

TOWARD AN  
INTERSECTIONALITY JUST OUT  
OF REACH: CONFRONTING  
CHALLENGES TO  
INTERSECTIONAL PRACTICE

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ABSTRACT

*Purpose – This chapter reflects on the interpretation and effects of the term intersectionality within the academy and across a broad spectrum of institutional and grassroots environments in which it is operationalized and deployed.*

*Design/methodology/approach – Based on the authors' experiences within the academy and their respective participation as researchers and organizers within feminist, queer, and racial and economic justice movements, the chapter surveys the rhetorical, political, and organizational uses of intersectionality across these realms.*

*Findings – Five general challenges to intersectional practice are identified and described: misidentification, appropriation, institutionalization, reification, and operationalization. The authors trace these challenges across the academy, grassroots movements, and nonprofit organizations.*

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Perceiving Gender Locally, Globally, and Intersectionally

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*Originality/value – Offers a new articulation of intersectional practice as the application of scholarly or social movement methodologies aimed at intersectional and sustainable social justice outcomes.*

Nearly 20 years after its emergence, intersectionality remains one of the most vital and widely used concepts within feminist studies. Though first coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to refer to the interdefining structures of racism and sexism, intersectionality's political roots stretch back as far as the 19th century, when numerous Black women writers and reformers critiqued the racial construction of gender and protested its violent effects (Church Terrell, 1898[2005]; Crenshaw, 1995; Truth, 1851[2005]; Wells-Barnett, 1901[2005]). Given the concept's origins in Black women's social theory and activism, intersectionality has taken form not only as an analysis of the multiplicative nature of oppression, but also as a political intervention that deconstructs social relations and promotes more just alternatives. In this way, from its inception, intersectionality has been a political strategy as much as it has been a theoretical lens. More, it has evolved to include not only race and gender, but also socioeconomic class, nation, sexuality, religion, and other locations within the "matrix of domination" (Collins, 1990; see also Baca Zinn & Thorton Dill, 1996; Mohanty, 2003a). Its applications can be seen in projects ranging from social science studies of culture (Bettie, 2003), organizations (Ward, 2004), social movements (Kurtz, 2002; Luft, 2008, 2009b; Naples, 1998; Stockdill, 2003), and public policy (Weldon, 2005), to humanistic studies of political discourse (Alarcon, 1996) and performance (Mutoz, 1999). Reflecting the way that intersectionality has begun to displace singular pedagogical approaches, the concept has also been widely featured in undergraduate textbooks in both the social sciences and humanities (Segal & Martinez, 2007; Kirk & Okazawa-Rey, 2006; Andersen & Collins, 2006).

Recently, the scope of intersectionality's contribution has occasioned reflection on the concept's varied meanings, as well as its popularity within certain progressive circles. Some feminist scholars have assessed the successes and limitations of intersectionality as a research methodology and a body of theory (Daniels, 2008; Davis, 2008; McCall, 2005) and some have hinted at its academic overuse by suggesting that intersectionality has become "catchy and convenient" within feminist studies (Davis, 2008, p. 75). In this chapter, we also consider the meaning and uses of intersectionality; however, we take a different approach by returning to intersectionality as a *practice* and a *political intervention*, one with roots in racial justice efforts as much as within women's studies. As we approach intersectionality's 20-year anniversary,

we reflect here on its interpretation and effects not only within the academy, but across a broad spectrum of institutional and grassroots environments in which intersectionality is operationalized and deployed. Our aim is to survey the rhetorical, political, and organizational uses of intersectionality on the ground, and more specifically, to identify some of the challenges that stand in the way of intersectional practice across these domains.

In taking stock of the current state of intersectional praxis, we draw on our experiences within the academy, as well as our respective participation as researchers and organizers within feminist, queer, and racial and economic justice movements. Rachel, who has long been involved in feminist and racial justice projects, has recently been immersed in grassroots organizing for a just reconstruction in post-Katrina New Orleans (Luft, 2008, 2009b). Jane's research and activism has centered on queer politics in Los Angeles, with particular focus on problems of institutionalization and mainstreaming in lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) nonprofit organizations (Ward, 2008a). Across these projects we have been concerned with the distinct but overlapping reasons that intersectional efforts become mired in confusion, stall out, or simply break down altogether. This chapter summarizes our concerns, and categorizes them into five general challenges to intersectional practice: misidentification, appropriation, institutionalization, reification, and operationalization. We describe these challenges with admittedly broad strokes so as to capture their range, as well as to trace them across distinct but related sites in which intersectional projects are enacted and disabled: the academy, grassroots movements, and nonprofit organizations. Throughout this discussion, and in our conclusion, we work toward our own articulation of "successful" intersectional practice. Namely, we define intersectional *practice* as the application of scholarly or social movement methodologies aimed at intersectional and sustainable social justice outcomes. In doing so, we emphasize application, justice, and outcomes. Yet, we also keep in view that this definition must be evolving and adaptable to the as-yet-to-be-fully-grasped complexities that the term itself describes.

## FIVE CHALLENGES TO INTERSECTIONAL PRACTICE

### *Misidentification*

The first obstacle to intersectional practice – if defined as an activity aimed at intersectional, sustainable social justice outcomes – is *misidentification*.

Misidentification refers to the dilution and misappropriation of intersectionality. We find a disturbing and growing lack of discrimination in the application of the term. It is increasingly used to describe a great variety of politics and practices that (merely) recognize race, class, gender, and sexuality. This usage encourages slippage between intersectionality and a wide assortment of earlier models of multiplicity: double jeopardy, diversity, multiculturalism, and so forth. Further, intersectionality is invoked in conjunction with rhetorical and organizational practices that threaten to derail its objectives.

In this section, we identify four of the things intersectionality is *not* in order to establish parameters for what it is. Each of the four misidentifications introduced here then reappears as one of the remaining four obstacles to intersectional practice that organizes each of the remaining four sections (appropriation, institutionalization, reification, operationalization). We conclude this section by describing how misidentification itself functions as an apparatus to delimit the complexity and promise of intersectionality.

First, intersectionality is often misidentified as the purview of feminism and women's studies. We are concerned that as intersectionality is increasingly embraced by feminists – in and of itself a good thing – its subaltern and liminal origins are elided, and with it the fruitful friction that intersectionality has always posed to feminist thought and practice. As the latest in a long line of challenges by women of color to feminism and other historically essentializing, binary discourses, intersectionality is both inside and outside of feminism and women's studies. The genealogy of the concept, both well-rehearsed and neglected, is still instructive, and we use it to anchor our assessment of intersectionality's intersectional origins.

Toward this end, we follow Deborah King (1988) in tracing the lineage of the concept back before the second wave of the women's movement, through more than a century of intellectual and political contestation over the relationship between race and gender. Unearthing its roots in the 19th century articulations of Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, and Mary Church Terrell takes intersectionality out of the domain of white feminism, and locates it in the lived experience of women of color who theorized race as much as they did gender, from the perspective that the two were inextricably linked and mutually constructive (King, 1988). In the more familiar, recent history, the concept that would become intersectionality iterated through the post-Civil Rights collective explorations captured in the Combahee River Collective (1977[2005]), *This Bridge Called My Back* (1981), and *All the Women are White, All the Blacks are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (1987). What Frances Beale (1979) called “double jeopardy”

in 1979 became triple and then multiple jeopardy in Deborah King's groundbreaking 1988 articulation. The word “intersectionality” itself was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, and developed by Patricia Hill Collins in the 1990s. Since the 1990s its usage has exploded, arguably becoming “the most important contribution that women's studies has made so far” (McCall, 2005, p. 1771).

As this historical overview indicates, intersectionality is not the offspring of feminist studies alone. As a contribution of marginalized Black feminism, it is as much the outgrowth of an early critical race discourse as of gender discourse. Since every key figure in the history of the development of the concept is Black, with the exception of the Latina editors of *This Bridge Called My Back*, to claim intersectionality as the product of women's studies, without also situating it in overlapping (Black) race discourse is a failure of intersectional historiography. The point of this claim is neither petty territoriality, nor the reinscription of identity politics, nor the exclusion of early Black feminists from the feminist canon. Rather our intention is to recenter intersectionality's racial roots, and with it its function as an intervention. Recontextualization of intersectionality in race studies is intended to be a prophylactic against the whitening of intersectional discourse, which reveals itself subtly in the enthusiastic claim to ownership of intersectionality by white feminists. Although we share the sense that intersectionality has changed feminist theory and that feminist theory has been the most receptive and fertile ground for intersectional work, the celebratory championing of women's studies as the home of intersectionality collapses the historical friction between the two, and with it the critical imperative the latter has brought to the former. Intersectional genealogies that acknowledge the Black founders but then emphasize the work of white women threaten to lose the racial habits that produced the theoretical innovation (see, for instance, Davis, 2008). Here, we are describing the practice of theory building as a political and contested project.

Race is not the only category that drops out of intersectional practice, and scholars have noted that class (Acker, 2008) and sexuality (Schilt, 2008) are even more undertheorized. Nonetheless, the fact of the origins of the concept of intersectionality in the lived experience of Black feminist race theorists makes the minimization of race particularly worrisome. Recent intersectional work by some white feminist scholars contains little mention of race, racism, or racial justice, while overstating intersectionality's hegemony: “Today, it is unimaginable that a women's studies program would only focus on gender” and “Feminist journals are likely to reject articles that have not given sufficient attention to ‘race,’ class, and

heteronormativity, along with gender” (Davis, 2008, p. 68). We are not so sure. Understanding the significance of the concept’s lineage should increase the accountability of intersectional scholarship to race scholarship, and caution women’s studies against easy claims to ownership. We develop this argument further in the following section on appropriation, by pointing to growing slippage between intersectional rhetoric or claim, and practice.

Second, intersectionality is not diversity nor an intellectual version of diversity management. For some scholars and activists, this distinction may appear obvious given that multiculturalism and diversity management so frequently take additive, superficial, and coopted forms, problems which have been well documented in literatures on corporate and nonprofit organizations (Gordon, 1995; Ward, 2008a). Still, for many, the distinction between diversity and intersectionality remains blurry, especially because some institutionally embedded diversity trainings and initiatives *do* deliver progressive and necessary forms of structural change (e.g., internal organizational diversification, employee/activist consciousness raising, and the development of needed social services), outcomes we would hardly dismiss as unimportant or unnecessary. However, while these outcomes are certainly markers of institutional progress, they are different from intersectional movement outcomes in crucial ways. Ultimately, institutional approaches to diversity support, rather than challenge, the financial survival and prosperity of the institutions in which they are embedded. Grassroots movements, however, can and do take oppositional stances in relation to mainstream institutions, public opinion, broader political-economic trends, and even the “non-profit industrial complex” (Smith, 2007). As we discuss later, in the section on institutionalization, diversity initiatives do not meet our definition of intersectional justice if they are dependent on, and accountable to, institutions rather than grassroots movements.

Third, intersectionality is not multiple jeopardy. It is not multiple jeopardy because it describes a more fluid, mutually constructive process than does the more static description of multiple jeopardy as “several, simultaneous oppressions” (King, 1988, p. 47). Although, King did note the “interactive” quality of these oppressions, they nonetheless appear more categorical than the deconstructive framings that would follow, as intersectionality in the 1990s met with the social and theoretical effects of a generation of new social movements, and with poststructuralism. As Joan Acker explains, there is a “continuing problem with the analysis of intersectionality: how to escape thinking about race, class, gender, and sexuality as separate categories while, at the same time, recognizing that ‘they have particular material, ideological and historical specificities’” (Acker, citing

Andersen 2008, p. 107). Acker and Andersen’s working solution is “to focus on the relational and reinforcing processes of mutual and emergent reproduction of gender, class, race, and sexuality” (Acker, 2008, p. 107). As Leslie McCall asserts, “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” (McCall, 2005, p. 1783). King’s more fixed presentation of systems and oppression was innovative at the time, and produced the multiplication metaphor, which implies pre-existing, fixed variables. Intersectionality’s subsequent encounter with new social movement complexity and deconstruction described identity and oppression as more ontologically, interactively productive. There is no gender before race, and therefore no original or raceless gender with which race can be multiplied, and so forth. We explore this challenge further in the fourth section, on reification.

Fourth, intersectionality also differs from the jeopardy and bridge models by facilitating a focus not only on vulnerability and oppression, but also on privilege and advantage: “Analyzing race, class, and gender ... requires analysis of existing systems of power and privilege; otherwise, *understanding diversity becomes just one more privilege* for those with the greater access to education – something that has always been a marker of the elite class” (Collins and Andersen in Andersen, 2005, p. 446 [ital ours]). Intersectionality in its current iteration emerged at the same time as the critical studies of dominance – specifically masculinity (Connell, 1987) and whiteness (Frankenberg, 1993) – and has facilitated the unveiling and marking of these and other dominant categories (middle-class status, heterosexuality, citizenship, and so forth). Indeed, much of the best intersectional work unmasks privilege, in interaction with subordinated identities (Bettie, 2003; Fine, Weis, & Adelman, 1997). The role of privilege in intersectional practice is at the heart of the challenges to operationalization, discussed in the fifth section.

Composed of these four misidentifying techniques, misidentification is an apparatus that avoids accountability to the social justice outcomes that are at the heart of the intersectional project. In the early 1990s, as the term intersectionality was entering the feminist and racial justice lexicon, feminists of color were identifying subjugated subjectivity to be, in Chela Sandoval’s term, “a process of ‘determinate negation’” (Alarcon, 1996, p. 129). Determine negation is an articulation that is not essential nor foreclosed, a “not yet/that’s not it” position” (Sandoval in Alarcon, 1996, p. 129). Although the discourse at this time focused on subjects, it reflected the convergence of theoretical and political advances that would come

together more broadly in the concept and practice of intersectionality. In this chapter, we read intersectionality as a politics of “not yet/that’s not it.” By politics we mean a practice, a lived application which is operationalized not only oppressively but also resistantly. The fundamental flaw of misidentification is recuperative identification itself, the cavalier way in which intersectionality is claimed and consumed. Instead, we hope to preserve a model of intersectionality that is still visionary, still just out of reach, and so interactive and inclusive it has not yet been achieved.

#### *Appropriation*

Elsewhere, we have noted the recent prevalence of the concept intersectionality in certain progressive circles (Luft, 2009a; Ward, 2004). Others have recognized the way in which it functions like a contemporary “buzzword” as well (Davis, 2008). The acceptance of the term and its methodological imperative to take multiple and interacting axes of power into account is a significant advance over previous singular and often universalizing methods, and a harbinger of better and more just scholarship and action. Indeed, it has created a new progressive “desirability norm” that cuts across academic, organizational, and movement arenas. The fact that intersectionality has developed intellectual, political, and moral capital, however, has created unintended consequences. The extent to which it has become a trend with leverage means it is also being *appropriated* to less than intersectional ends.

It has been our experience over the last few years that the term is increasingly being invoked absent actual intersectional efforts, be they theoretical, methodological, or tactical. At times it is clear that the lack of intersectional practice is the result of ignorance, the early adoption by those who are beginning their intersectional journeys. This is an inevitable, developmental process. In other instances, however, we suspect that the invocation is not so benign, but rather seeks to claim the intellectual, political, or moral virtue the term has come to imbue, without supporting the work of intersectional resistance. Whether naïve or more insidious, these appropriations threaten to water down the term through misattribution, and to offer credentials where none have been earned. When touted in advance – the espoused values of an organization, for example, or of a research network – the appropriation has material rewards: it can open doors, earn funding, win members, or validate projects.

Our argument is based on our shared observations in a variety of contexts, and not yet on systematic investigation. We raise these issues here

to encourage greater discussion, and also future empirical work. We find appropriation to be occurring across sectors, including the academy, social movements, and nonprofits. In this section, we identify the problem as it manifests in the first two of these, highlighting the absence of racial justice in the academy, and gender justice in movements. The examples are not meant to imply that there is more racism than sexism in the academy or sexism than racism in movement activity; we could just as easily have reversed the examples. The third sector, nonprofits, we take up in the next section on institutionalization.

#### *The Academy: Racism*

As we move through a variety of hard-won feminist academic communities, we find ourselves surrounded by white feminist colleagues who now refer to intersectionality – or race/class/gender, privilege, positionality – in an insider, girls’ club kind of way. Whether in private conversation, community meetings, feminist societies, or professional publications, intersectionality is more and more frequently invoked as shorthand for difference, power, and justice. It has been jarring to hear it from the mouths of scholars who still universalize white women’s experience, who do not study the scholarship of theorists of color, who privately badmouth scholars and activists of color for being too “demanding,” who undermine the leadership of women of color who are not subservient to them, and so forth. The juxtaposition between intersectional rhetoric and racist practice – both liberal and a more reactionary model – has us wondering what other work the invocations seek to accomplish.

When not joined to intersectional practice, intersectional intonations function as a kind of credentialing, an appropriation used to mask an anti-intersectional orientation. In the instance of the general, public references described earlier, the language of intersectionality can serve to inoculate against charges of racism. It distracts from the speaker’s resistance to the struggle for racial justice, like other liberal and/or colorblind disclaimers. A generation and more ago, the primary intersectional error was omission. Today it is joined by appropriation, and the failure is one of justice, of commitment to feminist, racial, economic, and sexual social transformation.

A second, related kind of appropriation occurs when intersectional politics are claimed, but intersectional methods are not utilized. It is the difference between an additive model (let’s apply a gender analysis to people of color) and an intersectional approach (gender is always already racialized, and intersectional analysis examines the mechanisms of intersectional construction). For instance, new feminist and queer scholarship which

claims to be intersectional, but uncritically centers gender, sexuality, or whiteness while merely applying race neglects, in Acker's words from earlier, "the relational and reinforcing processes of mutual and emergent reproduction of gender, class, race, and sexuality" which constitute the core of the concept (Acker, 2008, p. 107). One example of this kind of appropriation comes from recent efforts within LGBT studies to integrate race by applying existing queer concepts – such as "the closet," "coming out," "lifestyle," and "sexual identity" – to people of color. Queer scholars of color have argued, however, that these concepts are rooted in white, middle-class, and American conceptualizations of the relationship between self, sexuality, and community (Almaguer, 1993; Gopinath, 2003; Takagi, 1996). In this example, an intersectional approach not only accounts for racial difference, but also considers how the very construction of queerness is itself a racialized one. Here the failure is one of method, of operationalizing the always already constitutive dimensions of gender, class, race, and sexuality.

#### *Social Movements: Sexism*

We identify similar examples of appropriation occurring in social movement groups. Here we focus on gender, drawing on social movement activity in New Orleans since Hurricane Katrina, where Rachel has been involved as a participant observer<sup>1</sup> (Luft, 2008, 2009b). The following observations come from this work. As a postdisaster context in a majority Black city, this site is not directly generalizable, but the patterns we describe are consistent with our observations in other places.

For two years following the disaster of 2005 in New Orleans, in local movement activity for a just recovery, several Black<sup>2</sup> male grassroots leaders made frequent reference to the interconnections between struggles. Specifically, they emphasized that the fight for racial and economic justice was a fight for gender justice as well. They noted regularly that women have been key organizers within the Black community, and that "the woman question," as some older Marxists put it, must be dealt with in radical movements. Their discourse was intersectional in that it linked racial, economic, and gender oppression and resistance. The language was striking, theoretically incisive, and politically galvanizing, at least initially. It clearly reflected the intersectional advances in social movements of the last generation.

However, despite the intersectionally valid discourse, rarely did these groups have women in leadership, adopt no tolerance policies to violence against women within movement circles or put a stop to it when it occurred,

or recognize women's roles as community caregivers and networkers to be central to grassroots organizing. Repeatedly after the formation of these groups in 2005, local Black women and some nonlocal white women challenged male leadership on power hoarding, lack of transparency, interpersonal sexism, male-centered tactical models, and the unwillingness to value the needs, visions, and leadership of women. Across these groups, the senior leadership was composed of Black men and supported by the labor of the Black and white women who worked under them. After a few months or years of this, women across the organizations eventually walked out. Although this kind of institutional sexism is as familiar to movement groups as it is to other kinds of organizations, what was new was the degree to which the male leadership spoke to feminist concerns in their political statements. If one had simply listened to the movement vision and not tracked the movement culture, structure, and tactics, one would have concluded that an intersectional approach to justice had been adopted.

There is a bitter irony in the use of intersectionality, itself an intervention into white supremacy and patriarchy, being appropriated to veil white supremacy and patriarchy, but it is no surprise as dominance recuperates itself (Reskin, 1993). The problem raises a more substantive question about what "counts" as intersectional. We recognize that those of us who are committed to intersectionality are always on a spectrum of understanding and operationalization. Further, we are not interested in creating an intersectional police force, nor a litmus test for authenticity. However, our aim is to relink intersectional discourse to practice, justice, and outcomes. Following Civil Rights law, we have sought to tie the always-elusive domain of intention to the empirical realm of outcomes in order to create a working standard by which intersectionality might be evaluated.

#### *Institutionalization*

If intersectionality is the buzzword for intersecting forms of difference within progressive grassroots movements and the academy, then diversity is arguably its mainstream counterpart inside corporate and nonprofit institutions. As numerous scholars have illustrated, the celebration of multiple differences under the umbrella of diversity is now a ubiquitous feature of political, cultural, and institutional life in the United States (Gordon, 1995; Michaels, 2006; Ward, 2008a). Implied in the logic of diversity is that practical and fair-minded people are interested in multiple human differences, understand that people should not be reduced to any

single component of their identity, and recognize that cross-cultural understanding is not only fair, but also practical and profitable. These principles have become the centerpiece of corporate diversity trainings, cross-cultural communication workshops, courses in multiculturalism, and the like. In many cases, the call to “celebrate diversity” inside institutions goes further than asking people to appreciate the differences of their coworkers; it also teaches us that disapproving of the most blatant forms of racism, sexism, homophobia, and classism have become a routine part of the way that “good” Americans think, work, and produce culture.

On the surface, the rising popularity of these diversity values appears to be a progressive development. Yet many scholars have argued that mainstream diversity paradigms are subject to problems of *institutionalization*: they have an all too easy relationship with white and middle-class norms, and they frequently teach tolerance for cultural differences without changing the underlying systems that sustain structural inequalities. Commitment to diversity is now at the heart of what historian Lisa Duggan (2003) has called “neoliberal ‘equality’ politics,” or the rise of a new liberalism focused on cultural expression, identity-based rights, and mainstream inclusion, yet simultaneously supportive of global capitalism and its aspirations. In many institutional realms, the glossy presentation of diversity is often a matter of good public relations, or a tool leveraged by the powerful to accomplish various financial goals. From this perspective, “diversity values” are a far cry from intersectional analyses. Unlike diversity, intersectionality rejects additive understandings of difference, seeks to redistribute power within and outside of institutions, critiques the expansion of global capital, and sees *outcomes* as its litmus for social justice. We perceive the need to continue to highlight the slippage between intersectionality and diversity, especially as grassroots movements institutionalize and/or take the form of nonprofit social service organizations.

In *Respectably Queer* (Ward, 2008a), an ethnography of queer organizing in Los Angeles, Jane has examined how the diversity-awareness and multi-issue commitments of queer activists transformed three LGBT community organizations. Across racial, gender, and socioeconomic lines, activists working in these organizations called attention to race, class, and gender diversity to promote inclusion and power-sharing among their ranks, as well as to address the intersections of homophobia, racism, poverty, and sexism in their programmatic work. Yet these same activists had also learned – primarily from the corporate model – that emphasizing multiple differences could accomplish more than taking steps toward social justice; it could be leveraged to achieve various personal and institutional ends. Following the

lead of other “successful” and well-funded organizations, they used a broad diversity rhetoric to compete with other nonprofit groups to garner funding and mainstream legitimacy, to enhance their organization’s public reputation or their individual progressive standing, and to draw attention away from issues of sex and sexuality. In sum, they engaged diversity just as corporations have done: not as an end in and of itself, but as a commodity or instrument to be used in pursuit of competition, image-management, and avoidance of particularly controversial issues and concerns.

For instance, at the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center, where Jane worked in the development department while conducting field research, employees were trained to be attentive to the financial and public relations benefits of highlighting race and gender differences among queer people. Racial diversity was also a centerpiece of the Center’s public discourse about its staff and programs. Internally, in the development department, program directors explained to the grantwriting staff that in Los Angeles’ social service field, it was more difficult to find funding for gay and lesbian services than programs addressing racism or poverty. As a result, grantwriting staff were instructed to emphasize the organization’s presumably nongay-specific programs, such as the immigration clinic and homeless youth shelter, particularly when speaking to funders who might understand the urgency of racism and poverty more than the urgency of, for instance, violent hate crimes against gay men (including gay men of color). In one case, Jane was assigned to write a grant proposal for a Latino-specific grant from a large banking corporation, but asked not to use the words “gay and lesbian” and instead emphasize the organization’s service to Latinos (not *gay and lesbian* Latinos – just Latinos!).<sup>3</sup> In this instance, what at first appears to be intersectionality – an LGBT organization emphasizing racial identity and racial justice issues – is accomplished by suppressing, or cloaking, queer sexuality (thereby rendering queer Latinos invisible). These sorts of strategic “trade-offs” help to secure grants that can in turn enable important projects, yet they also exemplify the hegemony of singularity. As one form of difference and oppression becomes legible (such as being Latino), another (such as being queer) must step aside, wait for its turn, or remain silent. And in many cases, the newly recognized form of difference is difference itself, often named “diversity.” Diversity – when named in grant proposals, organizational materials, and public speeches – may *hint* at the possibility of intersectionality, but conveniently avoid naming those specific differences (such as queerness) that may not be popular or fundable in a given time and place. Although many studies have documented the ways that diversity is misused in institutional settings (Duggan, 2003; Gordon, 1995; Ward, 2008a), we

recognize that diversity projects also enable organizations to achieve some progressive forms of structural change. For instance, even though leaders at the L.A. Gay & Lesbian Center approached diversity as a matter of “good business,” the organization was also powerfully transformed by its members’ commitments to diversity and had come a long way from its inception in the 1970s as an organization run by white gay men. In the 1980s and 1990s, queer leaders of color had worked with progressive whites to diversify the organization’s staff and improve its ability to serve its racially diverse clients (Vaid, 1995). The Center instituted diversity initiatives and diversity trainings as part of a broader effort at multicultural transformation, and by 2001, more than two-thirds of the Center’s clients were people of color, 52% of the organization’s employees were people of color, and 32% of managers and directors were people of color. At the programmatic level, employees of color and whites worked together to develop techniques for service delivery and advocacy based on a structural analysis of how racism, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty affected their particular clients. All of the Center’s advertising materials were multilingual and most of the organization’s job postings announced that prospective employees must demonstrate their ability to assess and meet the needs of the “racially and socio-economically diverse” queer communities of Los Angeles. Indeed, by setting its sights on diversity, the Center had undertaken necessary forms of structural change in the direction of racial parity.

However, despite this movement toward racial diversification, the Center still maintained a local reputation among queer people of color as “the white” LGBT organization in Los Angeles. As Jane has argued in her analysis of the Center (Ward, 2008b), to understand this apparent contradiction requires examination not only of whether – but also *how* and *why* – the Center had come to value and promote racial diversity. By most accounts, true diversity is measured by structural change, wherein organizations move beyond tokenism and include both a critical mass of people of color (and white women, queers, and the poor and working-class) at all levels of the organization. Yet as the case of the Center illustrates, structural change is not always the end of the story about intersectionality. During fieldwork and interviews, employees of color at the Center reported that although the organization’s demographics and programs had changed for the better, the organization’s *culture* was marked by an excessive focus on declaring its own racial diversity for funders and other organizations. The Center’s constant promotion of its own diversity – a strategy brought to the organization by leaders (both whites and people of color) who drew on their previous corporate sector experience with diversity management and

public relations – became the very practice that many employees of color identified as evidence of the “white corporate culture” of the organization. As in the corporate environment, diversification had indeed taken place at the Center, yet “diversity” (the word and the idea) had also become a normalizing force in the organization. It had become overused, empty, and “white.”

To be clear, diversity trainings and initiatives in nonprofit and corporate organizations *do* frequently deliver progressive and necessary forms of structural change. They can help produce multicultural organizations by building consensus about the importance of internal diversification; they can raise individual and group consciousness that may have effects in the broader culture; and they can result in more and better services that help address the symptoms of intersectional problems. But this does not mean that institutional diversity projects – or the provision of social services to people experiencing multiple forms of oppression – necessarily constitutes intersectional justice. Institutional approaches to diversity, by their nature, must serve the interests of the institutions that authorize them. All too frequently they emphasize institutional, bureaucratic goals (primarily financial survival) over broader social movement goals, and for this reason, they do not meet our definition of intersectional practice (i.e., a method aimed at sustainable social justice outcomes). In some cases, institutional goals and social justice goals converge, such as when members of an organization recognize that developing anti-racist programs or ensuring racial diversity in leadership are not only the right things to do, but also good fundraising and public relations strategies. Yet such approaches do little to ensure that diversity values will remain important to institutions once they have fallen out of favor in the broader sociopolitical environment, or that progressive social services will be sustainable in the event that “diversity funding” diminishes or disappears (Duggan, 2003; Vaid, 1995).

Though social services are necessary, they are rarely the sites of intersectional movement-building. Unlike grassroots movements, which often take strongly oppositional stances in relation to public opinion and broader political-economic trends, nonprofit social service organizations are frequently tied up with numerous other interests, including the professional and financial investments of funders and organizational leaders. Nonprofit social services are ultimately vulnerable to what Andrea Smith (2007) and Dylan Rodriguez (2007) have termed the “non-profit industrial complex,” a system in which state, corporate, and philanthropic organizations contain grassroots dissent and ensure elite control over progressive social



movements. In the nonprofit industrial complex, distributors of large grants, such as corporations and foundations, not only determine which political struggles survive, grow, or receive public attention, but they also encourage competition, managerialism, and careerism among activists. In competing for grants, activists are encouraged to package themselves as slick, business-minded, “culturally competent” professionals, and to present their cause as more urgent than those of their competitors. Rather than building a broad-based and collaborative social justice movement, the nonprofit industrial complex is characterized by bureaucracy, resource scarcity, competition, and an emphasis on service-provision – even when it is focused on multiple forms of difference and oppression.

What we are suggesting here is that some forms of education, service-provision, and even structural change are not “enough,” so to speak. Form and context, or the *how* and *why* and *for how long* of intersectionality, also matter. They draw attention to questions of motivation and ownership, but especially sustainability: Where did this effort come from and who is invested in it? Who owns it, funds it, and why? Does it address only the *symptoms* (poverty) or also the *causes* (economic policies) of intersectional problems? These questions get to the heart of the distinction between institutional approaches to equality, which are often time-bound and economically dependent, and movement approaches to justice, which are designed to be dynamic and independent of particular leadership personalities or specific funding sources.

We are not suggesting here that intersectionality and institutionalization are fundamentally opposed, and we certainly do not mean to suggest that diversity training programs or social service organizations should be eliminated (Luft, 2009a). On the contrary, we are invested in political struggles aimed at building service-rich communities in which intersectional justice is normative, built into social structures, and a fact of cultural and institutional life. However, what we *are* suggesting is that institutions cannot lead the way toward intersectional justice, nor can they accomplish intersectional practice without being regularly held accountable to grassroots movements and the new tactics and critiques that emerge within them. In other words, to achieve intersectional practice inside institutions requires that we reconfigure the relationship between intersectionality and institutionalization by focusing our attention not on what intersectionality can do for institutions, but what institutionalization can do for intersectionality. This chapter is inspired by a handful of groups that have used institutional resources for intersectional purposes. We introduce these exceptions, and the possibilities they represent, in our conclusion.

### Reification

The *reification* of identities, cultures, and social problems has long been a challenge within resistance movements – a challenge that intersectionality, at least in theory, works to address. Over a decade before the emergence of the term intersectionality, Black feminist members of the Combahee River Collective (1977[2005]) demonstrated that presumably universal categories such as “woman,” “Black,” or “lesbian” were simply too broad and unitary to capture the ontologically interactive layers of race, gender, class, sexual, and cultural difference. Yet despite the antessentialist and poststructuralist momentum of early intersectional theory, many projects that have since laid claim to intersectionality have struggled to recognize racial, gender, and sexual differences while also keeping in view their social construction. This has been true even in contexts in which it is generally agreed that identities are multiple and constructed, such as within the discipline of sociology and its “race, class, and gender” subfield. For instance, in the name of intersectionality, most feminist sociologists have drawn attention to racial, socioeconomic, and sexual differences among women without incorporating a challenge to the gender binary itself, or to the systems that produce and protect the base-line requirements for recognition as female or male. Such questions have largely been the purview of queer theory, and have been slow to be taken up within the sociology of gender (Valocchi, 2005).

The difficulty of balancing intersectionality with social construction reflects not only the multifaceted nature of such a task, but also the open-ended and metaphorical quality of intersectionality itself. As others have noted (Davis, 2008; Corber & Valocchi, 2003), intersectionality often takes the form of metaphor – a crossroads, a matrix, an intersection, an axis point – where different subjectivities and systems of domination presumably converge at a fixed location. Rather than enabling us to direct our attention to the ways that identities shift, transform, cross over, and/or become more or less salient across time and place, such metaphors are vulnerable to our limited imaginations, especially our tendency to conceptualize “intersections” as knowable, unitary, and classifiable bodies and experiences. Among other concerns, these metaphorical formulations invoke predictable and commodifiable group experiences, political needs, and consumer preferences (What *do* Latina consumers *want?*, corporations will and do ask . . .). This dilemma has led queer scholars, in particular, to suggest that intersectionality, “at least as a metaphor, implies fixity or stasis,” in contrast with queer theory’s emphasis on the mobility of identity and resistance to normativity and commodification (Corber & Valocchi, 2003, p. 10; Halberstam, 2006).

To operationalize intersectionality without reifying difference requires an “even more complex understanding of the relationship between various categories of identity, one that does not see them as intersecting at a fixed point” (Corber & Valocchi, 2003, p. 10)

Confronting the problem of reification requires placing intersectional frameworks in conversation with the assertions of poststructuralist theory – namely the argument that there is no coherent, rational, stable, unified subject or self that exists outside of, or previous to, the social structures that name and discipline it. Queer theorists, in particular, have been critical of the “identitarianism” that undergirds many political projects, asserting that we should be wary of clinging to identities without first understanding where they came from and what they accomplish (Butler, 1990). By synthesizing such critiques with critical race and feminist theories, queer theorists of color have formulated new multi-identity frameworks that emphasize disidentification (Muñoz, 1999), the politics of “not yet” (Alarcon, 1996), subjectivity “in-process” (Alarcon, 1996), and other ways of being unpredictable subjects. Such approaches take seriously the effects of race, gender, and sexuality while disentangling them from a history of essentialist and bodily meanings. They also envision a queer intersectional politics organized around multiple modes of challenge to the institutional and state forces that normalize and commodify differences.

In the merging of queer and intersectional politics, the core ingredient is refusal to allow any aspect of our subjectivities to become normalized, disciplined, or quantifiable. Disidentification challenges us to think critically about the long-term consequences of making demands for rights based on our normalcy and decency (as respectable queers, hardworking people of color, rational women, and so forth). It rejects additive approaches to difference which frequently hold one component of subjectivity constant (such as race) to reveal how another is socially constructed (such as gender). In contrast, queer-inflected intersectionality draws our attention to the sociohistorical construction of *all* social identities, and concomitantly, encourages some ironic, performative remove from our investments in identity itself. It takes seriously the need for global human rights and the material consequences of racialized, gendered, and classed positionalities, but it does not confuse these consequences with the “facts” of our bodies (such as female embodiment) or the essence of ourselves (such as female maternalism).

As an emergent political tactic, disidentification’s form is not yet clear. Transgender activism certainly represents one productive direction, as many transgendered individuals refuse both male and female identification,

thereby rejecting simple political categorization (and even placement in the matrix of domination). For Muñoz (1999), queer performance artists of color – such as the Black drag queen Dr. Yaginal Creme Davis – exemplify disidentification in their campy engagement with different registers of power (as embodied by straight white movie stars and Black activists like Angela Davis) and their dramatic rescripting of times and places associated with trauma and violence (Muñoz, 1999). We might consider another example to be the growing number of happy, chanting, seemingly genderless, pink tutu-clad activists who stand-off against the serious oppression – and oppressive seriousness – of riot cops at various protest events in the United States. Such tactics allow people to confront violence intersectionally, not with identity politics, but with humor, pleasure, and unpredictable strategies aimed at reclaiming culture and space.

In sum, intersectional practice, in its pursuit of sustainable social justice outcomes, rejects mainstream discourses about oppressed groups, including liberal-humanist discourses that may acknowledge diversity and oppression but nonetheless reify identity categories and binaries (woman/man; white/other; heterosexual/homosexual). Queer-inflected intersectionality, with its emphasis on camp and disidentification, builds on the early antiessentialist impulses of intersectional theory to offer a needed corrective to the challenges of reification.

### *Operationalization*

The final challenge to intersectional practice is *operationalization*, and we root this discussion in the site of social movements because collective action is central to our interpretation of intersectional possibility. Specifically, how do we operationalize intersectionality in social movements, in the face of intersectional social problems and intersecting identities among movement constituencies? How do movement actors *do* intersectionality in a way that does not compromise facets of identity, reproduce oppressive patterns, nor sabotage long-term movement goals? We delimit this subject by focusing on solidarity politics because of the explicit way it deals with identity and political practice. Here we understand identity in a materialist sense, to reflect constellations of power. We draw on Chandra Mohanty’s (2003a) notion of solidarity: “I define solidarity in terms of mutuality, accountability, and the recognition of common interests as the basis for relationships among diverse communities” (p. 7). Mohanty (2003b) embodies

solidarity in “imagined communities” and “communities of resistance” because they

lead us away from essentialist notions of Third World feminist struggles, suggesting political rather than biological or cultural bases for alliance. It is not color or sex that constructs the ground for these struggles. Rather, it is the way we think about race, class, and gender—the political links we choose to make among and between struggles. (p. 46)

During and after the Civil Rights movement, solidarity politics were usually defined along single issues, with membership organized by a group’s dominant identity (e.g., whiteness, or citizenship, or maleness) in relation to a constituency’s subordinated status (e.g., blackness, or refugee status, or femaleness). These alliances generally configured around single identity facets (such as race, or national status, or gender). Well-known solidarity groups included the Weatherman, Community in Solidarity with the People of El Salvador (CISPES), and National Organization of Men Against Sexism (NOMAS). Solidarity principles emphasize the willingness of the dominant group to use its privilege to mobilize support for the subordinate group, and to “take leadership” from the subordinate group, as directed, for example, by a common refrain in racial justice movements: “white people need to be able to take leadership from people of color . . . . The sense of being part of something but not in charge of it” (Thompson, 2001, pp. 299, 301). In this way solidarity politics seek to operationalize multiple relationships to identity: they acknowledge that identity is material and aim to redistribute its rewards, and also attempt to transcend identity by replacing it with politics.

As the history of solidarity politics demonstrates, singularity of focus can provide short term, contingent accomplishments (Luft, 2009a), but it is not a viable basis for broader, enduring movement alliances (Evans, 1979). Exclusive orientation to a singular identity facet represses other dimensions of identity and their interaction, which creates strategic and interpersonal obstacles to intersectional and sustainable outcomes. In the absence of a solidarity politic that engages multiple identity facets, oppressive patterns are reproduced and alliances revert to identity politics. Intersectional analytic tools help to reveal the challenges of solidarity practice, an unmasking produced by a generation of intersectional movement histories. But, as we shall see, analysis alone does not rewrite power scripts. Despite good intentions *and* good analysis, multiplicity is hard to navigate. Movement actors attempting intersectional tactics still struggle to translate their insights into practice. In this section, we describe one group’s effort at

intersectional solidarity practice as it sought to operationalize its intersectional framework for dealing with the interaction of multiple issues.

#### *Common Ground*

The Common Ground Collective (CG), a large grassroots, volunteer group that emerged weeks after Hurricane Katrina, provided relief and reconstruction assistance to New Orleanians. Founded by a local Black couple, and several white, nonlocal allies, Common Ground’s membership base was over 10,000 temporary, primarily white, nonlocal volunteers who came to New Orleans to contribute to its recovery. Its motto was “Solidarity not Charity,” and it saw itself as “part of a new movement, creating a parallel social infrastructure to replace the one responsible for the conditions causing this disaster” (Hilderbrand, Crow, & Fithian, 2007, p. 80).

In March 2006, in a large volunteer program it called Alternative Spring Break, CG hosted approximately 2,500 volunteers in the city, many of whom stayed in a gutted out religious school complex in the Upper Ninth Ward. Months later, as reports of numerous sexual assaults of the white volunteer women surfaced, the general climate of CG turned increasingly fearful and suspicious of the surrounding poor Black community. Despite the fact that almost every single accused perpetrator was a nonlocal, white male volunteer, CG discourse – informal conversations, public meetings, strategy sessions – evolved as if the threat to women were coming from outside the CG community: from local Black men. New security measures included instating ID checks, outside patrols, and work crew and sleeping accommodation coordination. There was little intervention into the CG culture itself, which exemplified what Rachel has elsewhere called disaster masculinity (Luft, 2008). For our purposes here we point not to the glaring absence of intersectional frameworks within the larger CG community, but rather to the more subtle and shape-shifting challenges faced by a small group of feminist, antiracist members who did have an intersectional understanding, but still struggled to turn it into strategy.

Within the CG community, several familiar, competing frames emerged to describe the events around the assaults: the Black and white male leadership downplayed the accusations, and wondered aloud if the charges were racist attempts to discredit the organization; the mostly white CG membership increasingly pathologized the surrounding Black community in both discursive and material ways; white women advocates focused on creating protocols for female victims in a standard, race-neutral rape crisis framework; and some white male and female volunteers thought that suggested measures to create more accountability in the decentralized

culture of CG was an overreaction, a distraction, and repressive. These representations respectively privileged single issues, which usually reflected the respective constituency's dominant identity category.

Into this contested discursive space, The Antiracism Working Group (ARWG) of CG sought to move beyond singular, identity politics frameworks, and to take multiple issues into account as they called for intervention. The ARWG had formed in January 2006 to advance anti-racist principles in CG, and to deepen the latter's accountability to local grassroots organizations of color. It was a small collective of mostly white, mostly female, nonlocal activist volunteers in their early 20s, who identified as antiracist and feminist. Most had just graduated from elite liberal arts colleges, and had sophisticated understandings of intersectional theory. Although outraged at the assaults, and quite articulate about the culture of excessive masculinity that enabled them, ARWG members were also concerned about the increased demonization of the surrounding Black community. As they tried to return the focus of the CG community back to the organizational membership itself, they were repeatedly thwarted by the leadership, who wanted to downplay the violence. ARWG's intersectional analysis had steered them clear of the gender-only, racist interpretation of the events. However, the great resistance they encountered from the leadership caused confusion among them. Since the senior leadership was Black, and because its resistance to dealing with the assaults was framed as a defense against white supremacy,<sup>4</sup> the mostly white, mostly female ARWG became paralyzed as to how it could maintain its antiracist values while challenging Black male authority. As the obfuscations of the leadership increased, more and more ARWG energy was directed to getting them to admit the violence and to authorize remediation. In the course of this struggle, attention to the mostly white male perpetrators and the larger culture of white disaster patriarchy receded. Though ARWG had many meetings over the course of several months, continued to raise the issues publicly, and did one-on-one organizing to influence CG membership opinion, it could not produce an overall strategy for substantive intervention.

There are several elements that combined to create strategic paralysis for ARWG members. The first has to do with the difficulty of acting intersectionally, here of responding to both sexism and racism at the same time when both are coursing through the surrounding actors and actions. Having moved beyond a simple solidarity politics based on single issues, ARWG members were committed to engaging all of the oppressions at play. Without a tidy oppression hierarchy to dictate behavior, however, the field

was complicated and shifting. When relations have not been reduced to a simple binary – dominant/subordinate identity – in any given moment one or another political focus becomes salient. When the CG community began to develop a racist response to the sexual violence, what was most salient for ARWG was antiracism, or racial solidarity. But when the male leadership began to deny that assaults had occurred, feminism became more pronounced. How to practice both at the same time when they have been defined in opposition to each other?

The second, related challenge, is that in such a shifting field, neither ally nor enemy is a fixed category. ARWG was not only allied with the leadership in condemning the racist framing of the CG community, but also needed the community that was finding assault unacceptable, in the face of leadership suppression. In singular solidarity politics, actors recognize their friends and opponents based on a simple litmus. Historically, the simple litmus is eventually overrun by additional, intersecting vectors.

The third challenge to ARWG was the multiplicity and interaction not only of its members' politics, but also of their identities as well. Singular solidarity politics dictate identity management with guidelines about how to control and channel dominant identity manifestations (follow the leadership of the subordinate group, do not dominate meetings, do not patronize, handle the grant work, and so forth). In the face of multiple salient identity features, however, a host of competing characteristics and directives emerges, some dictated by dominance, some by subordination (speak up, claim space, self-determine, and so forth). ARWG members were committed to monitoring their white supremacy, even as they were silenced and disregarded as women, and struggled in gendered ways with self-doubt and the strong desire not to alienate anyone.

The fourth challenge was the way in which the structural location of ARWG was also multiple and competing. As white nonlocals in New Orleans who were there because of a catastrophic event they understood to have been defined by white supremacy, they were constantly aware of their white privilege, of their ability to come to the city when hundreds of thousands of Black residents were still displaced, and of their access to resources. At the same time, in a relief organization run by and filled with men of all races who were not committed to gender equity, they were excluded from decision making and not taken seriously. Further, most ARWG members matched the profile of the assault victims, and so they lived with the palpable threat of violence. Maneuvering an array of structural advantages and disadvantages, while committed to a politics of

redistribution (as dominants) and empowerment (as subordinates), is complicated business.

Finally, as alluded to earlier, the specific context in which these events occurred also functioned as an independent variable. CG's *Alternative Spring Break* happened just six months after Hurricane Katrina, and the city was still a chaotic, dysfunctional disasterzone. The race and class determinants and outcomes of the disaster were explicit and frequently overwhelming to activist volunteers in the city. Although Katrina also had gendered effects in terms of its impact on women, these were much less apparent. The overall mood and imperative in movement organizations at the time was crisis management, and the racial dimensions were paramount. The conditions of the setting clearly impacted the culture and functioning of both CG and the ARWG.

The difficulties intrinsic to applying intersectionality contributed to a domino chain of CG crises. After the initial disasters of the hurricane and then sexual assault by relief volunteers, the failure of all parties to operationalize intersectionality led to a predominantly male leadership minimizing the seriousness of sexual violence and thereby likely prolonging it, a predominantly white organization criminalizing an already devastated Black community, and an antiracist feminist collective facing both external obstacles and internal paralysis in a time of great urgency. In the ensuing months, the assaults tapered off, though CG remained involved in some controversial policing activities in the surrounding Black community. ARWG members had stood up in CG strategy sessions to reject dominant organizational narratives that alternately denied the violence and blamed local Blacks for it, instituted assault survivor protocols and gender caucuses, and eventually, half a year later, were instrumental in producing a zero violence tolerance policy in the religious school shelter, as well as becoming more active in solidarity activity with local Black organizations. Despite these accomplishments, ARWG members felt stymied by the challenge of operationalizing intersectional interventions, and aware of their inability to produce a comprehensive strategy, or to garner enough power to implement it if they had one.

Intersectional solidarity practice embodies the challenges and stakes of intersectional politics, and must be central to movement struggles. Movement actors with intersectional analysis and commitments have to manage the effects of their own dominant and subordinate identities, and the competing directives that a solidarity politics based on each suggests, as they navigate a field of shifting allies, opponents, and power dynamics in a context of larger, macro structural constraints and opportunities.

## CONCLUSION

This essay was inspired by our concern that even as some feminist scholars have begun to proclaim intersectionality's triumph as the *au courant* feminist theory, we continue to witness the effects of singularity and cooptation across academic, organizational, and movement realms. In our analysis, we have pointed to the dearth of principles for intersectional practice, and we have traced the ways that this absence is both cause and effect of the prevalence of superficial engagements with intersectionality. To the extent that intersectionality can be leveraged rhetorically and without accountability to its applied and racial roots, the concept is vulnerable to an array of symbolic functions disconnected from political outcomes.

In reflecting on intersectionality's past and future, we have attempted to accomplish two interventions that arguably sit in productive tension with one another. First, we have demonstrated the costs of delinking intersectionality from the practice of social justice. We have done this both prescriptively – by honing in on methodology and outcomes – and proscriptively – by highlighting what intersectionality is not: theory divorced from political accountability, rhetorical claims, multiple jeopardy and other additive models, diversity training, metaphorical allusions to static crossroads, or single-issue coalitions. Second, even as we have gestured toward a definition of intersectional practice, we have also tried to communicate the value of keeping intersectionality on our growing edge, a politics of “not yet,” or just out of reach. To suggest that we have already achieved intersectional consciousness, or to imagine that it is sweeping the nation, would be to mistake its intellectual and rhetorical uses for the social justice outcomes for which it strives. It is premature to hail intersectionality's popularity (which goes hand-in-hand with noting that it is soon to be “old news”), not only because its imperative is not (yet) shared among progressive scholars and activists, or because singularity is still pervasive, but also simply because we have so far to go to redistribute power intersectionally (even within movements making intersectional claims). And from a poststructuralist perspective, we have yet to do the work of interrogating our investments in identities themselves (identities being the lines along which power is structured and distributed).

Finally, we note that we have been inspired by social movement groups that understand well the challenges mentioned above to be transforming their practices accordingly, such as the New Orleans Women's Health and Justice Initiative (New Orleans), Catalyst Project (San Francisco), Incite! Women of Color Against Violence (national), the Sylvia Rivera Law Project (New York), and the Labor/Community Strategy Center (Los Angeles), to

name a few. For example, the New Orleans Women's Health and Justice Initiative is a predominantly nontrans, women of color organization that pursues gender and sexual health and justice through political education and organizing. It conceives gender violence broadly to include interpersonal and state violence, reproductive and population control, and the imposition of the gender binary, through which it links trans issues to a wide array of gender oppressions. Each social problem is understood to be constructed through race, class, citizenship, ethnicity, culture, and language. Similarly, Catalyst Project, a white, antiracist, feminist collective skillfully focuses on antiracist movement-building while maintaining intersectional, antioppression commitments. Successfully avoiding both single-issue reductionism and intersectional dilution, they carefully run their own shop according to the antiauthoritarian principles they teach in movement circles.

Though we imagine that these projects are not without their internal and power-inflected conflicts, we believe they exemplify an advanced deployment of intersectionality. Such groups correctly distinguish intersectionality from other similar models, place movement-building at the center of their work, build infrastructure without giving over their decision making to funders, are committed to multi-identity solidarity politics, genuinely seek the outcomes they claim, and have accountability structures in place to ensure that they take ownership of, and learn from, their mistakes. This chapter is dedicated to these and similar projects engaged in the struggle for intersectional justice.

## NOTES

1. The comments here refer specifically to three sizeable and important grassroots groups that emerged after the hurricane and were based in New Orleans, all of which were led by Black men.
2. In the context of Hurricane Katrina recovery, there are few white men involved in grassroots efforts for racial, economic, and gender justice. When present, they rarely used intersectional language, or appeared invested in its objectives. As a population with race and gender dominance, we think their seeming remove from intersectional politics is an indication that they felt less accountable to the new progressive intersectional social desirability norm. This detachment from intersectional values meant they are less guilty of the shippage between intersectional claims and single-issue practice, the issue we take up in this section.
3. The supervisor who assigned the task expressed strong discomfort with "closeting" the Center, but indicated this was the request of a gay contact from the bank who was going to "sneak" the funding through to a gay organization, even though it was earmarked for Latinos.

4. This concern was not as unreasonable as it may sound, especially for former Black Panthers just months after the egregious behavior of the federal government during Hurricane Katrina.

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