

Intersectionality, Metaphors, and the Multiplicity of Gender

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Although intersectional analyses of gender have been widely adopted by feminist theorists in many disciplines, controversy remains over their character, limitations, and implications. I support intersectionality, cautioning against asking too much of it. It provides standards for the uses of methods or frameworks rather than theories of power, oppression, agency, or identity. I want feminist philosophers to incorporate intersectional analyses more fully into our work so that our theories can, in fact, have the pluralistic and inclusive character to which we give lip service. To this end, I advocate an intersectional family resemblance strategy that does not create philosophical problems for feminists. I test my approach against María Lugones's argument in "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" (Lugones 2007) to determine, in particular, whether we can successfully resist a move to create multiple genders for women. If we can successfully resist this move, then we can answer the objection that intersectionality fragments women both theoretically and politically. I also argue that my approach avoids Lugones's critique of forms of intersectionality that fall within "the logic of purity."

Intersectionality, minimally the idea that various forms of oppression interact with one another in multiple complex ways, has been moving through feminist studies and critical race studies for over two decades.¹ Feminist philosophers tend to give it lip service, but often fail to construct theories that integrate the insights brought to bear by intersectional analyses. Although the concept is widely used across a range of disciplines and was rarely criticized for almost twenty years, worries remain about it. Feminists, including feminists of color, have begun to raise questions about the limitations, implications, or slipperiness of intersectionality or question its focus.² My intent here is to defend a concept of intersectionality that is inclusive, modest, and capable of providing a structure in which to meet the theoretical and practical needs of feminists and

other engaged social theorists. I provide support for intersectionality and encourage its use by (1) understanding its benefits and limitations, including the limitations of metaphors used to explain it, (2) considering María Lugones's position on intersectionality and gender(s), and (3) setting out an intersectional family resemblance position that supports Lugones's aims, but differs with her view of the number of genders that women have.

1. THE BASICS, THE BENEFITS, AND THE LIMITATIONS

I propose a broad, inclusive concept of intersectionality and then retrace familiar steps to lay out a few benefits and limitations of intersectionality for feminists and others whose work includes a commitment to social justice.³

Oppression and privilege by race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, class, nationality, and so on do not act independently of each other in our individual lives or in our social structures; instead, each kind of oppression or privilege is shaped by and works through the others. These compounded, intermeshed systems of oppression and privilege in our social structures help to produce (a) our social relations, (b) our experiences of our own identity, and (c) the limitations of shared interests even among members of "the same" oppressed or privileged group.

By encompassing privilege my concept of intersectionality is more inclusive than some, but with its focus on "intermeshing" oppressions it is more specific than others.⁴

BENEFITS

First, intersectional analyses make a fundamental point that we all have many important facets to our identities and are differently impacted by multiple interacting systems of oppression and privilege depending on our various facets. The self-understanding and awareness of our social location that can result from intersectional thinking helps not only to improve our scholarship but also to face up to dominant group members' unacknowledged privileges, including the privilege of remaining ignorant of marginalized people. Many white people do not consciously see themselves or their conceptual frameworks as raced. Similarly, heterosexuals of any race/ethnicity or class often render gay men and lesbians conceptually invisible. Patricia Hill Collins finds intersectional analysis helpful in our ability to identify "the oppressor within us" (acknowledging Audre Lorde); she applies this not simply to those in privileged groups, but to all people (Collins 1993/2008, 98). The value of self-knowledge is not simply

for moral self-improvement, but also to enable us to undertake the very hard work of understanding the implications of feminist philosophy's Eurocentrism. It is difficult to face the colonial legacies and deep biases based on race, class, and gender that permeate the methods, formulations of issues, and substantive positions of Western philosophy, including feminist philosophy.⁵ Recent work on "epistemologies of ignorance" has called attention to the ways in which dominant groups' ignorance is constructed and maintained; explorations of whose power is served by such ignorance; and the ways that our current interests, beliefs, and theories block why we sometimes do not even know that we do not know, or if we do know it, why we do not care (see Mills 1997; Tuana and Sullivan 2006; Sullivan and Tuana 2007).

Alison Bailey's discussion directed toward white analytic feminist philosophers illustrates the difficulties of dealing with deep biases and shows that philosophers need to rethink the reasons that we value certain methods and styles of philosophy over others. Analytic philosophers, feminist or not, can be averse to the idea of tinkering with their methods of argument or with the high levels of abstraction and generality in which they discuss issues. Intersectional approaches can feel threatening to those who believe that such approaches put the "purity" of philosophical methods at risk. They then try to label the work of philosophers who value intersectionality and want to reflect upon the thinking and actual diverse conditions of the lives of women of color as "not philosophy" (Bailey 2010).

Second, another basic point is that intersectionality can point us to locations where we need to begin identifying issues and constructing our theories. For decades feminist standpoint theorists have been explaining the importance of starting our thinking or our research from the lives of marginalized people (see, for example, Harding 1991). Intersectionality helps to point us to fruitful and complex marginalized locations. It does not do the work for us, but tells us where to start and suggests kinds of questions to ask. It sets the stage to counteract the deep Eurocentrism referred to above by trying to formulate issues from the lives of those not part of the Western philosophical canon. Starting with an African-American woman's life experience and structures of authority might well lead a feminist naturalized epistemologist to shape differently her questions and strategies about the ways in which epistemic authority is constructed, how we choose "experts," and whose views carry weight and whose are not even acknowledged when a working-class African-American woman has a disagreement over medical symptoms or a factual dispute with a middle-class white man.⁶

Third, the focus on systemic interaction, compounding, and intermeshing avoids several misunderstandings of the ways oppression and privilege work as structural forces. These arguments are well known in feminist theory. For example, race, gender, and sexual orientation, whether used to oppress or to

privilege human beings, are not simply added together in Black lesbians or added/subtracted in white gay men. Additive or “pop-bead” models of identity or oppression do not work.⁷ Although intersectionality builds on a rich literature by feminists of color about multiple oppressions and double consciousness, it does not merely repeat that women of color or lesbians of any ethnicity are multiply oppressed. Instead it points to the ways in which oppressions intermesh with each other or are used to construct each other. This can be seen both in the ways they act as structural forces and are applied to individuals. For example, note the ways in which racist stereotypes of African-American, Asian-American, and Latina women are used to objectify these women sexually as well as to assign them to “appropriate” jobs. Or consider Anna Stubblefield’s analysis of the ways advocates of eugenic sterilization in the first half of the twentieth century intertwined classism with racialized theories of intelligence and sexist views of moral depravity in the concept of feeble-mindedness (Stubblefield 2007).

Fourth, the inclusion of both privilege and oppression in intersectionality implies that members of dominant groups must consider the factors of privilege in their own identity and positionality. Intersectionality applies to everyone, not only to members of subordinated or marginalized groups. This is important to me not only because I think it is correct, but also because it overcomes one of Naomi Zack’s objections to intersectionality, namely, that intersectional analyses keep white women central to feminism and exclude women of color and women from the global south from the feminist conversation table. Zack believes that intersectionality helps to maintain the distinction between “feminism” on the one hand and “multi-cultural feminism” and “global feminism” on the other (Zack 2005). However, given that all people, not just the oppressed, have race/ethnicity, then intersectionality as I conceive it undermines Zack’s conceptual basis for dividing feminists. In fact, it can facilitate moving white feminists from center stage and make them less likely to over-generalize about “women” and decrease the extent to which they are “arrogant perceivers” of other women.⁸ It can also increase the awareness of “relationality” and hierarchical power relations among women, for example, the extent to which privileged women’s lives are dependent on the work of other women who care for their children and their homes.

Fifth, intersectionality has many other practical advantages for feminists as well. It can enable us to face squarely and understand the reasons why we might have different interests at stake in a particular issue, for example, lesbian interest in marriage. It can support alliances and solidarity even when there are salient differences; for example, East Asian women have formed alliances across historically conflicting nationalities to work on behalf of “comfort women” pressed into sexual service by the Japanese military in World War II.

LIMITATIONS AND SCOPE

In order to explain the respects in which my concept of intersectionality is modest, we need to look at the *limitations of intersectionality*: what it is not capable of doing or does not imply. I do not consider these “objections” to intersectionality, but a realistic assessment of the scope and positive value of the concept. Of course, not everyone agrees.

First, although I hesitate to use the word ‘methodology’ because its meaning varies widely across and within disciplines, I doubt that intersectionality is one.⁹ I prefer to call it a framework. One can develop methods and methodologies that support an intersectional framework (or even an intersectional picture). Intersectionality’s positive value can be seen in its function as a “framework checker” or “method checker” that provides standards that a method or methodology should meet.¹⁰

Second, by itself, intersectionality provides neither any structural analyses of oppressions and privileges nor any particular analysis of anyone’s complex identity or experiences. Instead it points out what kinds of analyses might be useful, namely, ones that consider mutually constructed or intermeshed axes of oppression or facets of identities.

Third, it is not a theory of power, of oppression, or of any other central concept of social and political theory.¹¹

Fourth, it provides neither a theory of identity formation nor a theory of agency.¹²

Fifth, it does not abolish identity categories; instead they become more complex, messy, and fluid. This stance is against a number of critics who argue that the treatment of identity categories in intersectional analyses is problematic. These would include (i) poststructuralist critiques that seek to undermine identity categories deeply, (ii) critiques that pushing identity categories to a higher level remains problematic, and (iii) Lugones’s critique that identity categories embody a “logic of purity.”¹³

Sixth, it does not imply that all situations are intersectional to the same extent. The degrees and kinds of intersectional intermeshing need empirical investigation. For example, the degree to which a gay couple is subject to economic oppression will need a thoroughgoing intersectional analysis. We need to consider whether they are gay men or lesbians, what their races/ethnicities and social classes are, whether they speak the dominant language of the country, how these all fit together, and so forth. In contrast, if we want to know whether this gay couple is discriminated against by legal prohibition of same-sex marriage, we need to know far less about them. The laws under which they live determine whether they can marry (whether rich or poor; white, Asian, Latino, or Black; gay man or lesbian). Of course, marriage laws are not devoid of relevant intersections, but there are differences in the degree of intersectional analyses needed in different situations.¹⁴

LIMITATIONS: METAPHORS AND IMAGES

Other limitations of intersectionality rest on the fact that although intersectionality is itself a metaphor, it has required explanation and elaboration in terms of other metaphors, images, and analogies. Because there is not space here to consider fully the ways in which the images used have limited the concept, I simply contrast Kimberlé Crenshaw's original traffic intersection with one that I believe captures more facets of intersectionality.

In 1989 Crenshaw introduced a traffic intersection to explain the ways in which Black women were harmed by existing U.S. legal categories that allowed African-American women to be disadvantaged by only one axis of discrimination at a time.

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly if a Black woman is harmed because she is in the intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination [or both] (Crenshaw 1989, 149).¹⁵

This image of intersectionality caught on in a way that a more sterile intersection of sets in mathematics or a Venn diagram would not have. Even if streets are more linear and horizontal than axes of oppression, the vivacity of the images of multi-car collisions and of Black women being battered by multiple vehicles representing oppressions helped people to expand their thinking beyond legal frameworks that were based on analyses of equality that relied on the "single-axis" model of discrimination ("but for" this one oppression, they'd be treated equally).

As I have visualized intersectionality over two decades, I have added many more streets to the intersection and placed a roundabout in its center. We need these changes in order to distinguish intersectionality from more simplified cases of multiple oppressions. Being hit by two different cars does not show the ways that oppressions can interact. A roundabout works better to illustrate that one axis of oppression uses another to oppress a single person, or that axes can sometimes blend together to produce a distinct mixture (consider, for example, Carla Trujillo's treatment of Chicano Catholic homophobia [1991] or Lugones's position on the colonial/modern fusion of race and gender [2007]). In a roundabout, different axes can intermesh in various ways after they enter the central space. The central space is up for grabs! There might not even be an "island" in the middle, just an open space. A person standing anywhere in the

central space could be hit by any number of axes either in combination or singly. Cars, trains, buses, and motorcycles all could be vehicles carrying different axes of oppression into the central space. Vehicles could even crash or fuse together first before hitting the person. No need to keep it simple. Imagine here the life of a U.S. Muslim lesbian with family members in Afghanistan trying to enlist in the U.S. military.

This more fluid roundabout allows us to visualize more facets of intersectionality. It is now easier to expand the axes of oppression beyond race and gender to include sexual orientation, class, and other factors; in addition, the central area is suitable for incorporating several types of intersectionality. By “types” I include the interactions among axes in institutions or social issues as well as intersectional effects on an individual. For example, Collins explains the ways in which Black slavery exemplified patriarchy and class hierarchy as well as racism (consider the many reasons for controlling slave women’s sexuality and fertility) (Collins 1993/2008, 100–1). Crenshaw, in addition to discussing the importance of intersectionality in dealing with domestic violence, details the interaction of axes of oppression on each other in a more structural way and distinguishes among structural intersectionality, political intersectionality, and representational intersectionality (Crenshaw 1991; 1993).

However, a horizontal roundabout presents a problem, particularly if we adopt a concept of intersectionality that includes privilege as well as oppression.¹⁶ If a person is subject to axes of privilege/oppression rather than just oppression, how or where do we locate her on the axes and in the intersection? Suppose our U.S. Muslim lesbian above is white with family in Europe, not Afghanistan. Is she standing on a “white curb” protected from racism while being hit by a combination of heterosexualism and anti-Muslim bigotry? Or perhaps an axis in terms of which she is privileged simply bypasses her as she stands in the roundabout. Or imagine that no cars are allowed to enter the intersection from the privileged end of the axis, so battering an oppressed pedestrian is done by cars, trucks, and buses on one-way streets from the oppressive end.

However, something is still wrong: a person with privilege can sometimes choose to mitigate a few of the damaging effects of oppression, not just bypass that axis. A wealthy Chicana lesbian can choose to use her wealth to mitigate some of the damage done by her ethnic/religious community’s homophobia. For example, she could donate funds to organizations that resist homophobia in her community or move away from the neighborhood in which her daily social interactions are oppressive, even if such a move has emotional costs in other respects. The possibility of mitigation makes it look as if a multi-dimensional matrix of axes of oppression and privilege would be needed. In addition, we must also keep in mind that social forces do not merely “strike one differently”

depending on one's location in this complex matrix, but that agents choose to act differently within their locations. They can resist oppressions even without being otherwise privileged; those with some privilege can use their privilege in a variety of ways (or not). It would be worthwhile to explore Collins's image of the matrix of domination to assist us, but that must wait for another occasion.¹⁷

In order to address the horizontality of the model and its lack of ability to incorporate the ways in which privilege in one respect can mitigate or modify oppression in another, let us introduce mountains to add verticality. Intersections can be found on various places on the side of a mountain. A heterosexual's intersections are found higher up on the "heterosexuality" mountain, or if the heterosexual is also middle class, higher up on the mountain of combined heterosexuality and classism.

Once we have mountains we can replace vehicles with liquids to show the ways in which some oppressions or privileges seem to blend or fuse with others. Different liquids—milk, coffee, nail polish, olive oil, beet borscht, paint in several colors—run down from different places at different altitudes into roundabouts. Some of the liquids run together, some are marbled with others, and some stay more separate unless whipped together. For me, this image captures intersectionality better than many others, but it still cannot capture agency well.

Although I yearn for a rich concept of intersectionality that can be visually captured, it is, in fact, difficult to find visual images that both capture all the features of intersectionality and are simple enough to help explain the concept.¹⁸ However, this difficulty does not imply that the fault lies with the concept of intersectionality. Perhaps we simply need to realize that intersectionality itself is a metaphor that, as it has evolved, encompasses too many facets for any image to capture completely: the interaction of the axes of oppression and privilege across a variety of social structures and situations; the agency of people within these structures; the conflicting interests of members of an oppressed group; individuals' social identities—how people see and represent themselves and each other; and so on. I mean here to allude not simply to Crenshaw's categories of structural, political, and representational intersectionality, but also to the sheer array of cases and uses at hand. We might want to keep in mind sociologist Kathy Davis's claim that it is "precisely the vagueness and open-endedness of 'intersectionality'"—coupled with the needs it satisfies—that give it such a wide appeal (Davis 2008, 69).¹⁹

2. LUGONES: INTERSECTIONALITY, COLONIAL/MODERN POWER, AND GENDERS

Although we now turn to María Lugones's work, we continue our discussion of metaphors and imagery, and the need for messiness in them. Not only does Lugones use rich imagery, but she is also especially concerned that intersectionality and related concepts not leave our key concepts pure, tidy,

and separate from each other. I consider her work in some detail not only because of her valuable contributions, but also because it challenges the position I develop in Section 3.

I concentrate on two of Lugones's essays, "Purity, Impurity, and Separation" (in Lugones 2003) and "Heterosexuality and the Colonial/Modern Gender System" (Lugones 2007), focusing on her treatment of the role of intersectionality and her position that women differently situated by oppressions have different genders. Although I argue against Lugones on the latter issue, her work has influenced my thinking for decades. I strongly support her overall aims to make feminist theory pluralistic, to make women of color visible, and to push white feminists and men of color (I would add white men) to appreciate more fully the importance of work done by and in the interests of women of color. I explain later how my work supports Lugones's aims.

In "Purity, Impurity, and Separation," Lugones develops a framework built on the contrast between the logics of "purity/splitting" and "impurity/curdling." The logic of purity/splitting encompasses dominance, control, hierarchy, categorizing, and selves that are either unified, fragmented, or both. On this view, "unification and homogeneity are related principles of ordering the social world" (Lugones 2003, 127). This logic fragments the identities of women of color. The contrasting logic of impurity/curdling resists intersected oppressions, sees that the social world is "complex and heterogeneous and each person is multiple, nonfragmented, embodied" (127), and has "potential to germinate a nonoppressive pattern, a mestiza consciousness" (133).

The image that is most vivid is that of "curdle-separation" in contrast with "split-separation." Lugones draws on our knowledge of emulsions: if mayonnaise is curdled, the egg yolk, oil, and water are not separated cleanly and completely; instead "they coalesce toward oil or toward water . . . [there are] matter[s] of different degrees of coalescence . . . you are left with yolky oil and oily yolk" (Lugones 2003, 122). If curdled mayonnaise is beyond a reader's grasp, Lugones offers another image of "impurity": our frequent inability to separate the two parts of an egg completely. We leave some yolk in the egg white. Curdle-separation is the act of a subject resisting the logic of purity. It gives a way to characterize the identity of *la mestiza* and the nature of mestiza consciousness. Lugones, of course, acknowledges that she is writing within the mestiza tradition of Gloria Anzaldúa and others (see Moraga 1983; Anzaldúa 1987). For our discussion here, it is important to note that curdled identities are intersectional identities, but not split or fragmented identities. A passage from Anzaldúa illustrates curdled identities that are misperceived by others as fragmented or split:

I am a wind-swayed bridge, a crossroads inhabited by whirlwinds. . . . What am I? A third world lesbian feminist with

Marxist and mystic leanings. They would chop me up into little fragments and tag each piece with a label. . . . One foot on brown soil, one on white, one in straight society, one in the gay world, the man's world, the women's, one limb in the literary world, another in the working class. . . . Who, me confused? Ambivalent? Not so. Only your labels split me. (Anzaldúa 1983, 205)

We need to be explicit about the relation between intersectionality and Lugones's concepts. That oppressions intersect is a necessary condition for (or an assumption of) Lugones's analysis. Nevertheless, she usually speaks in more specific terms. Oppressions that are *interlocking* are part of the logic of purity that fragments people; they require that fragments are "unified, fixed, atomistic, bounded . . ." (Lugones 2003, 231, n.1). They do not change the nature of what is interlocked.²⁰ In contrast, *intermeshed* or *enmeshed* oppressions more closely approach the logic of impurity/curdling she uses—although a "mesh is still too much separability" (231, n. 1). Although I cannot discuss Lugones's theory of resistance here, resisting multiple oppressions is central to her long-term work. So note that her curdle-separation resists both interlocking and intermeshed oppressions.

In "Heterosexualism and the Colonial/Modern Gender System," Lugones weaves together two frameworks: (i) the coloniality of power, as exemplified in the work of Anibal Quijano (1991; 2000a; 2000b; 2001–2002), and (ii) theories emphasizing intersectionality that detail the exclusion of women of color and Third World women from "liberatory struggles in the name of women," work done primarily by Third World feminists and women of color feminists or critical race theorists (Lugones 2007, 189). This essay and Lugones's larger project of decolonial feminism pose complications for my view of intersectionality.

Lugones offers a historicized analysis that includes gender oppression, heterosexualism, racial classification/oppression, colonialism, and capitalism as "impossible to understand apart from each other" (Lugones 2007, 187). I focus here on her view that colonial/modern power and the colonial/modern gender system mutually constitute each other. Lugones states:

Colonialism did not impose precolonial, European gender arrangements on the colonized. It imposed a new gender system that created very different arrangements for colonized males and females than for white bourgeois colonizers. Thus it introduced many genders and gender itself as a colonial concept and mode of organization of relations of production, property relations, of cosmologies and ways of knowing. (Lugones 2007, 186)

Lugones explains the “light” and “dark” sides of gender in the colonial/modern gender system, drawing on work by Quijano, Oyerónké Oyéwumi (1997), and Paula Gunn Allen (1986/1992), among others. The “light side” includes “biological dimorphism, heterosexualism, and patriarchy” and applies only to the gender of the colonizers (Lugones 2007, 190). Women on the “light side” are thought to be fragile and sexually passive (203). The gender characteristics on the “dark side,” result from white colonists’ need for many kinds of labor coupled with their fears of the sexuality of the native people. Indigenous people were thought to be intersexed or hermaphrodites with both penises and breasts (195), with their sexuality characterized in animalistic terms (203). Colonized women were thought to be sexually aggressive, sometimes perverse, and capable of doing any kind of labor (203).

On these bases, Lugones maintains that the colonized women and colonizers’ women have different genders. They are parts of different systems of distinctions. All are different from precolonial Yoruban society as explained by Oyéwumi (1997). Oyéwumi says that the Yoruba categories of *obinrin* and *okunrin* are mischaracterized by using terms such as ‘female/woman’ and ‘male/man.’ Instead ‘*obinrin*’ and ‘*okunrin*’ refer to only anatomical features: she uses the terms ‘anafemale’ and ‘anamale’ (Oyéwumi 1997, 32–34). She maintains that gender was not an organizing principle for the Yoruba until colonial powers imposed it. The distinction between *obinrin* and *okunrin* is “one of reproduction, not one of sexuality or gender” (37). Her claim that gender is absent rests on her identification of gender with social categories containing hierarchy or binary opposition (34), neither of which she finds in the relation of anamales and anafemales. She finds hierarchy among the Yoruba, but it is based on seniority and is context relative.

Although there are many controversial issues in Oyéwumi’s account, it is at least inspiring to think about a culture in which physical reproductive differences played a minor role in social organization—whether or not her denial of gender is precisely correct (or relies too heavily on her definition of gender). But even if Oyéwumi is wrong and there were precolonial genders among the Yoruba, Lugones can still make a point about the existence of multiple gender systems. She will need to clarify the sense in which “gender itself” is a colonial concept (Lugones 2007, 186); the ways that gender and colonial/modern power constitute each other or fuse; and the ways that the imposed systems relate to the Yoruban precolonial gender system. Assuming she can do this successfully, she could increase the number of genders: at least two precolonial genders, two others imposed by the colonizers, all of which are different from the Europeans’ own two genders. However, what is more important here than the precise number of genders, four or six, is that colonial/modern force imposed a different and very vicious set of rules and norms on indigenous men and women than indigenous men and women imposed on themselves, that the

Yoruban anafemales became inferior in all spheres of life (cognitive, economic, political, as well as control over reproduction), and that the process was accomplished with the cooperation of the Yoruban anamales (Lugones 2007, 198). It is these truths that require continued feminist focus.

Because I focus on the roles that intersectionality plays in Lugones's position, I cannot do justice here to her very rich project. Her exploration of mutually constructed colonial/modern intersections promises to expand feminist thinking.²¹ Her position relies on intersectionality, as did her position in "Purity, Impurity, and Separation"; not surprisingly, Lugones again advocates the need to avoid separability in the intersection (Lugones 2007, 193). Avoiding separability here is not expressed in terms of "curdling"; instead it means that systems of oppression, namely, colonial/modern power and the colonial/modern gender system (along with heterosexualism, racial classification/oppression, and capitalism), literally constitute each other and cannot be understood apart from each other. This is a strong position.

Lugones explicitly addresses the relation of intersectionality (as conceived by Crenshaw) to Quijano's structural axes such as colonial/modern power.

I think the logic of "structural axes" does more and less than intersectionality. Intersectionality reveals what is not seen when categories such as gender and race are conceptualized as separate from each other. The move to intersect the categories has been motivated by the difficulties in making visible those who are dominated and victimized in terms of both categories. . . . It becomes logically clear then that the logic of categorical separation [the logic that identifies women with white bourgeois women, Blacks with Black heterosexual men, etc.] distorts what exists at the intersection, such as violence against women of color. Given the construction of the categories, the intersection misconstrues women of color. So, once intersectionality shows us what is missing, we have ahead of us the task of reconceptualizing the logic of the intersection so as to avoid separability. It is only when we perceive gender and race as intermeshed or fused that we actually see women of color. (Lugones 2007, 192–93)

Using Lugones's own terminology, I sort out four positions to help us determine whether there is any leeway in the kinds of analysis that make women of color visible, and whether intersectionality remains part of the logic of purity. The positions include those that Lugones rejects and the one she holds.

A. The most "pure" position within the "*logic of purity*" conceptualizes categories of oppression in ways that do not allow for differences within categories such as gender or race. It cannot distinguish "transparent" interests (those of

the dominant group within a category, for example, straight Black men among Blacks) and “thick” interests of those who are marginalized within that group, for example, Black women, gay Black people of either gender (Lugones 2003, 140–41). Difficulties in this kind of essentialist position are what led to the need for intersectional analyses.

B. Views that focus on “*multiple oppressions*” and “*multiple jeopardies*” of women of color are precursors to intersectional analyses; however, these analyses do not explore the inseparability of the intersections in a way that moves far enough toward Lugones’s goal. In fact, they might not even speak in terms of interactions or intersections. For Lugones, this kind of position is still part of the logic of purity.

C. *Intersectionality of “interlocked” oppressions* does not change the nature of what is interlocked: for example, on this view racism is not mutually constructed by patriarchy or heterosexualism, nor are identities curdled. Lugones sees this kind of position as part of the logic of purity.²² However, although the natures of the interlocked oppressions have not changed, even this kind of intersectionality takes extremely important steps toward making the “thick” interests of Black women or Latina lesbians visible. Crenshaw’s original intersectional analysis and examples aimed to do precisely this (1989, 1991). Something similar could be said about Collins’s analyses (1990). And as we have seen from the uptake on early intersectional analyses over two decades, they were effective theoretically by undercutting essentialism, and effective practically by encouraging complex institutional changes to benefit the lives of women of color, for example, in programs of domestic violence. To my mind there are very big differences between “pre-intersectionality” purity of categories (pop-beads, essentialism, and so on) and “post-Crenshaw-intersectionality” categories of oppression and identity, even if the latter are not as “impure” as Lugones desires.

D. *Mutually constituted and fused oppressions*: This is Lugones’s considered view that I explained above—joining together the tradition of intersectional analyses with Quijano’s analysis of the modern coloniality of power. The conceptual content at the intersections explains the inseparability of oppressions. The logic of impurity reigns.

3. MY VIEW: FAMILY RESEMBLANCE INTERSECTIONALITY

Where does my view of intersectionality fit into these four positions? The short answer is between (C) and (D): intersecting oppressions change each other, but are not necessarily fused. My framework pairs intersectionality with a Wittgensteinian family resemblance analysis of the “identity categories”—the approach I find most appropriate for thinking about women, men, Latinos, Anglos, gay men, or transwomen. Take women as an example. A family

resemblance view acknowledges that although there is nothing—neither a property, an experience, nor an interest—that all women have in common, we know what a woman is and who women are because of crisscrossing, overlapping characteristics that are clear within social contexts.²³ In this way, we can say that women share a gender (or that woman is a gender). Of course, the contexts as well as the properties, characteristics, and gendered roles are all intersectional. Race, sexual orientation, class, and so on are part of the family resemblance analysis of woman. Similarly, gender, sexual orientation, and class are part of the family resemblance analysis of African-American. We should not take “resemblance” too literally or narrowly; our terms are not merely “descriptive” here. For example, my analysis can accommodate feminists who argue that subordination in a hierarchy or other prescriptive features are important to a characterization of women. Family resemblances can be much messier and more politically laden than Wittgenstein’s own examples of games or numbers.²⁴

I have argued elsewhere that a position that pairs a family resemblance analysis with intersectionality can accommodate a wide variety of feminist positions, is anti-essentialist without the need to argue against the existence of categories in a thoroughly postmodern manner, gives us a strategy to answer the most problematic objections to intersectionality, and provides plausible accounts of women for everyday politics (Garry 2008a; 2008b). It’s also very useful in my argument here against Lugones’s position that women have many genders. In terms of “political metaphysics,” my view falls between one such as Naomi Zack’s, which requires that women have a disjunctive nominal essence to ground inclusive feminism, and views that thoroughly critique identity categories or advocate a “solidarity” view of feminism not based on identities at all.²⁵

I discuss only two issues here: I first argue that my position is not part of the logic of purity and so, although more open-ended than Lugones’s position, is compatible with many facets of it. Then I turn to the question, “How many genders do women have?” in order to see whether an intersectional family resemblance account or a multiple genders account better serves Lugones’s (and feminism’s) overall aims.

My commitment is to a framework in which intersecting oppressions are mutually shaped and changed rather than to any particular substantive analysis in the intersections. Lugones’s project shapes the substantive analysis in more detail. My terms are weaker than Lugones’s; for example, I say that gender oppression works through and is shaped by racism, classism, or heterosexualism. Mutual construction seems to be a good way to state their relations in many circumstances (although Lugones might not agree with my usage). In any case, she uses a variety of expressions including ‘co-construction,’ ‘mutual constitution,’ and ‘fusion’ apparently interchangeably (Lugones 2007). I do not

interchange the terms because fusion seems the most restrictive and, although it is harder to argue for it, I hear a nuanced difference between co-constructing and mutually constituting race and gender as well. As fruitful as I find Lugones's discussion of fused categories, I want to leave open the possibility of a wider range of relations among oppressions.

I worry about how many kinds of oppression must mutually construct each other at once (not to mention fuse), how these will vary from case to case, and the precise, multiple ways they apply in our lives. Recall an example I used earlier: economic discrimination against gay couples is much more thoroughly intersectional than is legal discrimination against their marrying. In general, I want to be able to (i) claim that most of the time oppressions are inseparable in individual people's lives (though not necessarily to the same degree or in the same manner in every single instance), and (ii) state the conceptual relations among oppressions in such a way that we leave open to be explored the details of lives and experiences in the intersections. Although oppressions *might be* conceptually fused from the start, the fact that they are enmeshed in people's lives does not necessitate their antecedent conceptual fusion.²⁶

Let me explain briefly why my view of intersectionality is not linked to Lugones's logic of purity. In addition to my explicit statements that the categories are in fact changed by intersecting, there is a simple logical point. The fact that a logic of purity *can* use intersectional analyses of certain kinds (interlocking oppressions) does not imply that intersectionality *must* be part of the logic of purity. Intersectionality is useful within both curdled and pure logics.²⁷

Although Lugones says that "the intersection misconstrues women of color" (Lugones 2007, 193), she also realizes that intersectional analyses move at least part way out of the logic of purity to set the stage—give necessary conditions—for intermeshed oppressions that are resisted in impure/curdled logic as well as for the fusion of the colonial/modern gender/power systems. Granted that intersectionality (with or without family resemblances) does not entail either of Lugones's analyses, it can still be consistent with the direction she wants to go. What's important for Lugones's position on intersectionality is that oppressions not be thought of as unchanged or separated. My account and hers do not differ here.

We must also not be misled into thinking that an intersectional analysis, whether mine or another's, is part of the logic of purity simply because of the way it retains the terminology of race, gender, class, and so forth. We do not imply that categories are static or have internal homogeneity simply by using the term 'gender' or 'class.' Given that we must have *some* way to speak of the factors that intersect, mutually construct each other, or even fuse, we simply speak in the everyday terms available to us.

Let us turn to the final issue of the number of genders that women have. I address it here because critics of intersectionality such as Zack appeal to

theoretical and political fragmentation resulting from women's allegedly multiple genders as a reason to repudiate intersectional analyses (Zack 2005). As an advocate of intersectionality, I aim to clear away this avenue of critique so that a broad range of people can feel comfortable developing intersectional analyses.

Zack argues that intersectional theories are harmful because they fragment feminist theory and solidarity. Specifically, she maintains (i) that intersectionality entails that each ethnic group of women has a different gender, and (ii) that this proliferation of genders promotes both *theoretical fragmentation* (because each "virtually incommensurable" group can produce theories applicable only to itself) and *political fragmentation* that can easily preclude "common goals as well as basic empathy" (Zack 2005, 7–8). She visualizes segregated groups of feminists engaging in "parallel play" unable to find common ground (7).

I disagree with all of these claims, but because my principal dialogue here is with Lugones rather than Zack, I must be brief. Against claim (i) I offer my family resemblance approach. In addition, if each new intersection of ethnicity and gender constitutes a different gender, it obscures intersectionality's conceptual logic and makes it harder to explain how ethnicity affects one's gendered experience. Nevertheless, Lugones (unlike many other advocates of intersectionality) would agree with claim (i).

Both clauses in claim (ii) are highly controversial. However, we can construct weaker, more plausible claims: that multiplying genders *can encourage* theoretical and political fragmentation or that there is *a risk* that postulating multiple genders for women can lead to fragmentation. If one believes that ontological, conceptual, or linguistic framing influences theory construction and politics at all, one could not deny that there is at least *a risk* of theoretical fragmentation here.²⁸ If we have an alternative position that avoids this risk, it makes sense to use it. Why take a chance with a more risky position?

Lugones's position is exactly the kind that Zack believes promotes fragmentation: colonized women have a different gender from European women; women from different ethnic groups have different genders. I aim to avoid a Zack–Lugones dispute by changing the terms of the discussion to family resemblances.

One advantage of coupling intersectionality with a family resemblance analysis is precisely to have a framework that can block the implication that differences among women mean that we cannot share the gender woman. Theory fragmentation does not get off the ground because we are women in virtue of the crisscrossing resemblances, similarities, reasons for places in the hierarchies of power, possible relations to reproduction, and so on. This precludes neither "opting out" nor borderline or ambiguous cases; indeed, we should have troublesome cases because binary gender systems are problematic on many grounds.²⁹ Family resemblances can easily accommodate Lugones's

analyses of curdle-separation and curdled identities, for nothing precludes curdled family resemblances or curdled identities among women. No purity is needed in family resemblances. Lugones wants to give visibility to women of color—to their resistance to the logic of purity and to their “thick” interests. A family resemblance analysis can support her aims.

However, Lugones’s discussion of the fused colonial/modern gender/power analysis moves in a different direction from a family resemblance analysis. Of course, we could stretch a family resemblance analysis to the point that a pre-colonial Yoruban anafemale (regardless of everything else about her life and experience) will be in the same gender as a European woman colonizer because they share one of the many characteristics of the gender woman—they are both the kind of human being who typically can give birth. However, since Lugones accepts Oyéwumi’s view that there is no precolonial Yoruban gender at all, there is no conceptual space for woman in her picture. Unless I am prepared to mount here both a conceptual and empirical argument against Oyéwumi’s account of the absence of gender (including the way it was based on making hierarchy part of the definition of gender), I cannot simply insert a family resemblance gender concept into it. To use a bit more Wittgenstein, we can say that gender makes sense within certain forms of life (common as they are). On Oyéwumi’s account, the precolonial Yoruba did not have such a form of life.

When the concept of gender clearly enters the picture, mutually constructed with race and modern colonial power, Lugones speaks of different genders for the colonizers and the colonized, but does not necessarily need to do so. I understand her motivation for postulating four genders; however, given that this move is open to a fragmentation objection, let us try to accommodate Lugones’s central points without gender proliferation. If we speak in terms of family resemblances among the colonized women and the European women, it could actually illuminate rather than disguise both the hierarchies of power and the mutual construction of modern colonial power, race, and gender by pointing to the extreme differences among the characteristics of European women and colonized women (for example, in the norms for their sexual behavior and their labor). There is no need for these women to occupy different genders in order to explain the male colonizers’ motivation or implementation of different norms and expectations for different groups of women within the hierarchies they imposed. Nor do multiple genders for women help to explain the relations of dependency that the European women have on the colonized women.

Of course, I cannot talk Lugones out of multiple genders. They are integral to her decolonial feminist project (see Lugones 2010). Lugones is likely to reject Zack’s critique as part of the logic of purity because Zack uses nominal essences to overcome fragmentation among women. Both Zack and Lugones want to overcome fragmentation, but focus on different kinds. Zack does not want women as a group fragmented—severed from each other theoretically or

politically. Lugones opposes fragmenting/splitting the elements in identities of women of color. She maintains that white women are already split from women of color and tend not to see them. So Lugones tries to make visible women of color (with coherent, nonfragmented but multiple identities as well as agency that resists oppression) and to make intelligible the reasons for their current invisibility. In this way, she aims to create pluralist feminist theory. Although I have not focused on empathy and solidarity in this essay, we should note that Lugones seeks solidarity and empathy among women. Zack would reject Lugones's strategy as a wrong-headed way to go about it.

It is clear, I hope, that my family resemblance approach supports Lugones's overall aims in a manner that avoids salient objections to intersectionality. My view also has a communicative advantage over Lugones's because mine uses familiar everyday terms in both theoretical and practical contexts. Even if ordinary language is rightly considered conservative, being able to explain "the diverse and sometimes contradictory interests of women" in everyday speech has a better chance of success than an approach that eschews our standard uses of 'woman' or 'gender.'³⁰ In fact, without everyday concepts it is more difficult to explain the ways in which oppressions intersect. Consider an Ecuadorian woman of European ancestry who moves to Chicago. In Ecuador she was a member of the dominant group; in Chicago she is not. I find it neither plausible nor useful to think that she changes genders by moving to Chicago. Instead, understanding her situation requires attention to the intersecting changes that her gender and her move from dominant group to immigrant group have on each other. Creating a new gender for each new intersection does nothing in itself to help us explore the intersection. Instead, intersectional analysis becomes more difficult without this bit of conceptual stability to express the Ecuadorian woman's intersectional life changes.³¹

Nevertheless, my strategy has a serious downside. If women from many different groups share a gender, we must constantly be vigilant to keep dominant (for our purposes, white or Western) women de-centered, off center stage—historically, in the present, and in the future. Otherwise we cannot construct pluralist, inclusive feminist theory. It will be difficult; we are battling not only history, but also the perceived self-interest of certain white women. However, it is very powerful for women of color to refuse to let white women "own" a gender that is not white women's to own. White women's lives are likely to be irrelevant to the intersectional analyses that increase the visibility of women of color.

I understand the conceptual pull to say that different gender systems imply different genders and the desire to de-center white women by excluding them from the analyses of other women's genders. Both speak to the worry that a family resemblance framework could dilute the experience of colonized women and women of color.³² Although it makes sense to worry, being alert to this

possibility is not the same as prejudging the results of intersectional analyses. Exploring intersections in their specificity is an empirical activity, admittedly within a theoretical framework. Both Lugones's framework and mine allow specificity to flourish.

4. FINAL REMARKS

I have advised caution lest we overextend or expect too much of the concept of intersectionality. It is neither a methodology nor a theory of power or oppression. It provides a framework or strategy for thinking about issues, a set of reminders to look at a wider range of oppressions and privileges to consider their mutual construction or at least their intermeshing (if these are different). The hard work is in digging into the details of the ways that the full range of oppressions and privileges interact in our societies, lives, and theories. In order to encourage this hard work and the use of an intersectional framework, I have undertaken the tasks below in this essay.

- To convince feminist philosophers that intersectional analyses are the best strategy we have at the moment for developing truly pluralistic and inclusive feminist philosophy
- To assure readers that intersectionality, especially when paired with family resemblances, is a safe and useful framework without dangerous implications of gender proliferation or theory fragmentation
- To support Lugones's aims to increase the visibility of women of color and to create pluralist feminist theory at the same time that I disagree with her position on multiple genders

NOTES

The notes below have been abbreviated from much longer notes that are linked as "Supporting Information" to the online version of this essay. Notes containing supporting information are marked with *. A full list of references accompanies the complete set of notes.

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1. Some feminists trace intersectional thinking to Anna Julia Cooper (1892). Nevertheless, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the term 'intersectionality' and strongly influenced thinking about it in contemporary feminist theory and critical race theory (See Crenshaw 1989; 1991).*

2. See, for example, Brown 1997; Zack 2005; Carastathis 2008; Nash 2008.
3. Although the topic is beyond the scope of this paper, many of the benefits of intersectional analyses would also apply to those doing mainstream traditional work in philosophy and other disciplines.
4. African-American feminists who initially developed intersectionality and related concepts included only oppressions, not privileges, and only gender and race. Still today the major focus of intersectional analysis is, quite rightly, on oppressions and multiply oppressed people. Although I have not listed every major axis of oppression in my characterization of intersectionality, others such as disability, immigration status, age, religion, and so on, intersect with race, gender, class, and sexual orientation as well.*
5. On race, see, for example, Mills 1997; 1998; Yancy 2004; 2010; Stubblefield 2005; and Bailey 2010.
6. Miranda Fricker introduces the terms ‘testimonial injustice’ for the ways credibility is deflated by prejudice and ‘hermeneutical injustice’ for disadvantages experienced by not having “collective interpretive resources . . . [to make sense] of their social experiences” (Fricker 2007, 1).
7. “Pop-bead” metaphysics is Elizabeth Spelman’s expression (1988).*
8. On arrogant perception see Frye 1983, 66–72, and Lugones 2003, 77–100.
9. Social and political scientists are particularly interesting on this topic. See, for example, McCall 2005; Hancock 2007a; 2007b; and Nash 2008.*
10. This modifies Bailey’s recommendation to think of intersectionality as a tool along the lines of a spell checker (Bailey 2009).
11. In fairness, one might want to explore whether it *should* be such a theory. See, for example, Brown 1997 and Carastathis 2008.*
12. Nash believes that intersectionality will need to provide both of these (Nash 2008).
13. On (i) see Butler 1990 and Brown 1997; on (ii) see Carastathis 2008; and on (iii) see Lugones 2003; 2007.*
14. Intersectional examples: gay transpeople who want to marry are affected by heterosexualism/trans oppression; heterosexualism mixed with sexism probably motivates much opposition to same-sex marriage. See Weldon 2006 on intersectionality compared with other relationships of oppressions.*
15. “Or both” was not in the original essay, but was added as clarification at some point in the many reprintings of the 1989 essay, for example in Kairys 1998, 361. Crenshaw uses other variations on intersections and crossroads. For example, see Crenshaw 2008.*
16. Crenshaw uses vertical imagery, but it doesn’t transfer to her explanation of intersectionality. Her image is of a narrow door in the floor through which those with the fewest disadvantages (standing on the shoulders of others) can climb through into the non-oppressive space, for example, by affirmative action (Crenshaw 1989).*
17. Collins uses the language of intersectionality as well as the matrix of domination; the images do not seem to compete in her eyes (Collins 1993/2008).*

18. Were there space, we could fruitfully discuss Frye's juxtaposition of pattern perception and metaphor, including her view that feminist theory is about "re-metaphoring the world" (Frye 1996, 43).

19. Davis argues that "successful theories appeal to a concern regarded as fundamental by a broad audience of scholars, but they do so in a way which is not only unexpected, but inherently hazy and mystifyingly open-ended" (Davis 2008, 70).*

20. Lugones says that "interlocking does not alter the monadic nature of the things interlocked. . . . [I]t does not trouble the 'pop bead' metaphysics (Spelman 1988, 15)" (Lugones 2003, 231, n.1). In contrast, I believe that even a *minimal* intersectional analysis using interlocking oppressions takes decisive steps to undermine "pop-bead" metaphysics simply by questioning essentialism. ("Essentialism" can mean many things. I use it to refer to positions of the following kinds: i) that there is a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of a concept such as woman, or ii) that there is a set of experiences that women universally share.)*

21. Lugones understands her 2007 essay as the beginning of a larger decolonial feminist project that requires detailed work with historically specific concepts in order to make women visible as subjects (Lugones 2007, 207). Her 2010 paper, published after I wrote this essay, further develops decolonial feminism. Lugones's 2010 work helps us understand more fully her 2007 statement that gender is a colonial concept (Lugones 2007, 186).*

22. Lugones uses 'interlocking' differently from some other theorists. For example, Sherene Razack says, "Interlocking systems need one another, and in tracing the complex ways in which they help to secure one another, we learn how women are produced into positions that exist symbiotically but hierarchically [e.g., domestic workers and professional women]" (Razack 1998, 13).*

23. Wittgenstein uses the term 'family resemblance' to evoke the wide variety of kinds of resemblances among family members: those who share coloring might not have similar chins or noses; others share only a chin; still others share temperament but no physical features (Wittgenstein 1958, §67). In the preceding section Wittgenstein illustrates his position about family resemblances by using the example of games (§66). We cannot give a set of properties that are necessary and sufficient for something's being a game, but "game" is still an important and useful concept with clear applications. If space permitted, it would be fruitful to analyze further the family resemblance metaphor: see, for example, Medina 2003 and Frye 2011.*

24. Other feminists have used Wittgenstein to analyze woman or gender, for example, Stoljar 1995; Hale 1996; Tanesini 1996; Zerilli 1998; Heyes 2000; Nelson 2002; Medina 2003; and Frye 2011. Unfortunately I cannot take time to differentiate the ways in which my view differs from each of theirs.*

25. Zack says, "All women share the nonsubstantive, relational essence of being assigned to or identifying with the historical, socially constructed, disjunctive category of female birth designees, biological mothers, or heterosexual choices of men—category FMP" (Zack 2005, 162). F = designated female at birth; M = biological mother; P = primary sexual choice of [heterosexual] men (8). See, for example, Butler 1990 for a critique of identity categories, and hooks 1984 and Carastathis 2008 for solidarity

analyses. An alternative strategy is Mikkola's: feminist politics can avoid definitions of 'woman' and rely on our intuitions about the extension of 'woman' (not the content of the concept) in order to explain on whose behalf feminists struggle (Mikkola 2009). Space does not permit engagement with the decades-long "essentialism" debate.*

26. See Weldon 2006.*

27. Alison Bailey points out that because intersectionality is very useful in everyday politics to advance the interests of women of color, they would not reject it as a tool simply because it sometimes falls into a logic of purity (email correspondence August 28, 2009). She suggests that in a "curdled approach" intersectionality is both curdled and pure.*

28. I cannot discuss here the extent to which metaphysics can influence politics, factors that increase or undermine empathy, or provide a thorough explanation or critique of Zack's argument. See Garry 2007; 2008a; 2008b for reasons to prefer my view to Zack's.*

29. Although the binary gender system needs critique, I am not undertaking it here. It is important to note that a family resemblance analysis can be used with more than two genders.*

30. Mikkola makes a similar point (2009). In general, I think one needs a very good reason to use language in a revisionary (non-ordinary) way when doing feminist theory. In addition, it is extremely difficult not to rely on ordinary usage (that is, to smuggle it in) to support one's arguments.*

31. This point is somewhat modified from what I wrote in 2008: "Intersectionality need not multiply genders for each different ethnicity/race or social class; indeed, an intersectional analysis does not make sense if it does so. After all, gender, class, and race/ethnicity must intersect. The individual axes must have a least a minimal degree of stable meaning for the analysis to work. If every intersection produced a new gender or a new race (or both!), there would be no way to make sense of the ways in which ethnicity affects one's gendered experiences" (Garry 2008a, 616). This passage sounds misleadingly close to "the logic of purity," which I did not intend.

32. Lugones expressed this worry to me in conversation at NWSA 2009.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional Supporting Information may be found in the online version of this article:

Appendix S1. Expanded notes and references.

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