

# On the Relation Between Iris Young's Conception of Structures and Intersectional Approaches to Subordination

By Lee MacLean

Email correspondence: [lmaclea3@uottawa.ca](mailto:lmaclea3@uottawa.ca)

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Text: Discovered by African-American feminist thinkers, the concept of intersectionality holds that forms of domination intersect and modify one another. This idea has caught the imagination of thinkers around the world and it could transform emancipatory knowledges, political debates, activism, and policy deliverance in very constructive ways. This is because intersectional approaches reveal the interactions between forms of disadvantage in ways that are not visible in dominant discourses.

Black feminists going back to the nineteenth century have discussed the interactions of race, class and gender. (Crenshaw, 1989; Alexander-Floyd 2012; Cooper 2015) In her 1852 speech, Sojourner Truth reminded her listeners of the ways that race and class domination had shaped her experiences as a woman. (Crenshaw 1989, 152 ff.). In 1892, Anna Julia Cooper wrote in her book, *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* that “The colored woman of to-day occupies, one may say a unique position in this country.... She is confronted by both a woman question and a race problem, and is as yet an unknown or an unacknowledged factor in both.” (Cited in Cooper 2015, 2). During the twentieth century, Angela Davis (1981); Deborah King (1988); Patricia J. Williams (1992); Patricia Collins Hill (2000); bell hooks (1984), Audre Lorde (1984), and the Combahee River Collective (1979) all broke new ground in their explorations of the impacts of race and class on Black women's experiences. And Audre Lorde and the Combahee River Collective provided memorable explorations of how homophobia and heteronormativity combine with other axes to affect the lives of Black women.

Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the term intersectionality in her 1989 study of anti-discrimination doctrine, feminist discourse and anti-racist discourse. She argued that since these approaches were so focused on single-axis frameworks to discrimination, none of them were able to grapple with the overlapping race and gender discrimination that often confronts Black women. “Because the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism,” she wrote, “any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated.” (1989, 140, cf. Crenshaw, 1991, 2000; 2015; McCall 2005; Yuval-Davis 2006; Hancock 2007a.).<sup>i</sup>

These thinkers not only explored mutually modifying forms of unjust domination and their implications but also considered possibilities for the real political transformation of the skewed and unfair status quo. But the formulations of these visionaries of intersectionality are one thing, subsequent applications are another. (Puar, 2012, 53-4). Attempts to use intersectional approaches have recently been subject to critiques that merit close attention. Critics have argued that intersectionality is often misapplied in ways that accommodate neo-liberal practices and/or re-marginalize the ideas and experiences of women of colour. (Cooper 2015, provides an overview).

In this article, in the light of these discussions, I consider the utility to intersectional approaches of Iris Young's theory of structures of domination, focusing especially on its potential to serve anti-racist, feminist intersectionality. The thesis of this paper is that thinking about Young's theory of social structures of domination can help to address some – but not all -- of these concerns recently raised about the problematic implementations of intersectionality. Before outlining the major points of my own argument, however, I will explain the contours of the debate in more detail.

### Progressive Neoliberalism and the Re-Marginalization of Women of Colour

There are two problems, then; first, intersectionality is often employed in ways that reinforce neoliberal practices and, second it is used in ways that re-marginalize the work and experiences of women of colour.<sup>ii</sup>

As Chandra Talpade Mohanty points out, when neo-liberalism is ascendant, accounts of the history of oppression are largely excluded from public discourse (2013, 971). This in turn undermines support for forms of knowledge, such as intersectional approaches, that could foster genuine political and institutional change. The problem, then, is not just government budget cuts to education worldwide (970-1) but neoliberal assumptions: “Questions of oppression and exploitation as collective, systematic processes and institutions of rule that are gendered and raced have difficulty being heard when neoliberal narratives disallow the salience of collective experience or redefine this experience as a commodity to be consumed.” (971). In this context, as Mohanty argues, the “epistemological and methodological claims of feminist and anti-racist thought are transformed into a privatized politics of representation disconnected from systematic critique and materialist histories of colonialism, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy.” (972).

But what, precisely, is neo-liberalism? Clearly, it is an economic ideology favouring smaller government, deregulation, and competition but it is not only that. As Nancy Fraser argues, neo-liberals overturn the premises of the supporters of state-organized capitalism about the relation between politics and economics. While advocates of the latter “sought to ‘use politics to tame markets’, proponents of this new form of capitalism proposed to use markets to tame politics.” (2009, 107).<sup>iii</sup>

Most recently, Fraser (2017) has argued that neoliberalism has appropriated new social movements' ideals of diversity and empowerment, forming what she calls “progressive neoliberalism.” Progressive neoliberalism, she explains, is an alliance between “mainstream currents of new social movements (feminism, anti-racism, multiculturalism, and LGBTQ rights), on one side, and high-end “symbolic” and service-based business sectors (Wall Street, Silicon Valley, and Hollywood), on the other.”<sup>iv</sup> New social movements, she argues, “unwittingly” lent

their ideals of diversity and empowerment to the latter. Progressive neo-liberalism then “equated ‘emancipation’ with the rise of a small elite of ‘talented’ women, minorities, and gays in the winner-takes-all corporate hierarchy instead of with the latter’s abolition.” Fraser’s analysis of progressive neoliberalism helps to explain the commodification and trivialization of the goals of radical knowledge projects that Mohanty describes.

However, Fraser’s account requires a nuance. Progressive neoliberals differ from reactionary neoliberals not just on social issues; on the question of the power of the market, progressive neoliberals do not typically seek to use markets to tame politics; instead, they choose to simply abandon politics to the market; I would argue that many progressive neo-liberals in the United States have (at least until the election of Trump) professed to be indifferent to politics.

Despite their differences, both progressive neoliberalism and regressive neoliberalism deny the significance of structural accounts of oppression developed by new social movements. The ability of neoliberal dispositions to disable the analysis of oppression as structural has also been a concern to several scholars of intersectionality who have critiqued the ways that intersectionality has frequently been employed. As noted, these scholars suggest that implementations of intersectionality have failed to challenge the exclusionary groundings of neo-liberal institutions and/or have re-marginalized the experience and work of women of color. (See, for example, Alexander-Floyd 2012; Puar 2012, Bilge 2013; Lutz, 2009, Cooper, 2015). Jasbir Puar comments that “Much like the language of diversity, the language of intersectionality, its very invocation, it seems, largely substitutes for intersectional analysis itself.” (2012, 53). This growing literature documents the ways that some authors refer to intersectionality and claim to accept the concept but fail to acknowledge the contributions of Black feminists, or to seriously address racism and/or structural injustice in their work.

Sirma Bilge argues that a sort of academic feminism in step with the “neoliberal knowledge economy contributes to the depoliticization of intersectionality.” (2013, 405). According to Bilge, “Framing social life not as collective, but as the interaction of social entrepreneurs, neoliberalism denies the preconditions leading to social inequalities; in consequence, it congratulates itself for dismantling policies and discrediting movements concerned with structures of injustice.” (407).

For Nikol Alexander-Floyd (2012), “post-feminist, post-racial (in this case, specifically, post-black feminist) forces undermine radical black feminism, not only through direct backlash, but also through its seeming incorporation of liberal forms of inclusion; indeed, post-black feminism emphasizes gender and racial representation while short-circuiting more far-reaching social and political change.” (2). Under these circumstances, she argues, efforts to define intersectionality and expand its scope have sometimes led to the “disappearance” of black women’s texts and experience. For example, “Current efforts to universalize intersectionality, to consolidate its meaning such that it is disconnected from the lived experiences of women of color and made available to larger numbers ... can serve to colonize intersectionality and redeploy it in ways that deplete its radical potential.” (18)

Alexander-Floyd is right that scholars who refer to intersectionality for its progressive clout but detach it from its history and fail to consider racism in their work, ignore its roots and could diffuse its power, the way that breath diffuses quietly into the atmosphere. And the invisibility of racism is an on-going problem in feminist intersectional work. There is a need to consider the deep roots of intersectionality in work of Black women as well to develop the capacity of

intersectionality to describe and challenge racism in its implication with other forms of discrimination in many contexts globally.<sup>v</sup>

Alexander-Floyd's essay is essential reading for scholars of intersectionality and reading it led me to rethink the terms of the present project. I am a white, anti-racist feminist writer. In the light of the under-acknowledgment of black feminist scholarship within intersectionality studies, using the work of a white, anti-racist thinker like Iris Young to try to theorize about intersectionality may appear to be an inauspicious beginning! But Young's *Justice and the Politics of Difference* made one of the most important anti-racist contributions of second wave feminism. Her account of the structural dimensions of oppression builds on this early work. I hope to show that it merits concern in the contemporary knowledge context in which this kind of theorizing about the institutional roots of unjust forms of disadvantage have such difficulty getting a hearing.

While in an initial version of my project I referred to the possibility of *incorporating* Young's insights into intersectional approaches, after reflecting on the re-marginalization of women of colour in intersectional work, I now see the project as a consideration Young's ideas of structure in *dialogue* with intersectional ideas. I do not seek to assimilate the two but to draw on Young's thinking here to contribute to a conversation about genuinely anti-racist and emancipatory intersectional approaches.<sup>vi</sup> I want to inquire about the ways in which it might be a useful resource to intersectional scholars and about the limits to its usefulness. A key goal moving forward will be to explore the ways Young's theory of structures helps to justify the focus on structures in intersectional approaches.<sup>vii</sup>

#### Young's Concept of Structures and Intersectionality: Towards a Re-Thinking

Young argues that gender, caste, race, age, ethnicity, and sexuality are best understood not as identities but as social structures that position individuals in situations of social advantage and disadvantage. Her concept of social structures includes practices, rules, routines, traditions, and discourses. She describes structures as "the confluence of institutional rules and interactive routines, mobilization of resources, and physical structures, which constitute the historical givens in relation to which individuals act, and which are relatively stable over time." (2005, 20. Cf. Young, 1995 and 2001). These different social structures create unjust advantages for some and unjust disadvantages for others. But Young's work on structures is rarely discussed in contemporary debates about intersectionality.<sup>viii</sup> And in the 2009 anthology in honour of her work published after her death, *Dancing with Iris: The Philosophy of Iris Marion Young*, only a few essays discuss her conception of structures.<sup>ix</sup>

Because Young's conceptualization is designed to highlight the institutional and systemic dimensions of dominance, employing it in intersectional approaches can focus attention on these aspects of subordination ignored in neo-liberal contexts. In addition, Young suggests that categories such as gender, race, and sexuality are better understood as structures than as identities. She holds that it is better to abandon the search for a unified form of gender identity; such a search has often led to the misnaming of the experience of marginalized women. Because of this, I argue that thinking about Young's conception in intersectional work could help to undercut this drive to unified forms of identity in feminist work which has so often re-marginalized women of color.

I then consider Kimberlé Crenshaw's (2000) analysis of two reasons why current approaches to discrimination often neglect intersectional dimensions of subordination: over-inclusion and under-inclusion. I suggest that Young's approach, by circumventing identity-based

theoretical claims, avoids identity-based over-inclusion. Moreover, Young's interpretation of cultural imperialism as a type of oppression might be helpful in thinking through the context in which over-inclusion and under-inclusion arise.

I also argue that while Young's notion of structures is useful in *conceptualizing* knowledge projects that seek to reveal the dynamics of domination, in many cases it will be necessary to disaggregate the notion of structures in order to think about its applications. (For a different argument for the 'disaggregation' of Young's idea of structures, see Htun, 2005). I provide examples to show that naming and examining the intersections of particular practices, discourses, traditions, rules and routines rather than the intersection of abstract structures per se will often provide a more precise understanding of the social positioning of those who are multiply marginalized. Moreover, her idea of gender structures requires expansion to show racism's implication in them; I call for an expanded understanding of racial structures and of how they intersect with gender and other structures of disadvantage. I also consider Young's endorsement of Toril Moi's use of the phenomenological notions of the body as a situation and of lived experience and I begin to think through the possible relevance of these ideas to debates about intersectionality.

### Gender as Seriality: Young's Initial Defence of Gender as Social Structure

For the purposes of brevity, I will focus my account on two of Young's best essays (1995 and 2005); in these she sets out her notions of social structures of domination. In "Gender as Seriality: Thinking about Women as a Social Collective" (1995) Young introduces her project as a way of addressing the problem that the feminist "search for common characteristics of women or of women's oppression leads to normalizations and exclusions." (1995, 99). In particular, she is concerned with claims by feminists that excluded the experiences of women of colour and lesbians.

Young notes Mohanty's critique of a tendency in feminist work to see women as "already constituted, coherent group with identical interests and desires" prior to any empirical investigation. (Mohanty 1991, 55). Young also notes Butler's critique of feminist deployments of the category of gender. In *Gender Trouble* (1990), Butler shows that feminist conceptions of gender often rest on the heteronormative presumption of a stable complementary relationship of male and female. For Butler, feminist attempts to treat gender as an identity or a set of attributes have often excluded some bodies and practices.

Young writes that she thinks these critiques are "powerful and accurate" but she adds that she "finds the exclusively critical orientation of such arguments rather paralyzing." (1995, 102-3). According to Young, a feminist critique of the unjust social disadvantage women face will require some use of the terms 'women' and 'gender.' In "Gender as Seriality," she therefore draws on the late work of Sartre to conceptualize women as not as a self-conscious group but as a "series," passively united by objects, practices and patterns. Women (and men), she argues, are positioned by structures such as the sexual division of labour and normative heterosexuality. Conceiving gender as an identity, for Young, either "leaves out some individuals who call themselves or are called women or distorts the experience of some of them." (120). Her conception of gender as a

series does not require making claims about the shared gender identity of women but it does enable feminist critique of the structures that position women in disadvantageous ways.

### Lived Body vs. Gender: An Exegesis of Young's Response to Moi

Young's essay "Lived Body vs. Gender" (2005) is her most fully developed thinking about structures of social disadvantage and so I will devote most of my attention to it. In this essay, Young elaborates her argument about structures of disadvantage through her response to Toril Moi's essay, "What is a Woman?" (1999).

Moi maintains that feminists do not need and should not rely on sex-gender discourse. "The distinction between sex and gender," she writes, "is simply irrelevant to the task of producing a concrete, historical understanding of what it means to be a woman or a man in a given society." 35. Moi contends that feminists can instead make feminist arguments through the phenomenological concepts of the body in situation and lived experience. Young accepts Moi's suggestion of a return these concepts. Young argues, however, that such a return is insufficient because feminists and queer theorists need the conception of gender as a structure to critique unjust and unequal social arrangements. In order to understand Young's position and because I will subsequently draw on Moi's ideas, I will explain Moi's rejection of sex-gender discourse and her alternative proposal in more detail.

Moi argues that sex and gender discourse does not provide a good basis for understanding the body or subjectivity. Moi advances her argument in part through a rereading of Judith Butler's work. She concedes Butler's argument that much sex-gender discourse relies on a stable binary that reinforces heteronormativity and excludes some bodies and practices. She suggests, however, that some of Butler's claims about gender as performance remain *dependent* upon the sex-gender distinction. Moreover, she maintains that the trajectory of Butler's project became too removed from concrete feminist concerns about the body or subjectivity. (1999, 49).

Moi has some additional objections to sex and gender theories. Scientific discourses focused on sex tend to treat the body as an object, often omitting any consideration of the free subjectivity of embodied individuals and/or their relation to a social context. As to gender, she argues that feminist gender theories can be used to impose limiting new norms upon women and men (112). She points out, for example, that Gilligan's research about women's distinctive moral reasoning has been used in court to justify excluding women from all-male schools. (1999, 109).

Noting that several languages, including French, have no word for gender at all, Moi suggests that feminists can replace sex/gender theories with a return to the Beauvoirian notions of the body as situation and lived experience. Drawing on phenomenology and existentialism, Beauvoir insists the body is not an object severed from the subjects' intentions, wishes and projects. Instead Beauvoir argues that the body is a situation. A situation, in this tradition, means a synthesis of the subject's freedom and projects, on the one hand, and the facts that serve as conditions for these, on the other. The body in situation is, as Beauvoir puts it, "our grasp on the world and a sketch of our projects." (quoted in Moi, 1999, 62). Moi argues that this conception allows for the idea that "the meaning of a women's body is bound up with the ways she uses her freedom." (65).

The body as a situation is, moreover, a concrete body that is situated in multiple historical and social contexts. The body positions us in situations such as race, class and nationality. Moi asserts that “in *Black Skin, White Masks*, Franz Fanon analyses race as a bodily situation drawing on exactly the same concepts as Beauvoir” (67) and that Maurice Merleau-Ponty describes class as a “historical and bodily situation” (68). And she suggests such situations are interwoven. I will return to this point.

In addition to the idea of body as situation, Moi recommends Beauvoir’s notion of lived experience to contemporary feminists. Lived experience refers to the experiences an individual undergoes and reflects upon, including “her situations and actions.” (64). And lived experience, in turn, feeds back into our situations; Moi writes that “lived experience is, as it were, sedimented over time through my interactions with the world, and thus itself becomes part of my situatedness.” (63).

Reflecting on the meaning of lived experience leads Moi close to a formulation about how situations intersect:

Beauvoir invites us to study the varieties of women’s lived experience. One aspect of that lived experience will be the way in which the individual woman encounters, internalizes, or rejects dominant gender norms. But this encounter is always inflected by the woman’s situation, and that means by her personal and idiosyncratic history as this is interwoven with other historical situations such as her age, race, class, and nationality, and the particular political conflicts in which she may be involved. (82)

Here Moi is moving toward an intersectional understanding of situations, although I think most contemporary scholars of intersectionality would see such situations not just as “interwoven” but as sometimes mixed and melded together. Still, this conception of simultaneously lived, embodied situations might provide a valuable alternative to theorizing about identity.

Taking her cue from Moi’s reliance of Merleau-Ponty and his idea of “*le corps propre*,” Young refers to Moi’s use of these phenomenological concepts as the idea of the “lived body.” Young writes that “The lived body is a unified idea of a physical body acting and experiencing in a specific sociocultural context; it is a body-in-situation.” (2005, 16) For Young, this provides an appealing way of approaching the question of subjectivity, that is, the question of “who one is as an agent, the attributes and capacities one has for experience, the relations with others that contribute to one’s sense of self.” (19).

The concept of the lived body, in Young’s view, is helpful in describing subjectivity because it allows us to think about real life constraints and freedoms. It acknowledges that an individual’s subjectivity is conditioned by facts and by the reactions of others that she does not fully control. Nonetheless, according to this understanding, “each person takes up and acts in relation to these unchosen facts in her own way.” (18). And Young approvingly quotes Moi who writes that lived experience “encompasses our experience of all kinds of situations (race, class, nationality, etc.) and is a far more wide-ranging concept than the highly psychologizing concept of gender identity.” (cited in Young, 18).

But while she thinks that Moi’s concepts provide better, more precise ways of discussing subjectivity and experience than “the blunt category of gender,” (Young, 19) Young disagrees with Moi’s contention that feminists can dispense with the language of gender altogether. Young argues

that feminist and queer theorists will still need a concept of gender (not to theorize subjectivity) but to describe “wrongful harms or injustices, locate and explain their sources in institutions and social relations, and propose directions for institutionally oriented actions to change them” (20). In fact, the concept of gender as a social structure is needed.

In “Lived Body versus Gender,” Young defines social structures as routines, institutional rules, “mobilization of resources” and physical structures that condition peoples’ lives in unjust ways. (20). In addition, structures include social outcomes that “result from the confluence of many individual actions within given institutional relations, whose collective consequences often do not bear the mark of any person or group’s intention.” (20)

It has not to my knowledge yet been recognized but, after she defines structures in this article, Young moves toward an intersectional understanding of what she calls structured social “positionings.” She writes that “any individual occupies multiple positions in structures, and these positionings become differently salient depending on the institutional setting and the position of others there.” (21).

In this last statement, I believe Young has in mind positioning in axes such as caste, class, race, and gender. For in the very next paragraph, she writes that “For the purposes of critical social theory, the main reason to care about structures is in order to have an account of the constitution and causes of social inequality.... Social groups defined by caste, class, race, age, ethnicity and, of course, gender, name subjectivities less than axes of structural inequality. They name structural positions whose occupants are privileged or disadvantaged in relation to one another due to the adherence of actors to institutional rules and norms and their pursuit of interests and goals within institutions.” (21).

Young then returns to the question of the basis of the structure of gender that she considered in “Gender as Seriality.” This time, however, she elaborates three bases of the structure of gender which often disadvantage women: the sexual division of labor, normative heterosexuality, and gendered hierarchies of power. She concludes that the term gender should not be jettisoned entirely, rather its use should be limited to “analysis of social structures for the purposes of understanding certain specific relations of power, opportunity, and resource distribution.” (25).<sup>x</sup>

### Returning to the Critiques

As I hope this exegesis has made clear, Young’s theory of structures offers a promising set of ideas for thinking about unjust social disadvantage and privilege. But how does it speak to the current debates about the applications of intersectionality? Returning first to the concerns about neo-liberalism set out at the beginning, we can recall that the argument was that neo-liberal practices and dispositions prevent histories of domination and subordination from getting a fair hearing. As we saw, Bilge notes that neoliberal premises disavow the “preconditions to social inequalities” (2013, 407). Particularly in American neoliberal discourse, there is also a prominent argument that, with hard work, individuals can achieve their dreams without relying on government support.

Young provides a robust and concrete understanding of structures which show the problems with these neoliberal premises. Her theory gives writers tools for showing that hard-working, well-motivated individuals meet sets of circumstances beyond their control that can undermine their



efforts to achieve their goals. (Cf. Young 2001, and Young, 1990) Faced with traditions, institutional rules, routines, practices, the deployment of resources and physical spaces that constrain them in often unanticipated ways, individuals are unfairly impeded in developing their capacities. The problem is aggravated when different structural axes compound or exacerbate one another.

Young's theory does provide tools, then, for those interested in intersectional approaches to think about systemic disadvantage. As she puts it in "Lived Body vs. Gender": "The most important thing about the analysis is to understand how the rules, relations, and their material consequences produce privileges for some people that underlie an interest in their maintenance at the same time that they limit options of others, cause relative deprivation in their lives, or render them vulnerable to domination and exploitation." (25). More attention to Young's views could help to forestall the acceptance of neoliberal premises in purportedly intersectional work.

Describing and critiquing neo-liberal structures in Young's sense could also help to re-orient some contemporary usages of intersectionality that re-marginalize women of colour. Young's account provides resources for understanding the ways that neo-liberal structures, such as gender, race and class, overlap to unfairly disadvantage women of colour.

Beyond this, Young's theory avoids a focus on identity which circumvents many false generalizations about diverse women's experiences. In much feminist work in the past, the search for a unified gender identity very often misnamed the experiences of women of colour. (Lorde; 1984; Crenshaw 1989; Spelman, 1989; Mohanty, 1991) Too much feminist work has described an implicitly white-centric version of gender identity as if it were simply the only kind. Because Young abandons this pursuit of collective identity she undercuts this drive to artificial unity which so often re-marginalizes women of colour.

It is true that identity is significant to personhood. Young herself argues that much of what women do to preserve family identities -- for example, through taking care of objects that convey family history and telling stories about them -- is undervalued. (1997, 151-156). But I would emphasize the difficulty of theorizing identity; blithe generalizations about shared gender identity misrepresent important experiences of subjects in non-dominant groups.

A significant objection might be raised here, however. It might be argued that it is nonetheless quite possible that scholars of intersectionality who try to describe structures of disadvantage could also misrepresent the experiences of women of colour in these very attempts. This is a strong objection but I would respond that it is easier to deliberate about wrongly described structures of disadvantage than it is about misstated identities and deeply personal affinities. Therefore, such mistakes would be more amenable to collective debate and remedy. I am thinking here primarily of academic contexts but the point is perhaps even more salient for coalitional, activist contexts.

Addressing the Reasons for the Neglect of Intersectional Subordination: Under-inclusion, Over-inclusion, and Cultural Imperialism

In a rarely discussed paper, Crenshaw (2000) identifies two key reasons why to existing approaches to race and gender discrimination often overlook the intersectional subordination of

women of colour. These she identifies as the “twin problems” of over-inclusion and under-inclusion.

Over-inclusion occurs when “a problem or condition that is particularly or disproportionately visited on a subset of women is simply claimed as a women’s problem.” (np) An analysis engages in over-inclusion when it views such a problem as women’s problem without attending to the significance of race or another form of subordination in shaping it. Crenshaw notes, by way of example, that many discussions of the trafficking of women are so focused on the lens of gender that they fail to contend with the impacts of other forms of marginalization. “When one pays attention to which women get trafficked,” she comments, “the immediate link to their social and racial marginalization is obvious.” (np).

Under-inclusion, on the other hand, prevents a problem experienced by marginalized subsets of women from being considered a women’s problem. Crenshaw adds that under-inclusion can also occur when the gendered dimension of a problem makes it invisible as a racial or ethnic problem. She gives the example of sterilization abuse; in the United States, she notes “thousands of Puerto Rican and African American women have been sterilized without their knowledge or consent.” Crenshaw then describes the failure to acknowledge sterilization abuse as racial discrimination to illustrate the under-inclusion of racially marginalized women in accounts of racial discrimination. But it should also be said that for years many feminists from dominant groups neglected to attend to this contravention of reproductive rights as a crucial case of gendered subordination. (On over-inclusion and under-inclusion cf. Knapp 2011, 188).

If over-inclusion and under-inclusion contribute to the neglect of intersecting aspects of subordination and discrimination in analyses, can Young’s idea of structures help to alleviate these problems? In the past, feminist over-generalizations about women’s identity that were implicitly based on the identifications of women from dominant groups did, in effect, “over-include” the identifications of women from less dominant groups. As a result, Young’s approach to gender as structure, by circumventing identity-based theoretical claims about gender and other structures, allows writers to avoid identity-based overinclusion. But beyond this, using Young’s idea of structure in conjunction with intersectional work will not, on its own, necessarily help prevent either over-inclusion or under-inclusion.

A different aspect of Young’s corpus, however, does offer some resources for thinking about the context of both over-inclusion or under-inclusion. The concept of oppression Young develops in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990) includes five sorts of oppression -- one of these is cultural imperialism. Young maintains that cultural imperialism turns on the question of the “universalization of a dominant group’s experience and culture and its establishment as the norm.” (59). According to her interpretation, “To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one’s own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one’s group and mark it out as the Other.” (58-59). Dominant cultural norms function to discount the significance of the experiences and perspectives of different groups. Young notes that recent feminist and Black liberation theorists have articulated this understanding and that she follows Lugones and Spelman (1983) in naming it cultural imperialism. Crenshaw, bell hooks, and others have explored this theme as well. Nonetheless, Young’s interpretive synthesis provides additional context for thinking through the reasons that differences are made invisible in over-inclusion and under-inclusion.<sup>xi</sup>

## Four Issues for Further Examination

In the remainder of the paper, I will discuss four issues that, following from the discussion above, require further examination and research.

First, in applying the notion of structures, researchers will often be best served by disaggregating the term into structured practices, discourses, routines, rules, resource deployments and traditions. To show this, I will now turn to examples of how, in the service of profit, some capitalist managers address female employees using seemingly feminist tropes while others address female workers using sexist discourse. Capitalist managers sometimes employ feminist-influenced tropes in attempts to influence the behavior of female employees in ways they expect will contribute to profitability. For example, Hester Eisenstein (2005) notes William Greider's account that "the managers for Motorola in Kuala-Lumpur have to "change the culture" of the Islamic women it hires to make silicon chips. The company teaches them to speak up for themselves, and to use ATMs, instead of handing their wages over to their families." (2005, 510-511). In contrast, in her essay, "Women Workers and the Politics of Solidarity" (in *Feminism without Borders* (2003)) Chandra Talpade Mohanty documented the way that capitalist actors in Western and non-Western settings use tropes about "women's work" to disparage the contributions of female workers.

Using the term 'structures' to describe these cases would result in a vague account. It is obviously not terribly illuminating to observe about these cases that some agents serving capitalist neo-colonist structures use the structures influenced by feminism, while other agents use the structures of sexism to reinforce capitalist, neo-colonialist structures. Disaggregating the term 'structures' allows for a describing the evidence more precisely: neo-colonialist capitalist actors seeking to augment profits employ sexist traditional discourse about the gendered division of labour in some cases and feminist-influenced anti-traditional tropes about gendered division of labor in other cases in attempts to influence the decisions of female workers. In so doing, these agents use these gendered *discourses and tropes* to profit from the neo-colonial division of labor of capitalism. Using only the umbrella term, 'structures,' is less informative and could obscure the the dynamics at work. (For a different argument about the need to further disaggregating the structure of gender see Htun (2005).

Secondly, there is a need for more theorization of the ways that axes of disadvantage other than gender function as structures. It is true that in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990), as well as in her 2001 article, "Equality of Whom? Social Groups and Judgements of Injustice," Young develops her concept of structural disadvantage through reflection on various axes of inequality. Nonetheless, in "Gender as Seriality" and "Gender vs. the Lived Body" her emphasis is on establishing gender as a structure. She asserts that other axes of social disadvantage also are structures but does not provide much argument or evidence to explain that claim. As a result, it would be desirable to have new research to investigate whether her definition of structures fits race, caste, sexuality, religion, ethnicity, nation, age, and ability as well as it fits gender. Using critical race theory along with intersectional theory to consider the ways that race is a social structure (in Young's sense or in other senses) would obviously be an important move here.

The third point turns on the issue of what I will call cross-categorical structures. Young lists normative heterosexuality as one of the bases or constituent structures of gender. Now, normative heterosexuality is at one and the same time implicated in sexism (Rich, 1986) and a source of disadvantage to members of the LGBTQ community. Since it is involved in at least two categories, I see it as a cross-categorical structure. (It might also be called a trans-categorical structure). Scholars of intersectionality reading Young's theory will be interested in further research into cross-categorical structures.<sup>xii</sup> (Compare, for example, Lugones' important 1990 study of racist, sexist discourse in colonial modernity).

Fourthly and finally, there is a need for more work on how people live out their intersecting situations and multi-situational experiences.

There is obviously much work left to be done. But I hope I have said enough to show that a fuller consideration of the relationships between Young's view of structures and intersectional approaches could open up new and more liberating possibilities in understanding and practice.

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<sup>i</sup> Cooper (2015, 2) notes that her 1991 essay, “Mapping the Margins,” found Crenshaw “explicitly expanding” her intersectional approach to include not only Black women but Latina women. My reading of that essay suggests that she also includes other women of colour. Sumi Cho (2013) argues that Crenshaw’s framework was intended from the beginning to be applicable to subordination based on sexuality. Cho provides a fine account of the development of Crenshaw’s framework and of its reception in legal scholarship.

<sup>ii</sup> These problems can be mutually reinforcing. Neoliberal practices and dispositions in universities and beyond can influence scholars of intersectionality to facilitate this re-marginalization of women of color in intersectional discourses and if scholars of intersectionality neglect the experience of women of color in their analyses this can work to perpetuate neo-liberal practices and assumptions.

<sup>iii</sup> For George Monbiot, neo-liberal ideology champions competition, conceives of citizens as consumers and “maintains that ‘the market’ delivers results that could never be achieved by planning.” “Neoliberalism: the Ideology at the Root of all our Problems.” *The Guardian*. April 15, 2016. Accessed August 5, 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2016/apr/15/neoliberalism-ideology-problem-george-monbiot>

In this paper, I focus on the impact of neo-liberalism in Western states but, as Fraser and Mohanty note, it has also had profound impacts on non-Western countries. Fraser writes that the neo-liberal approach “was applied only gradually and unevenly in the First World. In the Third, by contrast, neo-liberalization was imposed at the gunpoint of debt, as an enforced programme of ‘structural adjustment’ which overturned all the tenets of developmentalism and compelled post-colonial states to divest their assets, open their markets and slash social spending.” (2009, 107).

<sup>iv</sup> In her initial article in *Dissent*, written before Trump took office, Fraser prophesies that his election marked the *end* of progressive neo-liberalism. However, neo-liberalism, in its progressive (and regressive versions) is still ascendant in key jurisdictions. Regarding the latter, Trump’s administration has so far implemented neo-liberal policies of deregulation and has allied itself with neo-liberal business interests and (as well as with the traditional right). As to the former, the victory of Emmanuel Macron in France signals an alignment of a progressive social agenda with policies that will circumscribe the traditional rights of trade unions. It is premature to declare the end of progressive neo-liberalism. Perhaps, however, it is the end of the beginning. In a subsequent article, “Against Progressive Neo-Liberalism: A New Progressive Populism,” Fraser rightly focuses on alternatives to Trump and neo-liberalism.

<sup>v</sup> Alexander-Floyd also argues that to avoid “further neo-colonization of the term, intersectionality research must be properly understood as the purview of researchers investigating women of color.” (19) But, as Brittney Cooper asks, “Do we really want to argue that theories about black women should only travel in limited amounts? Is this not an essentializing fiction that limits black women as much as it limits the import of our knowledge production? (2015; 14). Also, I think confining intersectional approaches to a focus on the experience of women of color could disconnect it from important anti-racist texts (e.g. antiracist studies of white supremacist



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groups) which reveal how structures of white privilege combine with other forms of domination. Moreover, the path-breaking work of Crenshaw, Davis, Lorde, hooks and the Combahee River Collective is simultaneously about both privilege and disadvantage; it reveals how racial privilege interacts with other axes of disadvantage and privilege. See for example, hooks, 1984, preface. On this question cf. Crenshaw 2011 and Cho, Crenshaw and McCall, 2013.

<sup>vi</sup> Cf. Bilge's thoughtful remarks about the conceptualization of 2014 her study of the relevance of Stuart Hall's ideas to intersectionality. She writes that she does not seek to portray Hall as a "pioneer" of intersectionality. Instead she seeks to excavate the "lines of tension and convergence between Hall's thought and intersectionality, without dissolving one in the other." (70) (Translation mine).

<sup>vii</sup> In further work on this project I plan to research the ways multiple intersecting structures position individuals in relation to housing and homelessness.

<sup>viii</sup> Young's concept has received some notable attention from feminist political scientists in the journal, *Gender and Politics*. There Mala Htun (2005) relies on Young's conception to argue that gender should be understood not as an identity but as a feature of social structures. S. Laurel Weldon (2006) explicitly associates Young's concept with intersectional approaches. Weldon states her agreement with Young's claim that "social structures are more than identities, and that gender organizes society to systematically disadvantage women." She also accepts Young's view that critical analysis of unjust social structures "need not imply shared identities across gender, race, or class groups." (2006, 239) But she argues, we need a concept of the interactions of such structures: "It is not often recognized that structural analysis is *required* by the idea of intersectionality: It is the intersection of social *structures*, not identities, to which the concept refers. We cannot conceptualize "interstices" unless we have a concept of structures that intersect to create these points of interaction." (2006, 239, emphasis in original; cf. Weldon, 2007) Weldon also writes that "theorists of intersectionality insist that we cannot understand the ways that women are disadvantaged as women nor the ways that people of color are oppressed *unless we examine the ways these structures interact*. Specifically, they claim that certain aspects of social inequality, certain problems and injustices, will not be visible as long as we focus on gender, race and class separately." (Weldon, 2006, 239, emphasis in original).

<sup>ix</sup> Bonnie Mann's essay in Ferguson and Nagel does contain a response to Young's teachings on structures and identities. A complete version of my study will also need to include consideration of Patchen Markell's *Bound by Recognition*.

<sup>x</sup> In the last paragraphs of "Lived Body versus Gender," Young calls for more research into the relation between the lived body and these structures, research she was unable to complete in her lifetime.

<sup>xi</sup> In addition, some groups are more readily interpreted as *having* a culture than others. There are on-going debates about the existence of women's culture and lesbian culture, for example.

<sup>xii</sup> In earlier, unpublished work, I have suggested that Young's concept of structures could be used to deduce two different types of intersectional change: structures can intersect to transform one another and also sometimes intersect to transform lived experience.