girls. Certainly, when she went in, she knew she would be dealing with because of the school, race and social class, and gender. *They* dragged her into sexuality—and different types of sexuality. There's been this type of fanning out where, in order to—she was doing intervention and ethnography at the same time—in order to just stay where they were, where they were moving, in order to make sense of that, she became more and more intersectional. I think that's what happens when you talk about the lived life. If you are doing the *real* work—not just the work you came to do—then intersectionality becomes a really important tool.

Bhatia: I am thinking about the neoliberalization of universities and, again, one of the big pressures that we face is trying to internationalize the universities and make them these global spaces in order to attract international students. Getting streams of new income is a lot of what it's about. Sometimes it's hard to see that imperative in relation to what in Women and Gender Studies we know as the radical decolonizing function of transnational feminist theory. So I wonder if we can bring intersectionality to bear somehow in order to try to push back against this happy global multicultural diversity because now it's our job to create global citizens. How do we do that? How do we make that part of the frontier of intersectionality?

Lewis: I'm a chair of the Lesbian Caucus within the National Women's Studies Association (NWSA) and we've been doing these inter-caucus projects in part to represent to the NWSA body that there are political commitments that cross caucuses. The caucuses are constituted around identity groups for the most part. Some of them are very historical: the Women of Color Caucus,

the Lesbian Caucus. And some are newer and are more situated around areas of study; for example, the South Asian Women's Caucus is an identity group, but it is also about transnational feminist theory as produced by and about South Asian women. The NWSA has supported us in pulling together our resources and having panels, doing social and artistic projects at conferences, etc., so that we are performing and embodying intersectionality within the organization and we're kind of modelling and illustrating that we have responsibilities to each other. We have these connections that are not always made clear. I think that intersectionality within the NWSA is a practice and it's a theoretical framework that we use and teach and work with in terms of our research. But to actually *make* these connections is another thing. I think that that's one new frontier: we are *doing* intersectionality and we are *doing* interdisciplinary work, but we're also highlighting the responsibility that we have to one another and really facilitating that kind of community. That is one of the new practices that we have tried to put in place so that we're able to do the work that we need to do, and we can do it together, and we're not functioning so separately.

The intervening years since this roundtable have underscored both the continued relevance of intersectionality to social movement politics and social justice-focused intellectual inquiry as well as the persistent risks of intersectionality's dilution and cooptation. If, as Parks suggests, "we are all intersectionality," then contemporary anti-Black state violence in the U.S., homonationalism, austerity measures in Europe, and ongoing refugee crises worldwide remind us that the embodiment of intersectionality means very different things for differently situated subjects. Even activist responses to state violence against Black lives have sometimes obfuscated intersectionality in ways that have necessitated uniquely Black feminist responses. Kimberlé Crenshaw's #SayHerName campaign, for example, highlights the consistency with which quotidian state violence against Black women becomes both normalized and erased relative to Black men (see also Nash 2016). Recent academic work has also taken up the issue of Black women's erasure, as Vivian May (2015) and others (e.g., Bilge 2013) have critiqued women's and gender studies for white-washing and politically neutralizing intersectionality as it becomes even more diffuse and pervasive in contemporary feminist and cultural inquiry. As Herman Gray (2013) has argued, representation and visibility in the context of neoliberalism does not necessarily correspond with liberation; intersectionality's mainstreaming has not been immune to these dynamics and has raised new questions about how including intersectionality often seems to correspond with excluding Black feminism—and Black women. We remain particularly skeptical of institutional deployments of intersectionality that engage in the erasure of Black feminism's vision of radical social transformation in exchange for the politics of diversity and inclusion. Perhaps unsurprisingly, some of the most generative work on intersectionality today emanates from activist projects such as #SayHerName, UndocuQueer, and other manifestations of political intersectionality and coalition-building that link transgender, immigration, and disability issues to intersectionality's traditional roots in the study and contestation of racism, sexism, and capitalism. One of the things that is most consistent throughout our roundtable is our shared emphasis on social action and social transformation. Perhaps, then, one of the most effective strategies for resisting the neoliberalization and depoliticization of intersectionality is to keep doing what Parks called the "real work" of activism and resistance over and above debating intersectionality's more esoteric academic and, therefore exclusive, articulations.

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