

Intersectionality and Power Dynamics: Analyzing the Critique of Feminist Epistemology in Political Contexts

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Abstract

This Research explores the complex relationship between intersectionality and power dynamics in influencing the creation and validation of knowledge, critically analyzing feminist epistemology within political contexts. The analytical framework takes into account both the tactics and actions used by marginalized women to contest their subordination as well as the unofficial norms that encourage resistance to intersectional practices by these women. The empirical analysis highlights the significance of the intersectional wound, highlights the function of the emotional component in changing feminist practices, and demonstrates the mechanisms that put women in positions of marginalization. Furthermore, it stays away from essentializing women who are marginalized by concentrating on the mechanisms that make a difference. Expanding upon conversations with activists inside the Catalan feminist movement, the analysis of power struggles within the movement takes into account other dimensions of inequality, such as ability, sexual orientation, gender identity, and racism. In the end, this study aims to redefine the terrain of political epistemology to be more reflexive and socially just by promoting a transformative conception of knowledge that takes into account the many perspectives and lived experiences of excluded groups.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Power Dynamics, Critique, Feminist, Epistemology, Political

1. INTRODUCTION

Examining feminist epistemology in political situations offers a critical perspective on the complex interrelationships between identity, power, and knowledge. Fundamentally, feminist epistemology aims to question and dismantle the conventional epistemological frameworks that have historically excluded and repressed the voices of disadvantaged groups, including women. This critique gains even more strength by addressing the complex and linked nature of social identities and the power structures that shape them by embracing the idea of intersectionality. The concept of intersectionality, which was first used by Kimberlé Crenshaw, highlights how people encounter oppression in different ways and to different extents depending on how their particular identification markers—such as gender, race, class, sexual orientation, and others—combine. This concept is essential for comprehending how disparate types of discrimination interact and intensify to produce unique marginalization experiences.

The criticism of feminist epistemology in political situations highlights how preexisting power structures have a significant impact on the creation and distribution of knowledge. Though they usually have their roots in the experiences and viewpoints of dominant groups, traditional epistemological systems usually profess objectivity and impartiality, which perpetuates systemic biases and exclusions. Feminist epistemologists contend that knowledge is socially situated and that important insights from the lived experiences of excluded groups can both challenge and deepen our comprehension of reality. Feminist epistemology strives to both critique and reform the methods and practices of knowledge production by elevating these viewpoints.

This criticism has significant political ramifications. It demands that the definition of a knower and the value of knowledge be reevaluated in political discourse and decision-making processes. Feminist epistemology emphasizes the significance of appreciating and respecting the knowledge generated by people who have historically been excluded by embracing intersectional views. This method promotes knowledge generation that is more inclusive and participatory, allowing a range of views to be heard and actively influencing political agendas and policies. Moreover, the



critique of feminist epistemology from an intersectional perspective highlights the ways in which power functions in political environments to uphold and strengthen current hierarchies. It refutes the idea that political experience and knowledge are impartial and generally applicable, showing how they are frequently shaped by the viewpoints and interests of individuals in positions of authority. This critique calls for a more thoughtful, critical approach to political analysis and decision-making that recognizes and tackles the intricate relationship between identity and power.

2. REVIEW OF LITREATURE

Garneau's (2018) research explores the difficulties of implementing intersectionality outside of the conventional confines of feminist philosophy. The study makes the case that, although having its roots in feminist theory, intersectionality has wider methodological and epistemological ramifications that can benefit many research areas. In order to provide a more thorough analytical framework, Garneau highlights the significance of expanding beyond a narrow focus on gender to incorporate other axes of identification, such as race, class, and sexuality. The study advocates for a flexible and context-sensitive approach by highlighting the methodological opportunities and problems that come with incorporating intersectionality into research. The way that Garneau's analysis discusses how intersectional approaches can reveal the complex ways that power and identity interact in many social contexts is especially insightful. This can broaden the scope and depth of sociological research.

Grzanka (2018) focuses on the intersections of power, knowledge, and process as it examines the incorporation of intersectionality within feminist psychology. The study emphasizes how intersectional analysis has the power to fundamentally alter prevailing psychological practices and paradigms. According to Grzanka, the integration of intersectionality within feminist psychology not only expands the comprehension of identity and experience but also challenges conventional ideas of impartiality and objectivity in psychological studies. In support of research approaches that are reflexive and sensitive to the intricacies of power relations, the author highlights the dynamic and process-oriented character of intersectionality. Grzanka's work emphasizes the necessity for methodological innovation and epistemological reflexivity, adding to the continuing discussion about how intersectionality is transforming feminist psychology practice.

McKinzie and Richards (2019) make a strong case for an intersectionality that is context-driven, contending that comprehending the interaction between identity and power requires an awareness of the variety of social settings. The inclination to apply intersectionality in a broad way is criticized by the authors, who argue in favor of a nuanced approach that takes into account the specifics of various social and cultural contexts. In light of local circumstances and power dynamics, their article underscores the significance of firmly establishing intersectional analysis in empirical research. A context-driven approach, according to McKinzie and Richards, keeps distinct experiences and identities from being erased while also enhancing the explanatory value of intersectionality. This viewpoint is crucial to the advancement of an intersectionality that is more accurate and sensitive to context in sociological study.

Labelle's (2020) This article examines how epistemology might be included into intersectional methodology in relation to politics and gender. The paper critically investigates the ways in which various epistemological stances can improve intersectional analysis, especially with regard to comprehending identities and power relations. Labelle adds to theoretical discussions on gender studies methodology by tying epistemology and intersectionality together and highlighting the significance of reflexivity and situated knowledge in research. For academics and researchers interested in feminist and intersectional research methodological advancements, this article is helpful.



3. CONTEXT AND METHODS

The Catalan feminist movement, which arose in the early 1970s among the labor movement, neighborhood movements, anti-Franco fights, and a harsh critique of the capitalist system, is the subject of the examination of intersectional conflicts in political representation. About 4,000 women attended the inaugural Catalan Women's Conference, which was held in 1976. The year was a turning point in the movement's development, with the founding of several feminist organizations. The political heterogeneity of the activists active at the time was a feature of the movement, which prevented it from defining a coherent and specific plan of action. As a result, diverse schools of thought emerged and new avenues for action were explored. Furthermore, the feminist movement in Catalonia has historically maintained a suspicious view of the institutional arena, leading to the emergence of an autonomous movement. Through personal experiences, resistance to many forms of oppression, and political engagement, Catalan feminists created a "intersectionality-like thought" that connected gender, class, and national identity in the 1970s and 1980s. Lesbian feminists were highly involved in the movement during the 1980s, adding to its demands by criticizing heterosexism. Subsequently, there have been other discussions over the necessity of integrating the diversity of women within the movement. Migrant women were more prominent in the movement during the 1990s and requested that their contributions be given more prominence. Younger feminists were asserting similar things about the same time.

As with the Spanish feminist movement, the feminist movement in Catalonia has emerged as the one with the most potential for mobilization. Reproductive rights and gender-based violence have been the focal points of the feminist movement's mobilization since 2011. In addition, the gendered aspect and effects of austerity measures gave rise to networks like "Vaga de Totes" (all-women strike), which mobilized about 600 feminist organizations for a strike in 2014 and 2015 in Catalonia with the goal of increasing public awareness of reproductive work. The strike paved the way for the development of intergenerational networks and platforms that can lead to large-scale mobilizations. One such platform is the 8M Commission, which on International Women's Day in 2018 organized a 24-hour women's strike with the theme "if we stop, the world stops," and in 2019 organized a similar event with the theme "We stop to change everything." Not even a single step in reverse. The strike was carried out again in 2020, but not in 2021 because of COVID-19.

Hearing the perspectives of those making intersectional claims is important in order to reveal intersectional power struggles and gain a deeper understanding of how intersecting dynamics of inclusion and exclusion influence relationships between activists. Additionally, it is critical to take into account several oppressive axes simultaneously. Thus, the empirical analysis is based on 25 semi-structured interviews with activists from women's organizations that focus on gender alone (7) and those that focus on gender and sexuality (5), gender identity (4), gender and race (8), or disability (1). The activists that were interviewed are influential members of the most significant and dynamic groups involved in Catalan feminist movements. Certain feminist groups have chosen not to engage in shared spaces, such as the one that coordinates the International Women's Day mobilization, but some of these groups do. The activists who were questioned varied in age from 20 to 75 years old and work in a variety of fields, such as students, care providers, public servants, third-sector workers, seniors, and researchers. Cross-cutting consideration is given to other identifiers like national identification, age, and class. Due to COVID constraints, the interviews were conducted online or in-person in Barcelona between October 2020 and July 2021. Pseudonyms are used in the references to the interviews.⁴

Topical substance investigation was utilized to inspect the meeting information. All interview records were brought into, coded, and investigated involving the NVivo subjective information examination programming for information coding and examination. Both rational and inductive



strategies were utilized to code the information, and the examination was done in two phases. Two essential codes were made during the main coding progressively work to pinpoint cases of intersectionality obstruction and counter-opposition. Following past exploration on friendly development intersectionality and feminist institutionalist examination, I coded the casual standards that maintain honor (epistemic, institutional, useful, and social): ways of behaving, for example, generalizing, hypocrisy, obliviousness, disparaging anxiety, qualities that grant status, casual systems administration, and time accessibility. I likewise coded the activities that challenge honor at the individual or gathering levels corresponding to diverse fortitude: unions with significant basic companions, self-coordinating methodologies, and the multifaceted injury: foundational distresses and moral distresses. These two stages together address the two primary subject codes that have been distinguished exhaustively above.

4. RESISTING INTERSECTIONALITY

Ladies made up the larger part Five cause to notice the variety seen inside the ladies' development; as a matter of fact, the content that the Catalan feminist development's major precept is the affirmation of ladies' heterogeneity. They fight that since the 1970s, when activists set forth an investigation tying numerous sorts of persecution together by relating orientation, class, and public personality, there has been a "intersectionality-like idea" inside the development (I.3, I.4, and I.5). Besides, the interviewee activists underline the variety of political thoughts and encounters that were available at the debut Catalan Ladies' Meeting in 1976, alongside the requirement for keeping up with this heterogeneity and the need of laying out a cross country network that connects all ladies (I.3, and I.5). Intersectionality is, truth be told, underestimated, as one respondent put it. Conceivably alluding to it more as a training than in that capacity (I.2). Intersectionality, albeit without a trace of a reasonable name, is viewed as one of the development's fundamental getting sorted out standards. Without a doubt, the coordinators of the Walk 8, Worldwide Ladies' Day, and November 25, Global Day for the Disposal of Savagery Against Ladies, have approached a large number of different gatherings of ladies to partake in arranging the preparations for nowadays, exhibiting their anxiety for addressing the variety of ladies. The choice to save the development's heterogeneity and underline the worth of ladies framing networks prompted these suggestions to take action (I.3, and I.5). This was the aftereffect of the main Catalan Ladies' Meeting. Also, numerous subgroups of ladies are imagined and their requests are communicated on the proclamations and banners for those two days.

However larger parts ladies perceive that they should consider and manage their singular honors (I.1, I.2, I.3, and I.4), they don't suggest that these honors are aggregate. Everyone recited during the 8M strike, "We are not all here, live-in homegrown specialists haven't arrived, part time employees as well," as a racialized lady noticed. The strike in the long run reached a conclusion, however, and everybody returned to their ordinary social position (I.8). In like manner, it is deficient to scrutinize the viewpoints of dominant parts ladies inside the development by only expressing diverse cases or recognizing that ladies are a differed bunch. Minoritized ladies really realize that developments are attempting to be comprehensive, however they believe it's only to look good, as one racialized lady put it:

Thus, migrant women, women in wheelchairs, and black women are all part of this movement. However, they are not truly included. Those folks aren't really there, you know. In other words, they make an effort to speak for us so that, even when our voices are absent, we still feel like we are present. Although there is a person that stands in for us, they are not our requests or voices. I am aware that there is a desire to involve us, but the discussion is lacking the section in which the migrants, the non-standard people, and everyone else are asked what they would want to see. In this manner, you transcend the metaphorical image.

Despite the movement's commitment to intersectionality, these promises are not consistently reflected in day-to-day activities and practices. The next part provides examples of resistance (power over) in regard to the unwritten rules that uphold the privileges of knowledge, institutions, productivity, and relationships.

4.1 Unofficial regulations that uphold privilege

It may be more difficult for marginalized women to participate in feminist forums and to see differences amongst women due to epistemic privilege. I describe the unwritten rules that keep epistemic privilege alive in the movement in the paragraphs that follow.

First, stereotypical behaviors undermine the recognition of marginalized women as aware subjects. In reference to the variety of foods and cultural elements encountered on a day when you are involved, one colored woman said, "I think that one falls unconsciously into the dollarization of migrant women" Similarly, racialized women perceive that minoritized women are treated with indifference. These kinds of actions expose the instrumentalization of women who are marginalized, ensuring their visibility even though they are only given restricted opportunities for engagement. Racialized women, for example, feel uncomfortable in situations where certain settings believe that if a racialized woman is included in a debate, then that representation of racialized women has been achieved. This is because racialized women are diverse. Lesbian women, on the other hand, argue that although their difficulties may not be as visible as the movement's general issues, they nonetheless actively participate in it and ask themselves whether they should give their own causes more priority.

Second, there are ignorant behaviors used in relation to two unrelated but linked situations. Racialized women, on the one hand, condemned the way that global south feminists' epistemologies and knowledge were ignored by majority women. This is the outcome of failing to acknowledge minority women as competent subjects for knowledge creation or as having distinct methods of interacting with one another. In a similar spirit, minority women are expected to act in particular ways and conform to particular roles. Therefore, in order for marginalized women to feel included, they must conform to dominant norms. However, lesbian, racialized, and disabled women say that their problems go unnoticed, meaning that their needs and experiences are not always met.

furthermore, racialized and trans ladies portray that they experience disparaging concern — that is, deigning mentalities — when minoritized ladies voice their solicitations. In these cases, they are seen as defenseless casualties and are treated with weakness. Accordingly, lesbian ladies cause to notice the difficulties they have in setting their expectations known, especially on events like Walk 8, Global Ladies' Day, when various solicitations are made all the while. In addition, underestimated ladies contend that for their requests to be recognized, a legislative issue of presence is required. Despite the fact that racialized ladies make sense of that in any event, when their requests are recognized, this might in any case happen in a generally shallow way lesbian and impaired ladies feel that their participation at gatherings is fundamental for guaranteeing that minoritized ladies' issues are remembered for the plan.

As a result, the unwritten norms that support epistemic privilege highlight how adopting an intersectional perspective alone is insufficient to change political practices and demonstrate how engaging in an introspective process is a must for engaging in intersectional activism. Additionally, privilege operates in a variety of non-exclusive ways. In fact, a number of unofficial practices restrict minority women's access to institutional, productive, and interpersonal privileges. Together, these three forms of privilege maintain the positions of the most privileged women inside the movement by repeating dominating frames. First, women from marginalized groups refute the idea that the movement is structured in a non-hierarchical, horizontal fashion. Racialized and trans women actually clarify that activists are acknowledged



inside the movement because they have a set of attributes that confer status, like years of militancy, prestige, speaking well, or having political capital. In that sense, giving some people this kind of recognition could lead to power dynamics among activists that create hierarchies. Feminist activists do not break free from prevalent society standards, despite the fact that this fact is linked to having been socialized under a patriarchal system. This suggests that actively working to transform privilege is essential. One young activist observed, for example, that "older women often speak very directly and in an aggressive manner to each other, forgetting about care" (I.2). She clarified that many of her younger colleagues had sought out nicer and safer political venues to participate in instead of staying in mixed groups because they felt that the attitudes there were poisonous and unfounded in the ethics of care. She was therefore startled to see actions that brought to mind her experiences in mixed-gender groups, especially in areas populated exclusively by women.

Secondly, the informal networking method is used to structure the women's movement. According to one participant, "bonds [are] a big role in feminist movements." That is to say, if you don't know anyone, it can be challenging to take part in event organization. Furthermore, I believe that the feminist movement may not always be inclusive. It can be difficult to feel at ease if you don't know someone. As a result, connections founded on social and political capital may function as obstacles to new activists joining the cause.

Third, limitations related to time availability impede the engagement of women from marginalized communities. The triple shift—paid employment, unpaid caregiving and household chores, and activism—has, in fact, historically made it more difficult for women to engage in civil society. Long shifts and unstable working conditions are hallmarks of the care industry, which exacerbates the situation for racialized and immigrant women employees. Because the meetings take place in the early afternoon, the only women who can participate in activism are those who work in the third sector or have flexible work schedules. Therefore, women who benefit from a privileged economic or employment situation are the only ones assured of this third shift. Similarly, women with disabilities encounter challenges related to accessibility, and they could find it challenging to visit specific places. Additionally, a few of these ladies require the assistance of a personal assistant, with whom they must communicate. In other words, kids can only take part while the helper is at work. As a result, the movement does not examine its own organizational procedures that could encourage women from marginalized groups to participate. Minoritized women may feel that their availability limits their ability to participate. People who fall into at least two categories of subordination are disempowered because they are forced to divide their political energies between two occasionally antagonistic groupings. As one lesbian woman pointed out:

We truly are in two places when I say that we are, so you have multiple events on the same day, and attempting to be in two places at once was terrible. In actuality, we saw a significant decline in participation on June 28th, Pride Day. But eventually, on March 8, International Women's Day, we reached a point when we gave up and quit completely. We attended the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women on November 25 because we take part in all protests, marches, and other events; we are not a lesbian movement per se.

Finally, although only a small number of racialized women reported experiencing anger and distress during the movement they believe that majorities women have occasionally ignored these feelings. In fact, racialized women clarify that although one majorities woman expressed sadness when minoritized women expressed similar thoughts, she also questioned the reasons behind minoritized women's expression of these feelings. Therefore, adopting intersectional praxis becomes more difficult since emotional rules that are based on one's social status create



power asymmetries inside organizations by denying people the freedom to experience specific emotions.

5. CONCLUSION

The critique of feminist epistemology in political contexts reveals a complex interplay of intersectionality and power dynamics that profoundly shape knowledge production and dissemination. Feminist epistemology challenges traditional power structures by highlighting how intersecting identities—such as gender, race, class, and sexuality—influence who is considered a legitimate knower and what is accepted as knowledge. This critique underscores the importance of recognizing marginalized voices and experiences that are often excluded or devalued in dominant epistemic frameworks. By foregrounding the situatedness of knowledge, feminist scholars argue that power dynamics within political contexts not only shape epistemic practices but also reinforce systemic inequalities. This critical examination prompts a re-evaluation of the methodologies and standards of evidence in political epistemology, advocating for more inclusive and reflexive approaches that acknowledge and address the diverse ways in which power and intersectionality impact knowledge production. Ultimately, the critique of feminist epistemology in political contexts calls for a transformation in the understanding and practice of knowledge, one that is more attuned to the complexities of power relations and the lived realities of marginalized groups.

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