Intersectionality: A Model for Addressing the Complexity of Oppression and Privilege

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Abstract This essay proposes that adopting an intersectional theoretical approach amenable to the values and commitments of our field will enhance our efforts as pastoral theologians seeking to analyze, engage, and resist oppression and privilege in response to forms of difference. Intersectionality is a model that effectively addresses complex individual, relational, structural, and ideological aspects of domination and privilege arising from forms of difference treated oppressively. Methodologically, intersectionality pursues emancipatory praxis toward its telos of social justice. This essay introduces key themes in intersectional theory and draws on them to analyze a case. The essay also briefly explores both points of convergence in the literatures of intersectionality and pastoral and practical theology and points to which pastoral and practical literature may add value to intersectional theory.

Keywords Intersectionality · Emancipatory praxis · Power · Domination · Privilege · Difference · Public theology · Social imaginary · Pedagogy

Case

Susan is a white 32-year-old mother of a 2-year-old son and a 4-year-old daughter. Her children are multi-racial with an African American father who was killed as a bystander in a drug-related crime. They had no insurance, and Susan lost the car and their apartment due to lack of income to make payments. Her family and his also live in the city, though neither household is able to take them in and neither is able to assist financially beyond minimal and occasional help.

Susan had been employed at a 7-Eleven food and gas mart, but when she lost the car she could not manage transportation and childcare so she could not meet the expected hours there. Public assistance was not enough to pay for food and rent, so she went to a shelter. Fortunately, a case worker was able to arrange for Susan and her children to move into an apartment with subsidized rent that is affordable with the part-time job she now has. This apartment benefit lasts for 2 years. She and her children manage with food stamps and extra help with groceries at the end of the month through a food assistance ministry of a large

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Protestant congregation in the city. Her maternal grandmother and her deceased husband's grandmother are able to help with childcare. This allows Susan a low-wage part-time job that pays just enough to lower her food stamp benefits. She wants to pursue her education to increase employment options, but no assistance is available. She knows her neighbor, Maria, who is a Latina single mother, does have access to a scholarship created for Latinas that enables her to study at a local community college. While she likes her neighbor and knows she also faces challenges, this apparent inequity seems to her deeply unfair. Further, the city's cutback in funds for transitional housing alongside the national budget sequester that affects such resources heightens her sense of vulnerability. She is angry about this harsh consequence for the most vulnerable. Entitlements and big-cat politicians, who don't have any idea what it means to be poor, are dooming her future and that of her children.

The Chair of the Mission Committee, Claire, is taking her turn at Helping Hand ministry and sits with Susan when she comes by to get extra groceries toward the end of the month. Claire, a 62-year-old married white woman, has recently retired from a career in banking and is finding working with Helping Hand a challenging education. Claire would describe herself as a pro-business Republican. She is supportive of current efforts to reduce entitlements as part of managing a national debt that is at record levels. Claire is deeply moved by Susan's dilemma related to the lack of services in the city to allow her to care for her children and prepare to work full-time. She too finds it deeply unfair that Susan's Latina neighbor has a scholarship option and no options are available for white women like Susan. She wonders if documentation of citizenship is necessary for scholarships. While she has made her peace with the sequestration of funds as pressure for entitlement cuts, she had not expected to find it would affect women like Susan.[1]

Introduction

This essay focuses on the importance of developing methodological resources for pastoral theologians and pastors that assist us in extending the usefulness of our constructive theological proposals for engaging and strategically transforming public policies, practices, and structures that systemically resist the fuller realization of social justice in church and society related to forms of difference treated oppressively. This means we need resources that are able to provide theoretical, analytical, and strategic guidance for faculty and for religious leaders in classrooms and congregations. We also need resources that help us teach seminarians and congregants whose social location may more likely be predominantly privileged.

Thanks to the early leadership and courage of scholars of color and more recently a number of white scholars in our field, for a number of years our publications in pastoral theology have drawn from a range of resources such as Womanist theology, critical race and gender theory, racial identity development theories, and critical pedagogy. Our publications have provided close attention to particular forms of difference treated oppressively, including race, gender, sexuality, and to some extent social class. Some of our publications have named the fact that these differences inevitably intersect—especially gender, race, and class—and we have begun to explore how identity is experienced within a field of power relations that always include a dialectic of privilege and oppression. However, our literature, and thus our teaching of seminarians and support for religious leaders, is not yet shaped by a more coherent or comprehensive theoretical frame that allows us to analyze and engage the

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dynamic and simultaneous complexity of identity embodied in the experiences of Susan and Maria as well as the power relations that insinuate their lives and Claire's at micro and macro levels, such as city and federal regulations and budget decisions.

This essay proposes that drawing on a more coherent theoretical approach amenable to the values and commitments of our field will enhance our efforts as pastoral theologians seeking to analyze, engage, and resist oppression and privilege in response to forms of difference. Intersectionality is a model that effectively addresses complex individual, relational, structural, and ideological aspects of domination and privilege arising from forms of difference treated oppressively. Intersectionality emerged in the post-Civil Rights era in the United States. It was developed initially by women of color who focused attention on the importance of understanding their experience of complex, multiple forms of oppression. Subsequently, transnational feminists and white feminist allies have contributed to this theory, drawing from a wide range of disciplines such as women's studies, gender studies, law, sociology, psychology, and organizational theory. Intersectionality also reflects more recent influences of globalization and postmodern political and intellectual commitments. It is an epistemological resource that helps surface subjugated knowledge and creates new knowledge, and it is a strategic resource for transformational change. It intends to provide analytical, theoretical, strategic, and pedagogical resources (Dill & Zambrana 2009, pp.1–2).

In this essay I introduce intersectionality as a methodological paradigm and use it to help us engage the complex situation that our case discloses. This case is constructed to reflect typical dilemmas of those living at the margins in many cities in the United States, including the dialectic of oppression and privilege that insinuates such dilemmas. I will also explore points of correlation in which theological resources may revise or amplify the usefulness of this methodological approach.

Intersectionality: An initial description of its contours and goals

- The telos of this methodological approach is social justice, with a particular goal of empowering those who experience multiple dimensions of inequality and of supporting strategic action by coalitions that respect differences while pursuing common goals (Weber 2010, p. 213).
- Intersectionality deliberately seeks to provide a framework for engaging the dynamic complexity of multiple forms of inequality.
- Differences in systems such as gender, race, class, and sexuality express power relationships of dominance and control over socially valued resources (p. 91).
- Systems such as gender, race, class, and sexuality are embedded in three societal domains—ideological, political, and economic—that create, maintain, and transform the practices and social arrangements in such systems (p. 115).
- Differences such as gender, race, class, and sexuality are simultaneous, interrelated systems of inequality based on social (group) relationships of power and control that arise in every social location and are affected by both macro systems (institutional) and micro systems (individual and psychological) (pp. 91–92).
- All persons experience matrices of domination and oppression (Hill Collins 2000). Oppression and privilege are linked in this methodological approach (p. 92).
- Intersectionality avoids ranking oppressions or inequalities as if one were primary because such approaches cannot disclose the mutual dynamism of the power struggle over socially valued resources (p. 91).
- Such differences are historically and geographically contextual, which requires careful attention to the particularity of contextual experience and recognition that meanings associated with such differences vary across time and place (p. 90).

- Pedagogically, this approach recognizes that it is essential for persons to understand the social and historical differences for each of the interrelated systems of power, such as gender, race, sexuality, and class (Ouellett 2011, p. 5).

Based on these brief statements of key claims and approaches in the intersectional paradigm, I will elaborate particularly on the way intersectionality frames social justice, identity, power and related ideas about change, and pedagogy, incorporating the experiences of Susan, Maria, and Claire in the case that introduces this article. I will note ways in which these aspects of intersectionality align with, revise, and sometimes amplify current understandings and practices in pastoral theological literature.

Social justice as the normative goal in intersectionality

It is important to remember that the historical origins of this methodological paradigm lie in the experiences of women of color in the 1970s in the United States (who were intimately familiar with multiple, invisibilizing, intersecting forms of oppression) and subsequently of transnational feminists and white feminist allies. Scholars contributing to this paradigm insist on a praxis approach that links power and the production of knowledge that will result in social justice that attends to both material and social inequities. The goal of social justice requires an approach that supports a broad range of actions including "advocacy, analysis, policy development, theorizing, and education" (Dill & Zambrana 2009, p. 12). Because intersectionality presumes all human experience arises in a dynamic matrix of oppression and domination, this approach understands social justice as best achieved through coalitions that focus on shared interests in confronting complex, systemic oppression that also takes its toll on self-esteem and a positive sense of agency and identity. While its analysis of power inequities is unflinching and its goal of transformative change is clear, this theory also presumes the dignity and worth of all persons. Perhaps because this approach supports strategic engagement for change on behalf of marginalized people, it affirms an understanding of social justice that is experienced as a process of increasing freedom and self-determination rather than an elusive achievement (Weber 2010, p. 214).

Identity as simultaneous, contextual, dynamic, historically shaped power relations

Intersectional approaches to identity clearly link individual and social dimensions to any experience of identity. Identity is socially and historically constructed, which means that public and individual meanings for these categories for identity will vary. And within our own life experience, how we understand ourselves and how others perceive us varies across time and place and with the social location of the observer. Identities are not "fixed" or "achieved" or unitary; instead, our differences are the "kernel from which *identities* are constantly constructed by the individual and his or her society" (Holvino 2012, p. 180). The simultaneity of multiple subordinated identities such as women of color experience creates a particular

> shifting consciousness . . . the ability of many women of colour to shift from one Group's perception of social reality to another and at times, to be able simultaneously to perceive multiple social realities without losing their sense of self-coherence. (Hurtado 1996, p. 384)

The above comment from Hurtado underscores the claim by intersectionality that identity is not additive but simultaneous. Gloria Anzaldúa describes sustaining such simultaneity as the work of synthesizing, which creates what she calls a "*mestiza* consciousness" that

includes pain and creative energy in "a continual creative motion that keeps breaking down the unitary aspect of each new paradigm" (Anzaldúa 1990, p. 379). The subjugated knowledge that may arise from reflectively inhabiting these interstices is presumably what judge Sonia Sotomayor meant by her phrase, "a wise Latina woman" (Sotomayor 2002, p. 91). Nonetheless, such simultaneity poses challenges for "owning the complexity" of this simultaneity and managing the ambiguities of multiple "voices" that arise with one's various locations (Holvino 2012, pp. 177–179). Different aspects of identity are more salient depending on the moment and context, though all are simultaneously present. Evangelina Holvino describes one aspect of this experience of simultaneity:

> Identities and differences are contextual and, depending on the situation, some dimensions of one's identity come to be figural and others become background. When I work in Puerto Rico, for example, my Puertoricanness is less figural, and so I become much more aware of the gender dynamics between Puerto Rican men and women. (Holvino 2006, p. 2)

These various descriptions of the simultaneity of experiencing identity also underscore another important insight from intersectionality that insists this simultaneity demonstrates that oppressions are not additive or quantifiable in relation to a supposed discrete experience of identity (Bowleg 2008, p. 314). Because oppressions are "incommensurable," intersectional research suggests that, rather than quantitative approaches, we should pursue a richer qualitative analysis of the complex field of oppressive forces in which intersectional identities are situated (Purdie-Vaugns & Eibach 2008, p. 380).

The influences of post-structural and postcolonial themes are especially evident in the way in which intersectionality construes identity. Identity is discussed in terms of social categories such as gender, race, class, and sexuality that "mutually constitute, reinforce, and naturalize" each other (Shields 2008, pp. 301–302). In short, these categories only exist in a dynamic relationship through which we enact or practice our understanding of these aspects of our identity and thereby reinforce or naturalize the taken-for-granted binaries and hierarchies that construe our larger context. For example, in our case, Susan's description of her situation illustrates how her self-understanding and actions as a white, poor, heterosexual woman maintain prevailing racial, class, gender, and sexuality categories as they are arranged and reproduced in the prevailing macro domains of ideology, politics, and economics. These societal understandings shape her personal understanding and her social group identifications. Intersectionality also presumes that power relations are thoroughly insinuated in this process of mutual or co-construction. This helps disclose how our practices maintain or re-instantiate social stratifications as articulated through the institutions that shape the larger power domains such as education, media, government regulations and policies, and employment hierarchies.

An illustration of the historical variability within apparently taken-for-granted constructions of identity lies in the ways in which both gender and sexuality were significantly altered through the transitions created in family life and work by the industrial revolution in the 19th century and continued to evolve across the 20th century with the increasingly binary construction of dominant culture definitions of femininity and masculinity. In this same time period, the binary of homosexuality and heterosexuality was articulated and was clearly highly dynamic, as illustrated in current legal debates about the importance of heterosexuality in the definition of marriage and the rights and privileges that accrue to married persons. While sea changes in these two categories of gender and sexuality have happened in a relatively short period of time, debates in the dominant culture about changes in roles within heterosexuality or the status of homosexuality suggest many continue to perceive them ahistorically (Weber 2010, pp. 98–99).

Power and strategies for change

Intersectionality is especially apt for the work of public pastoral theology because it gives careful attention to how power as privilege or domination insinuates itself at the societal level through ideological, political, and economic domains and their related institutions. Further, it notes how these societal domains of power are mutually reinforcing in ways that amplify their influence further. For example, the ideologies promoted in media and the curricula of our schools shape and maintain the status quo as it is organized through practices in business, law, and governmental bureaucracies—the domains of economics and politics. Regulations in the political domain help to produce the ideologies that control marginalized populations via such policies as Affirmative Action Equal Employment Opportunity (AAEEO) and college admissions and immigration laws. Thus the interests of those in power are reinscribed through ideologies carried in daily images of success and the narratives of our national common life fraught with explanations of social hierarchies that we teach our children, whether or not they find their families and themselves in such images and whether or not they are central or marginal to the narratives.

Most often in intersectional research, three domains and related institutions are addressed: ideological (media, the arts, education, religion), political (the state, law), and economic (industry, work) (Weber 2010, p. 115). One of the most significant advances intersectionality provides in attending to the dialectic of domination and privilege is its explicit linkage of societal domains of power and the experience of both subjective (micro) and social (macro) identity.

> Race, class, gender, and sexuality systems are generated, extended, and challenged in the ideological, political, and economic societal domains. At the micro level, the everyday actions of individuals as they live their lives in unequal social relations both generate those systems and challenge them. At the macro level, structures of oppression provide a powerful framework, a hierarchy that persists through time and across places and that has serious consequences for social life (Weber 2010, p. 128).

This theoretical claim at once helps to explain how oppression arises and persists and thus how it effectively resists change at structural levels and at the same time, because intersectional analysis closely attends to the structural interstices of context in the particularity of lived experience, it offers insights into ways to mitigate the oppressive effects of privilege and domination to promote transformative change. Neither the macro analysis nor the micro analysis alone could yield such possibilities.

Ideological domain

In this domain, intersectional researchers locate the production and maintenance of what are also described as hegemonic ideologies, that is, those ways of describing shared cultural or "commonsense" reality that inscribe hierarchies of relation and access to material and social capital into personal and cultural ways of thinking such as we find in patriarchal stereotypes. Such stereotypes function at macro levels in economic and political domains to rationalize practices of differential opportunities and bias. For example, consider documented inequities in employment and promotion opportunities for women and men as well as civil rights debates and marriage and adoption practices that create real legal, material, and social consequences for persons who self-identify as LGBTQ.

Intersectionality also helps us see how these stereotypes not only function in macro levels such as employment practices but also at the micro level as privilege and stigma are internalized by individuals who find their sense of themselves distorted by stereotypes that

are at once inherently unachievable and powerfully operative in shaping our estimations of ourselves and others. Such stereotypes project and reproduce the interests of the dominant group, and they help "explain" contradictions in achievement, especially for those not in the dominant group served by the ideology. Such explanations mask the structural inequities across gender, sexuality, race, and class that preclude the success of those not in the dominant group by projecting that the failure is in fact their own responsibility. So, for example, given the heterosexual ideals for femininity and masculinity projected in media and print that lift up images of professional, economically privileged, educated, often white women and men, working class and poor heterosexual women without access to the resources presumed in such images will find themselves further marginalized. Working class and poor heterosexual men will likely only experience a further sense of failure in not exercising the autonomy and achievement associated with masculinity. While such stereotypes are most invidious for those who are clearly marginalized, it is also worth noting that even those who are among the privileged in such stereotyped images can never be confident they have fully achieved success because, by definition, stereotypes are beyond attainment.

Political domain

The political domain describes the work of organizing and exercising controls both for securing and sustaining our common life through the bureaucracies of government, including policies and laws and their implementation or enforcement. If one were to suggest an image for this domain, it might well be an intricate maze surrounding a center in Congress, the White House, and the Supreme Court. Zooming in on the central characters in this design would surface that the vast majority of these decision-makers are wealthy, white, heterosexual, and male. This is not to suggest essentialist assumptions about such descriptors, but it does indicate how challenging it is for the experience of a range of marginalized social groups to be adequately understood. Further, the surrounding maze of bureaucracy helps to illustrate two other distinguishing and related characteristics of the political domain—ambiguity about accountability and resistance to change. Even brief attention to this domain discloses myriad intersections in developing and enforcing policies and laws that intersect with gender, race, class, and sexuality. In reviewing a few of these intersections we can identify how domination is enforced, often outside the awareness of many; how difficult change can be; what seems to contribute to successful change when it happens within these domains; and the intricate dance between the controls enforced by this domain and changes in the "social imaginary" (Taylor 2004) that reflect the broad cultural assumptions of the ideological domain.

One striking illustration of resistance to change and ambiguity about accountability in the political domain lies in the way the stated intentions of the GI Bill for veterans of World War II were not implemented equitably. While the bill did not specifically privilege white male veterans, because of a series of related policies and laws, the benefits of the bill reached very few women and African American men who had served in the military during the war. This little-acknowledged consequence and the choice not to redress it politically contributed to a vast improvement in the economic privileges of white, newly middle-class American families in the middle of the 20th century (Sacks 1997, pp. 310–313).

The way laws and policies render some populations invisible is especially well illustrated in the work of Kimberle Crenshaw (1989), an African American law professor who wrote the first article to name the concept of intersectionality. Her concern was to illustrate the consequences of laws and policies that responded to racial and gender discrimination independently, with particularly invidious consequences for African American women because case law focused on race or gender discrimination independently. This meant that

legal decisions on discrimination focused on privileged groups in each case—white women or black men. The law and its implementation literally did not envision the multiple discrimination that black women experience. In fact, some case law demonstrated that black women's reports of discrimination were not allowed to represent a more inclusive category of all women and men as well as women of color, with the consequence of encouraging an adversarial posture between the several groups experiencing discrimination (Crenshaw 1989, p. 145). Crenshaw rightly noted that these legal difficulties required a theoretical shift toward intersectionality and not an attempt to add African American women to already existing single axes of race and gender. Crenshaw used legal decisions to demonstrate that African American women's experiences of multiple discrimination and legal invisibility could not be understood apart from recognizing the intersectional/simultaneous influence of gender and race (Crenshaw 1989, p. 140). She also powerfully critiqued how the political domain was enforcing a larger cultural (ideological) understanding of discrimination that presumed it occurred as discrete experiences and that "but for" these experiences equal opportunity prevailed (Crenshaw 1989, p. 151). That is, the law helped render invisible a far more complex reality of intersecting disadvantage across gender, race, class, and sexuality and ensured that privilege remained uninterrogated. A sobering parallel possibility lies in considering the implications of the extent to which current pastoral theological approaches can envision the breadth and complexity of dominance and privilege.

An equally sobering, more current illustration of the way political and ideological domains reinforce each other lies in the unfolding interpretation and enforcement of Affirmative Action laws for college admission. When President Johnson signed the executive order to prevent discrimination based on gender, race, sex, and national origin, the order did not specify what such programs would look like. What has unfolded demonstrates how powerfully dominant interests resist interrogating privilege as various groups protest against supposed "quotas" and insist that "color-blind" and "gender-blind" practices better represent the "fairness" the United States stands for (Bonilla-Silva 2006), while overlooking policies such as admissions practices privileging children of alumni. In marked contrast, current legal and judicial decisions and negotiations related to citizenship and to the full rights of persons who self-identify as LGBTQ also illustrate how substantial urgency within the broader culture indicates a remarkable process of revising the consensus in the social imaginary that is altering longstanding legal constraints and judicial practices.

Focusing on the military suggests a different experience with change, perhaps particularly related to the internal command structure that can institute sweeping changes in practices when so ordered. In a relatively short period of history, several presidents revoked racial segregation in the U.S. military, instituted a continuing process of the fuller inclusion of women and a continuing process toward the legal inclusion of persons who self-identify as LGBTQ with related benefits for their partners. None of these changes has been put in place without resistance from the dominant groups most represented in Congress. Yet, perhaps with the exception of Truman's 1948 decision to end racial discrimination in the armed forces, there were sufficient indicators in the social imaginary or ideological domain to allow the change to go forward.

Economic domain

This domain reflects the role of industry and the policies and enforcement of regulations that impact employment, with its consequent reward of economic and social capital. Because intersectionality focuses our attention on the relational dimensions of gender, race, class, and sexuality within the dynamics of this domain, we are better able to see the simultaneous impact of gender, race, class, and sexuality often obscured in one-dimensional data reports that can

imply discrete competing groups. One such benefit is the attention not only to data about income that is associated with wages but the closer attention to the more important category of wealth as a total of a person's accumulated assets (Weber 2010, p.124). This intersectional lens thus allows us to track the impact of the intersections of gender, class, sexuality, and race with greater clarity. We also see how class differently defines systems of race, gender, and sexuality.

For example, it is widely understood that since the 1980s in the United States, both the distribution of wealth and income inequities have increased exponentially so that the rich are much richer, the middle-income groups have lost substantial wealth and income, the poor are much poorer, and the numbers of unemployed are not only dangerously high but disproportionally high across lower-income groups with the fewest resources, with the greatest impact among people of color (Weber 2010, pp. 124–126). Even before the great recession of 2008, 25 % of the U.S. workforce earned poverty-level wages. We also see how class differences are distributed differently across systems of gender, race, and sexuality. For example, women and children, and especially women and children of color, are especially affected by these economic shifts. Women are disproportionately represented in the marked increase in "non-standard" work, which is other than full-time and thus without benefits such as health care. Nor do such statistics indicate the unpaid hours of women who care for children and households in addition to doing income-producing work. In 2007, African American households had just 19 % of the average wealth of white households and more than twice the percentage of households with negative net worth as white families (29.4 % compared to 13 %) (Mishel et al. 2007, as cited in Weber 2010, p. 71). The impact for women of color in such categories is regularly the most extreme, and single-parent mothers of color and their children are the most at risk of living in poverty in the United States (Weber 2010, p.70).

These dramatic shifts are accompanied by changes in work regulations in the political domain, whose impact on relatively invisible populations has not been widely acknowledged. Consider, for example, the welfare reform that was enacted during the presidency of Bill Clinton and considered by him and many others as a great advance in moving people off welfare lists and into employment. Intersectionality encourages us to ask deeper questions about who benefits and who loses. Because the minimum wage limit was not increased to reflect actual costs for surviving on the income from employment available from unskilled or low-skilled work such as cleaning motel rooms or waitressing, the real consequence for those relatively invisible persons affected by the heralded legislation but not consulted about it was a decline in the quality of life. The benefits went to those who could employ them at these wages, those whose taxes were lowered by the relief to the federal budget, and the politicians who promoted the shift (Weber 2010, p. 113). Others have noted how the welfare program is gendered and racialized. For example, though 1/3 of the women who receive welfare are white, the stereotyped image is of a woman of color who must be required to work because she prefers to live on the dole. Once again we see how a stereotype arising from a prominent national ideology disguises the contradictions of the skill and motivation it takes to survive in poverty, whether one is on welfare or minimally employed (Weber 2010, p. 113). Disparaging descriptors of the most vulnerable—the working poor and those on welfare—as "white trash," "trailer trash," and "welfare queens" illustrate the micro-level effects of macro policies and actions on those whom such stereotypes are intended to describe (Leondar-Wright and Yeskel 2007, p. 309). This relatively recent legislative milestone related to entitlements demonstrates how forcefully those in positions of economic and political dominance draw on core national ideologies such as the ideal of meritocracy or self-determination that are contradicted by the evidence but continue to reproduce a consensus in our social imaginary that those who try hard will succeed and those who do not deserve the economic consequences. For example, a 2005 *New York Times* poll

demonstrated that in the last 20 years the number of Americans who believe the popular American myth of a level meritocratic "playing field" for economic self-determination has increased at the same time that it has become increasingly untrue (New York Times Correspondents 2005).

Power and implications for change

Intersectional theorists identify a complex dynamic of power relations arising in and maintaining these three interdependent domains of power and their related institutions. Through the institutions of each of these domains, the dialectic of dominance and oppression organizes and enacts social (macro) and personal (micro) experience in systems of social identity such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. Intersectionality thus gives us a way of understanding how it is that power as dominance operates so persistently and so effectively to enact the effects of oppression and privilege at social and individual levels in what the theorists describe as matrices of domination. Patricia Hill Collins (2000, pp. 274–275) notes that the theory synthesizes two complementary ways of thinking of power that have implications for change. On the one hand, she suggests that intersectionality describes power as a sort of contest between dialectically related social groups who have competing interests in which dominance is resisted by the activism of those who experience oppression. This perspective emphasizes the importance of "knowledge in developing self-defined, group-based standpoints that, in turn, can foster the type of group solidarity necessary for resisting oppressions" (p. 275). On the other hand, she describes power as "an intangible reality" (p. 274) circulating within various matrices of domination, and individuals find themselves standing in varying relations to this power. This latter understanding helps to explain persons' experiences of the simultaneity of social identities with intersecting experiences of oppression. In various situations, one aspect or another of that simultaneous experience of difference will have more salience due to the dynamic quality of power that shifts the focus of oppression from gender to sexual orientation, for example, or from gender to race. Knowledge that could promote change in this case relies on increasingly self-aware individual agency that informs and supports responses to everyday experiences. Hill Collins suggests that "issues of consciousness" link these complementary ways of imagining power (p. 275). She insists that both ways of imagining power are necessary for an adequate intersectional analysis. This cursory review of the ways power works across macro and micro levels in ideological, political, and economic domains bears out Hill Collins' suggestion that both perspectives are necessary in order to describe the way power insinuates itself societally and inscribes itself in the very personal experience of individuals who find themselves living within the matrices of oppression and domination. Effective resistance, she suggests, will also need to have this dual focus: oppositional knowledge within social groups and critically reflexive agency within individuals participating in or responding to such groups. This dual process of developing oppositional knowledge politically and increased critical self-awareness personally is also reflected in processes of becoming an ally with those who experience oppression, as we see in the extraordinary memoir of Lois Stalvey, *The Education of a WASP* (Stalvey 1970/1989), in which she describes a concurrent journey of increasingly reflexive, personal awareness of white privilege and antiracism activism.

Pedagogy

Resources from colleagues drawing on critical pedagogy help us imagine instructional strategies for taking advantage of intersectional theory in courses addressing issues of privilege and oppression related to forms of difference such as gender, race, class, and sexuality. In particular,

because intersectionality does not collapse the distinct markers of each form of difference when noting their simultaneity, it is important that students learn the historical and cultural factors that have shaped each of these categories of social identity (Ouellett 2011, p. 5).

Given the central role of racial identity for those who developed intersectional theory and the prominence and challenge that racial privilege creates for addressing race and racism in the United States, most literature suggests that learning about racial identity is a good beginning point pedagogically, in part because it helps white students avoid predictable efforts to deflect focusing on racial privilege in favor of some form of subordinated identity. Moreover, as Goodman and Jackson (2012, p. 219) suggest, instruction best proceeds incrementally:

1.   A race-centered, single identity focus,
2.   A race-centered, limited intersectional focus,
3.   A race-centered, intersectional focus, and
4.   A full intersectional focus.

There is unanimity in the literature on intersectional pedagogy that instruction informed by intersectionality related to difference treated oppressively begins with the student's own experience. Because intersectionality presumes that everyone's social identity includes a complex and dynamic mix of privilege and oppression when the full range of social identity is accounted for, instruction will include the goal of helping students become self-aware of their own and others' experiences of this complex and dynamic interplay between privilege and oppression. In other words, intersectional pedagogy suggests that instruction begin from the inside of student's personal experience and move out. All the while, students are reminded that any one aspect of social identity is simultaneously constructed by other systems of identity such as gender, class, and sexuality. At different points one or more aspects such as class or gender may be more salient. This means that students also learn that social identity is dynamic and that definitions of the categories even change over time, rather than being static or unitary. Intersectionality will also ensure that with each system of difference, students will learn to see how such systems function as power relations that reflect and reproduce the three interdependent power domains: ideological, political, and economic. This pedagogical approach is quite focused on developing students' skills in analysis of power and the dialectic between dominance or privilege and oppression. An ethical commitment to advocacy for social justice is the telos of intersectional pedagogy.

Once students are grounded in the complexity of race as a system of social identity, it is good to begin to complicate such identity with another, such as gender. It is critical to describe how the two differences mutually constitute each other and have over time in different ways, with differing implications for privilege and oppression. Research on multiple experiences of subordination with the likely invisibility of one form or another will enrich this gradual attention to intersectional complexity (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach 2008). There are rich narratives, for example, about the often marginalized experience of women of color in the history of the Civil Rights movement or in early feminist theory that presumed the experience of middle- and professional-class white women (Dill & Zambrana 2009, p. 3). It seems likely that case studies and media and novels or short stories offer useful sources for helping students learn to analyze the dynamics of power in the complexity of intersecting social identities within matrices of dominance and oppression. Certainly, it is helpful to invite students to become aware of the particular skills and commitments that effectively shape their serving as allies alongside others experiencing oppression. Intersectionality helps students recognize the priority of addressing their own intersectional

complicity that may be implicated in another's experience of oppression (Bishop 2002; Kendall 2006).

Intersectional analysis of a case

I have now reviewed key analytical perspectives in intersectional theory, including its commitment to social justice; its attention to the simultaneous, mutually constitutive character of social systems such as gender, race, class, and sexuality in the social construction of macro and micro dimensions of social identity; and the ways in which its explicit attention to power at micro and macro levels discloses the effects of interdependent domains of power for shaping identity individually and in social groups. Intersectionality encourages multiple points of analysis that move around perspectives such as gender race, class, and sexuality in order to note how social locations shape the truths we identify as salient (Weber 2010, p. 85). These several intersectional points of analysis will now interrogate the case that opens this article.

Social justice

Intersectionality presumes that the experience of these three women is not simply an anecdotal story about three individuals, but reflects their complex social identities that are dynamically shaped by the formative influence of power through larger ideological, political, and economic domains. It discloses structures and systems that are shaped by public policies and practices that contribute to and reproduce a matrix of domination and privilege. For example, these two young mothers are forced to function in a "catch-22" system that only allows them 2 years of subsidized housing, during which time they are to become economically self-sufficient; yet, their financial support is reduced if they do improve their income. Further, many of the educational opportunities available to women like Maria do not have any guarantee of employment that will be sufficient to cover the costs of caring for herself and her children. Failure is the likely outcome for both Maria and Susan in their efforts to move toward economic self-sufficiency, though the reasons for failure are disguised as personal rather than systemic. This case also suggests how these three women understand themselves and each other via the prevailing ideologies within this matrix that inform the practices and arrangements of these domains of power. Both Claire and Susan have assumptions about the other shaped by their social locations and prevailing ideologies. Claire's privileges are not the result of her witting exploitation of Susan, nor does Maria pursue her opportunity for an educational grant at Susan's expense. The human dignity and worth of these three women are apparent, as are the webs in which they try to make sense of their contexts.

Identity

Susan's self-understanding, especially in relation to Maria's scholarship, illustrates the interrelation of social and personal experiences of identity that allow the larger societal domains of power to insinuate themselves into her individual experience. The insights from women of color who describe the complexity of living within shifting consciousness regarding the simultaneity of subordinated identities gives us a way to begin to imagine Maria's experience as she finds herself the friend of a poor white woman who expects that she should also have access to a scholarship if a poor Latina neighbor does. Susan voices no awareness of the much larger history of racism that shapes the experience of both women. What bonds the

two is their precarious economic vulnerability to the same oppressive regulations and practices and the stress of rearing children without a husband who will share the burden.

Intersectionality helpfully points to the ways in which, for these women, class, race, gender, and sexuality mutually shape each other to yield different self-understandings and experiences that are far from additive in the qualities of oppression and privilege that are present in each woman's life. Intersectionality also gives depth to interpreting the dialectic of domination and privilege so that we not only see it in Claire's class and racial privilege, but we also notice it in the relationship between Susan and Maria, where the complexity of historical oppression and the assumption of class hierarchies create the possibility of a scholarship for Maria, but the invisibility of poor white women means Susan has no such possibility. Claire begins to realize that Susan has knowledge previously invisible to her, knowledge that challenges her self-understanding. Maria has knowledge invisible to both Susan and Claire. Both Maria and Susan have knowledge Claire knows nothing of.

Privilege insinuated in categories of identity also can be spotted, especially in that which is not noticed, which in this case points to heterosexuality. Claire no doubt experienced inequities in her career in the world of banking due to her gender, but her status as a married (heterosexual) woman would have assisted her. Susan and Maria as employable, heterosexual women who are rearing children have particular priority for transitional housing. Few transitional housing programs across the country would define family to include two employable lesbian women rearing children. Women with children are given preference in housing relative to others, but inadequate provision for childcare funding across the country means only a few of these same women can access child care. If Susan's grandmothers were not present, her future and that of her children would be quite different. In addition, men in need of housing who are not rearing children do not have the same priority as single mothers who are caring for their children.

Power

The interdependent domains of power and their related institutions provide perspective and complexity to the experience of the three women in our case. It helps to disclose how their experiences and self-understanding are shaped by a larger set of interwoven cultural assumptions—ideological, political, and economic—as seen from their several distinct social locations. In Claire's story, for example, we overhear the national myth of meritocracy that asserts a level playing field and interprets economic class differences as disclosing an inadequate work ethic. The stereotypes that carry such ideologies prove challenging when Claire sits with Susan, who clearly wants to work. Susan's dilemma gives Claire a glimpse of the contradictions obscured by such ideologies; here is someone who is ready to work hard and who wants to be economically independent but who cannot succeed in part because the "entitlements" Claire finds unnecessary or at least excessive are too inadequate and uncoordinated to give Susan support for the education she needs. We also hear in Claire's comments overtones of the racialized, political debate about citizenship in the United States when Claire wonders if Maria, a Latina, is even a citizen and "entitled" to the scholarship that isn't available for Susan, an Anglo. In a few sentences, we hear how power as dominance works through a convergence of ideology, politics, and economics and distorts her assumptions about how to understand who Susan and Maria are, at least from the vantage point of social class and race. Equally clear is Claire's lack of critical reflexivity about the way power as privilege insinuates her simultaneous experience of gender, race, class, and sexuality vis–à–vis the domains of ideology, politics, and economics.

Susan has also been shaped by the ideological/political/economic rhetoric of "entitlement," as we hear in her reaction to Maria's race-based access to a coveted scholarship.

Susan's feelings about the seeming inequity reflect her different location from Claire's vis-à–vis the systems of gender, race, class, and sexuality. We do not hear that she wishes to deny Maria or all Latin@s the scholarship, only that she cannot imagine how her own desperate situation is any less deserving. Racial difference is foregrounded in the explanation she received. She hears that because she is white, she is not eligible. Like most racially privileged persons in the United States, Susan is not reflective about her racial identity or her racial group. Susan appears unaware that her white racial identity may open an employment door that will be closed to Maria or other women of color. Nor does she know the demographic and statistical data that contributed to the scholarship program benefitting Latinas and African American women because they are nearly twice as likely to be heads of households in poverty as white women. It is curious that Susan does not reflect on her situation through the lens of social class because of her own recent shift from the social status of working poor as a married woman to her current status as a poor, unemployed, single mother. She doesn't wonder about why education is out of reach for so many or why the job training that is available is not likely to lift her or others out of minimum wage status. Although she is living the contradictions obscured by meritocracy, she does not yet demonstrate the oppositional knowledge of one who recognizes herself as participating in a larger matrix of dominance and oppression. If we use Hill Collins's references to types of knowledge, Susan demonstrates neither oppositional awareness nor critical reflexivity related to her social locations.

In a context shaped by white supremacy, it is likely that Maria will be cautious around Susan, knowing how predictably Susan responded to the news of the scholarship through a frame of white privilege and not wanting to weaken their friendship further. We do not know whether Maria is critically reflective about her own social location or about the dialectic of dominance and oppression that shapes the matrix of her life. We do know she has risked trying to claim a new future, and that suggests she has a positive sense of agency.

Intersectionality as a resource for pastoral and practical public theology

As this brief introduction to the resources of intersectional theoretical approaches demonstrates, intersectionality offers multiple resources for augmenting the political efficacy of public pastoral theology for effective change in individual lives and local communities as well as larger public understanding and commitments. Its philosophical underpinnings and its practices are well aligned with those of contemporary pastoral and practical theology. It respects the particular value and possibilities of each life and seeks a context of social justice and love for human beings and social groups. It also clearly names how the dynamics of privilege and oppression function in every human life as well as across social groups. It recognizes the highly fluid rather than unitary nature of identity that is at once vulnerable to oppression and capable of hope and courageous resistance. It acknowledges and seeks effective means of resisting forces that obstruct and distort possibilities for hope and flourishing for all persons. It presumes complex and multiple forms of power as relevant for effective care and respects the importance of analyzing and strategically engaging power in these complex forms.

There are several particularly rich points of convergence in intersectional theory where the current literature of pastoral and practical theology offers helpful contributions and where intersectionality promotes new and positive elaborations. I will briefly note several of these and point to possible lines of connection and development. Given the close attention to embodiment in pastoral and practical theology, the helpful elaboration of the simultaneity of dimensions of social identity as power relations in intersectional theory will provide

further depth to pastoral engagement with persons and social groups around issues of privilege and oppression. Another rich convergence lies in the thoroughgoing way that intersectional theory attends to how power is insinuated in the dynamic complexity of personal identity and social identity and names identity as shaped by power relations that are dynamic and related to struggles for valued social and material goods. Perhaps because intersectionality was developed from the experience of women of color during and after the Civil Rights era in the United States, it offers depth to our understanding of the way experiences of oppression distort human experience at personal and social levels and to our literature on the ways in which sin as an ethical category informs our understanding of the distortions of power at societal, relational, and personal levels. There are clear connections at this point with Womanist theologians such as Townes (2006) and Copeland (2010) and to the earlier work of Farley (1990). Both intersectional approaches and these authors demonstrate unflinchingly how the distortions of oppressive and dehumanizing power are destructive at the level of social identity and in the embodied experience of individual lives.

Intersectional theory also points to a productive line of further research for pastoral and practical theologians seeking to be effective in prompting changes toward social justice in public life. When intersectional theorists point to power as "domains" that operate across public or cultural life, they describe how power as dominance shapes and sustains itself through wider shared social understandings (hegemonic ideologies) as these understandings intersect with political and economic forces to form matrices of oppression out of which social systems such as gender, race, class, and sexuality enact social identity. At one level, this attention to power domains by intersectional theory underscores how it is that what we call sin can have such power, as is reflected in the prior paragraph. It is also true that recognizing this formative role of power as it shapes our social imaginations suggests possibilities for effective change that contributes to enlarging love and justice.

Intersectionality names three interdependent power domains—ideology (hegemony), politics, and economics— noting how each contributes to and amplifies the reach of the other two via the institutions that are related to them, such as education, media, government and law, and "market" and employment regulations. In doing so, these power domains point toward social science research around social imagination that Taylor (2004) articulates well as "social imaginaries" (pp. 24–30).[2] Taylor describes social imaginaries as informal, collective, and common sense yet powerfully operative understandings of how things are and how they ought to be. That is, they are at once perceived as factual and normative. They shape a collective sense of ourselves and our interrelation to each other as a people with certain largely real and implicitly understood boundaries for behavior. Internal to such imaginaries would be the sorts of understandings that Bourdieu and Passerton (1977) refer to as "social and cultural capital," that is, implicit hierarchies in relations and practices.

Taylor's description of social imaginaries indicates they are malleable. He describes a highly interactive process by which a new idea related to human communities may be promoted by a much smaller group, and gradually those ideas are performed in social practices that in turn enact modifications to the ideas. Over time, the shape of the social imaginary is altered by multiple groups, usually apart from their concerted cooperation. In social science the term "drift" describes how the accumulation of practices gradually gives direction to a social imaginary without any necessary cultural reflection on the particular direction (Dalton & Simmons 2010, p. 15). Drift can explain accumulated distortions such as we see with ecological degradation, or it can suggest how diverse practices over time contribute to a tipping point in a social imaginary toward a new direction, such as seems

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[2] I am indebted to Genny Rowley, whose 2013 dissertation pointed me to the work of Taylor.

evident now in the growing support in U.S. culture for confirming the social and legal status of LGBTQ relationships.

The fact that social imaginaries are performatively shaped and malleable invites us to take seriously the encouragement of practical theologians such as Graham (1996) to attend to the influence of interventions in social contexts by developing practices that contribute to altering local as well as larger cultural understanding. Patricia Hill Collins, for example, notes the complementary efficacy of concurrently supporting oppositional knowledge among participants in social groups and supporting critical reflexivity within individuals regarding their personal experience of power relations in systems such as gender, race, class, and sexuality.

Pastoral theologians are accustomed to the sort of reflective engagement in the "messiness" of lived experience that Graham's encouragement and Hill Collins' proposals suggest. A critique of intersectional theory suggests that its methodology does not yet demonstrate fluency in its actual engagement with lived experience (Nash 2008). Lynn Weber's recent work would be an exception to that critique (2010). Pastoral theologians may add value to intersectional theory as we develop skill in using its analytical power to illumine the local and cultural contexts of ministry.

Not surprisingly, intersectional theorists do not engage the ways religious affiliation is shaped by dominance and privilege, nor do they explore the ways religion can be a resource in support of positive changes in social imaginaries. Religion is cited as one of the institutions related to power in the ideological domain. It is clear that religion is easily distorted in support of terrible destructiveness. However, Charles Taylor notes that even in highly secular contemporary contexts, religion is also a resource for shaping social imaginaries via personal and public references to its value. Certainly there are multiple pastoral and practical theological resources that augment practices and interventions that seek to enlarge love and justice. Similarly, the malleable and performative character of social imaginaries invites our deeper attention to the role of hope in revising and sustaining human behavior via social contexts (Lester 1995). This is also suggestive for ways we may draw on formation literature as contributing to the possibilities for change in social imaginaries.

Conclusion

Pastoral and practical theologians who seek to support political change find in intersectional theory a valuable resource for deepening and sometimes opening new lines of research and constructive engagement. There are ample points of convergence with current literature that also offer added value to intersectional theorists as well as immediate mutual benefit in our shared commitment to emancipatory praxis.

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