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Intersectionality as Critical Inquiry

So much has happened since the 1990s that the case *for* intersectionality no longer needs to be made. A surprising array of academics, activists, policymakers, digital workers, and independent intellectuals recognize intersectionality as an important form of critical inquiry and praxis (Collins and Bilge 2016). Both within and outside the academy, administrators, teachers, social workers, counselors, and public health professionals have increasingly used intersectional analyses to shed light on important social problems concerning education, health, employment, and poverty (Berger and Guidroz 2009; Dill and Zambrana 2009). Grassroots community activists, social media activists, and social movement participants continue to draw upon intersectionality's ideas to shape their political projects. In the United States, for example, intersectional ideas reappear within the social justice movements of African Americans; women; undocumented immigrants; lesbian,

gay, bisexual, transgender, queer (LGBTQ) groups; poor people; and religious minorities (see, e.g., Terriquez 2015). Ironically, white nationalists also draw upon a variation of intersectional analysis in defending their claims that white, working-class American men constitute a neglected minority. Intersectionality's reach is not confined to the United States. In a global context, grassroots and human rights advocates find that intersectionality's focus on the interconnectedness of categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, age, and ability sheds new light on how local social inequities articulate with global social phenomena (Collins and Bilge 2016, 88–113).

Since the 1990s, intersectionality has increasingly influenced scholarship, research, and curricular choices in colleges and universities. A copious body of scholarship within the humanities and the social sciences now self-identifies as intersectional, with anthologies emphasizing different aspects of intersectionality itself as well as various configurations of intersectionality's core categories of analysis (Grzanka 2014; Dill 2002; Lutz, Vivar, and Supik 2011; Berger and Guidroz 2009; Andersen and Collins 2016). Scholarship informed by intersectionality can now be found within both interdisciplinary fields and more traditional academic disciplines (Collins 2017a; Lutz, Vivar, and Supik 2011; May 2015). However imperfectly conceptualized and applied diversity requirements may be within colleges and corporations, they constitute one outcome of intersectionality's impact. Scholars of intersectionality have generated several monographs that explore these and other aspects of intersectionality as a field of inquiry and praxis (Carastathis 2016; Collins and Bilge 2016; Hancock 2016; May 2015; Wiegman 2012).

Intersectionality seems to be here to stay, at least for now. Yet the speed and spread of intersectionality, and the heterogeneous forms it now takes, point to new definitional dilemmas concerning intersectionality's current status and future prospects (Collins 2015). Intersectionality cannot rest on its past accomplishments and current status. Instead, the time seems right to analyze what intersectionality is, what it is not, and what it might become. Current debates within intersectionality provide much-needed critical commentary about its definitional dilemmas. Just as intersectionality is broad and complex, critical commentary about intersectionality within scholarly venues, the popular press, and digital spaces is similarly diverse. Here areas of discussion encompass varying perspectives on intersectionality's origins, the partiality of intersectionality's growing list of categories, whether intersectionality is a theory or a methodology, intersectionality's ties to social justice work, and even whether we are in or should move into a

post-intersectionality phase. Given intersectionality's broad scope, consensus among its practitioners is likely to remain elusive. Instead, identifying important avenues of investigation within intersectionality that can accommodate heterogeneous points of view may prove to be more productive.

Thinking through intersectionality's theoretical contours constitutes an important next step in its development. Because intersectionality straddles traditions of social action and academic scholarship, it is uniquely positioned to develop critical theoretical analyses of the social world. Intersectionality can develop a critical social theory that reflects the wide array of ideas and actors that currently fall under its expansive umbrella. Yet it cannot do so without thinking systematically about the contours of critical social theory as well as its own theoretical knowledge and theorizing practices. As a work in progress, intersectionality is a critical social theory in the making, one that may already be doing substantial theoretical work without being recognized as such.

In this chapter, I investigate how intersectionality's practitioners conceptualize and use intersectionality's ideas. I am less concerned with the content of intersectional knowledge than with ways of thinking that people use in creating such knowledge.[1] Using this approach, I identify important thinking tools that provide a cognitive foundation for intersectionality as a critical social theory in the making. Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) provide a useful starting point for identifying these tools. They characterize intersectionality as an analytical sensibility whose meaning emerges through use. They contend that "what makes an analysis intersectional is not its use of the term 'intersectionality,' nor its being situated in a familiar genealogy, nor its drawing on lists of standard citations. Rather, what makes an analysis intersectional . . . is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power" (795). This definition suggests several important questions that inform the arguments in this book. What exactly is an "intersectional way of thinking"? Does this mean that intersectional scholars use special cognitive tools? Or that they use conventional forms of critical analysis in new ways or toward different ends? Is the issue of sameness and difference essential to intersectionality? Significantly, how do power relations inform intersectionality's theoretical content and the processes used to develop that knowledge?[2]

I explore these questions throughout this book, yet in this chapter, I lay a foundation for examining them by discussing the use of metaphoric, heuristic, and paradigmatic thinking within intersectionality as a field of inquiry.[3] I first examine how the metaphoric use of intersectionality facilitates a new

view of social relations as interconnected entities. The metaphor of intersectionality is simultaneously a new way of conceptualizing power relations and a thinking tool that draws upon the power of metaphors in the process of theorizing. Next, I examine intersectionality's heuristic thinking—namely, how using intersectionality as rule of thumb or shortcut for thinking provides an important tool for problem solving. Intersectionality aims to explain the social world, and heuristic thinking provides an accessible route for people who utilize intersectionality to address specific social problems. I move on to examine how intersectionality's core constructs and guiding premises contribute to paradigm shifts concerning power and social inequality. These discussions explore the thinking tools or processes that people use to produce intersectionality itself. Metaphoric, heuristic, and paradigmatic thinking map the ways that people enter into, respond to, and shape intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry. Collectively, they describe a conceptual foundation or cognitive architecture for developing intersectionality as a critical social theory.

Intersectionality as a Metaphor

Kimberlé Crenshaw had no way of knowing that she was naming intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis when, in the early 1990s, she published her two groundbreaking articles on intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989, 1991). Crenshaw's scholarly articles constitute an important turning point in the shifting relationships between activist and academic communities (see, e.g., Collins and Bilge 2016, 65–77). Social movements in the mid-twentieth century pushed for institutional transformation in housing, education, employment, and health care. Transforming educational institutions and the knowledge they embodied was central to these initiatives. Indigenous peoples, African Americans, women, LGBTQ people, Latinos/as, and similarly subordinated groups challenged both the substance of knowledge about their experiences and the power arrangements within primary schools, high schools, colleges, and universities that catalyzed such knowledge. Many such groups produced oppositional or resistant knowledge that was grounded in their own experiences and that challenged prevailing interpretations of them (see chapter 3). Higher education was an important site for social transformation. Calls for transforming curricular practices within the academy stimulated an array of programs that embarked on a similar mission of institutional transformation (Collins and Bilge 2016, 77–81; Dill

and Zambrana 2009). Crenshaw's naming of intersectionality tapped into these important processes of institutional transformation with the academy.

Within contemporary neoliberal sensibilities, the commitment to the idea of social transformation within mid-twentieth-century social movements can be hard to understand. Yet a broader understanding of the meaning of resistance to subordinated people suggests that Black people, indigenous peoples, women, Latinx, LGBTQ people, differently abled people, religious and ethnic minorities, and stateless people continue to see transforming social institutions as necessary. Claims for social transformation can seem to be idealistic and naive, yet with hindsight, aspirations for social transformation in prior eras inform contemporary realities. Specifically, many of the visible changes within colleges and universities over the past several decades reflect prior efforts at institutional transformation (Dill 2009; Mihesuah and Wilson 2004; Parker, Samantrai, and Romero 2010).

In a 2009 interview, two decades after publishing her signature articles, Crenshaw reflected on the experiences that led her to use the term *intersectionality* within the broader social conditions of the times. For Crenshaw, her activism in college and law school revealed the inadequacies of both antiracism and feminist perspectives, limitations that left both political projects unable to fully address the social problems that each aimed to remedy. There seemed to be no language that could resolve conflicts between antiracist social movements that were, in Crenshaw's words, "deeply sexist and patriarchal," and feminist activism, where "race reared its head in a somewhat parallel way" (Guidroz and Berger 2009, 63). For Crenshaw, informed social action within both movements required new angles of vision. This particular social problem propelled Crenshaw's search for provisional language that she could use to analyze and redress the limitations of mono-categorical thinking regarding both race and gender. Crenshaw describes what she had in mind when she introduced the term *intersectionality*:

> That was the activist engagement that brought me to this work. And *my own use of the term "intersectionality" was just a metaphor* [italics added]. I'm amazed at how it gets over- and underused; sometimes I can't even recognize it in the literature anymore. I was simply looking at the way all these systems of oppression overlap. But more importantly, how in the process of that structural convergence rhetorical politics and identity polities—based on the idea that systems of subordination do not overlap—would abandon issues and causes and people who actually were affected by overlapping systems of subordination. I've always been interested

in both the structural convergence and the political marginality. That's how I came into it. (Guidroz and Berger 2009, 65)

For Crenshaw, intersectionality named the structural convergence among intersecting systems of power that created blind spots in antiracist and feminist activism. Crenshaw counseled that antiracist and feminist movements would be compromised as long as they saw their struggles as separate and not intertwined. Significantly, racism and sexism not only fostered social inequalities, they marginalized individuals and groups that did not fit comfortably within race-only, gender-only mono-categorical frameworks. Women of color remained politically marginalized within both movements, an outcome that both reflected the harm done by racism and sexism, and limited the political effectiveness of both movements. Crenshaw's understanding of the term *intersectionality* is important for subsequent use of the term. Her work suggests that, from its inception, the idea of intersectionality worked in multiple registers of recognizing the significance of social structural arrangements of power, how individual and group experiences reflect those structural intersections, and how political marginality might engender new subjectivities and agency (Collins and Bilge 2016, 71–77).

By now it is widely accepted that *intersectionality* is the term that has stuck. Of all the words that Crenshaw could have selected, and of all the idioms that might have resonated with intersectionality's adherents, why did this specific term resonate with so many people when Crenshaw first used it? Crenshaw's comment that her use of the term *intersectionality* was "just a metaphor" provides an important clue.

Many people think of metaphors as literary devices that are confined to fiction and essays. Yet metaphors are also important in shaping how people understand and participate in social relations. People from all walks of life use metaphors every day. As a foundation of thinking and action, metaphors help people understand and experience one kind of thing in terms of another. A metaphor can spark an instant sense of understanding, fostering an immediate sense of the formerly unknown in terms of the known.[4] In essence, the capacity to think and act is metaphorical in nature (Trout 2010, 3). As metaphor, intersectionality named an ongoing communicative process of trying to understand race in terms of gender, or gender in terms of class. Rather than following the chain of metaphors (race is like and unlike gender), the metaphor of intersectionality provided a shortcut that built on existing sensibilities in order to see interconnections.

Cultural theorist Stuart Hall provides another clue as to why intersectionality as a particular metaphor travelled so quickly. In an article published in the 1990s, Hall argues that metaphors are often linked to social transformation, ways that people can move from the familiar to imagining the unfamiliar. Hall posits that metaphors of social transformation must do at least two things: "They allow us to imagine what it would be like when prevailing cultural values are challenged and transformed, the old social hierarchies are overthrown, old standards and norms disappear . . . and new meanings and values, social and cultural configurations begin to appear. However, such metaphors must also have analytic value. They must somehow provide ways of thinking about the relation between the social and symbolic domains in this process of transformation" (Hall 1996b, 287).

As a metaphor of social transformation, intersectionality invokes both elements. It arrived in the midst of ongoing struggles to resist social inequalities brought about by racism, sexism, colonialism, capitalism, and similar systems of power. The metaphor of intersectionality could move among and through these forms of domination, providing a snapshot view of their sameness and difference as a way to see their interconnections. Intersectionality as metaphor did not proscribe what social transformation would look like, or even the best way of getting there. Instead, using intersectionality as a metaphor provided analytic value in linking social structures and the ideas that reproduce them—in Hall's terms, the ties between the social and symbolic domains of social change. For people who, like Crenshaw, were interested in social transformation, the metaphor of intersectionality expressed the aspirations of the time.

Crenshaw's metaphor was recognizable to many people because it invoked the tangible, spatial relations of everyday life. Everyone is located in physical space, and everyone has had to follow a path or move through an intersection of some sort. People could pick up the metaphor, imagining different kinds of pathways and crossroads, and use intersectionality as a metaphor to understand very different things. The idea of an intersection where two or more pathways meet is a familiar idea in physical, geographic space. The roads or pathways need not be straight or paved to invoke this sense of a spatial intersection. All cultures have intersections or places where people cross paths, whether superhighways or barely marked paths in a forest. Moreover, the places where people cross paths are often meeting places, spaces where different kinds of people engage one another. Being in an intersection or moving through one is a familiar experience. This spatial metaphor also invokes the idea of seeing several possible pathways from the

vantage point within the intersection, and being faced with the decision of which path to take. In this sense, the spatial metaphor itself is open-ended and subject to many interpretations. Intersectionality as a metaphor worked so well because it was simultaneously familiar yet highly elastic.

This spatial metaphor that could be seen in the material world implicitly advanced a more abstract theoretical claim about social structure—namely, that the places where systems of power converged potentially provide better explanations for social phenomena than those that ignored such intersections. Racism and sexism may be conceptualized as distinctive structural phenomena, yet examining them from where they intersect provides new angles of vision of each system of power as well as how they cross and diverge from one another. Politically, the idea of intersectionality also worked. The term *intersectionality* encapsulated the convergence of multiple social justice projects and long-standing critical practices within academia.

Crenshaw's use of the term *intersectionality* as a metaphor for structuring her argument tapped into this power of metaphor to provide a snapshot view of complex social relations during a time of considerable social change. Significantly, Crenshaw's metaphor was not confined to explaining racism, sexism, and similar systems of power. The metaphor of intersectionality emerged in the context of solving social problems brought on by multiple and seemingly separate systems of power. In her careful reading of Crenshaw's signature articles on intersectionality, philosopher Anna Carastathis (2014) examines how Crenshaw used intersectionality as a "provisional" concept to frame her argument about resistance to oppression. For those involved in activist projects, intersectionality enabled those who used the term to understand, for example, a familiar racism in terms of an unfamiliar sexism, or a familiar violence against women of color as individuals in terms of a less familiar analysis of state-sanctioned violence of colonialism. Using intersectionality as a metaphor provided a ready-made yet open-ended framework for making meaning of the social world. In this sense, intersectionality as metaphor offered an invitation to an array of social actors who were thinking about similar things within different social locations and from varying vantage points.

The significance of this particular metaphor lies in using these familiar ideas about physical space in order to apply to broader, less visible symbolic understandings of race, class, gender. Using intersectionality as a metaphor provided new angles of vision on each system of power, how they cross and diverge from one another, as well as political possibilities that were suggested by this new analysis. In this sense, the metaphor of intersectionality as a crossroads works well as a mental map that encourages people to look toward particular intersections in order to guide their intellectual work and political practice. It also fosters a new view of the social world that can be seen from working within particular intersections. It encompasses ideas about human agency and intentionality in a space of indecision.

When Crenshaw dismissed intersectionality as just a metaphor, she could not foresee the impact of this particular metaphor in informing critical inquiry and social change. Instead, Crenshaw's use of intersectionality seemingly provided the right metaphor at the right time. As intersectionality has grown, the importance of its metaphoric thinking has become clearer. Crenshaw's use of intersectionality as a metaphor was not incidental to intersectionality's subsequent development, but rather proved to be a fundamental pillar within intersectionality's cognitive architecture and critical thinking.

Why Metaphors Matter

If naming the ideas that intersectionality invokes were as simple as choosing from a predetermined array of terms that had already undergone academic scrutiny, it would make sense to debate intersectionality's merits in this universe of alternative terms. Intersectionality may not be the best metaphor for explaining social phenomena, but it is the one that has persisted. Some scholars recognize the significance of intersectionality as metaphor, yet offer alternatives to it that seemingly do a better job of explaining social reality. For example, Ivy Ken's (2008) use of sugar as a metaphor aims for a more historically grounded, fluid understanding of intersectionality. Mapping how sugar as idea and product weaves throughout historical and contemporary relationships of capitalism, racism, and sexism, Ken's metaphor of sugar is an innovative, alternative entry point into the constellation of ideas referenced by intersectionality. Sugar may be a better fit for the ideas that intersectionality invokes, but pragmatically, would it have worked as well?

The puzzle to be explained here concerns why the *term* intersectionality continues to resonate with so many people as a preferred way of conceptualizing an amorphous set of *ideas*. Can sugar as metaphor do the same metaphoric work as intersectionality? Conceptual metaphor theory helps explain why intersectionality as a metaphor persists.[5] For one, intersectionality as metaphor provides a cognitive device for thinking about social inequality within power relations. It asks people to think beyond familiar race-only or gender-only perspectives in order to take a new look at social

problems. For another, intersectionality as metaphor provides a framework for drawing upon what people already know about racism to learn about sexism and vice versa. Significantly, as metaphor, intersectionality suggests that racism and sexism are connected, the first step in establishing conceptual correspondences between these two constructs. In this sense, using intersectionality as a metaphor breaks down mono-categorical analyses to focus on the conceptual correspondences or relationships among racism and sexism. And this process need not end with just race and gender. Crenshaw's article named a starting point for developing conceptual correspondences.

Intersectionality may not have started out as a core conceptual metaphor for understanding social inequality, but over time, it has increasingly functioned as one. Significantly, the use of metaphor has been a crucial part of social theorizing itself. Just as creating social meanings in everyday life relies upon metaphors, theoretical knowledge also relies in some fashion on metaphorical thinking in constructing knowledge. In her classic work *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge?*, feminist philosopher Sandra Harding examines how metaphors have played an important role in modeling nature and in specifying the appropriate domain of a theory (1991, 84–85). Harding points out that metaphors are important dimensions of doing social theory, the case, for example, of imagining society in metaphorical terms—society as a machine, an organism, or a computer—and by implication, changing the core metaphor of a field changes its theoretical orientation to the social world. Originally offered in the context of critical science studies, this critical perspective advanced within feminist philosophy preceded more recent attention to metaphors as an important dimension of social theorizing (Abbott 2004; Swedberg 2014). For example, in his volume *The Art of Social Theory*, Richard Swedberg remarks on these connections between metaphors in everyday life and within the sophisticated process of theorizing: "Metaphors abound in everyday language, in the arts as well as in the sciences. Their power can be immense, as evidenced by the metaphor of the brain as a computer. This metaphor is generally seen as having helped cognitive science come into being" (2014, 89). In this sense, Crenshaw's reflection that intersectionality is *just* a metaphor underestimates the power of conceptual metaphors for critical analysis.

Intersectionality's metaphor of the connectedness of different systems of power has proven to be an important one for theorizing power relations and political identities. For example, Norocel's (2013) study of the radical right populist movement in Sweden provides an important example of an explicit use both of conceptual metaphor theory and of intersectionality as a

metaphor. Norocel examines how the radical right used the idea of *Folkhem* (the home of [Swedish] people) as a conceptual metaphor to ground their political project. As a metaphor, *Folkhem* helped structure radical right masculinities, specifically heteronormative masculinities, at the intersection of gender, class, and race. Norocel identifies the significance of conceptual metaphor theory for this project: "The choice of a certain conceptual metaphor in a specific social context . . . has a crucial impact on how we structure reality, determining what is explained and . . . what is left outside this framework of intelligibility, thereby highlighting the various power relations at work in that particular discourse . . . . In other words, the analysis of metaphors needs to be undertaken whilst bearing in mind the very discourse in which they are embedded" (9). In Norocel's study, the idea of gender, class, race, and sexuality provided a framing metaphor that could be extended to explain a political phenomenon in a specific national context.

Feminist theorist Chela Sandoval also recognizes the significance of metaphors for theorizing power relations. In a section titled "Power in Metaphors" in her signature book *Methodology of the Oppressed* (2000), Sandoval describes how different metaphors highlight important distinctions between hierarchical and postmodern understandings of power. Imagining power relations as a hierarchical pyramid differs dramatically from imagining power relations through a flat, spatial metaphor of centers and margins. Sandoval notes that the shift away from a hierarchical, "sovereign model" of power enables power to be figured as a force that circulates horizontally:

> As in the previous, sovereign, pyramidal model of power, the location of every citizen-subject can be distinctly mapped on this postmodern, flattened, horizontal power grid according to attributes as race, class, gender, age, or sexual orientation, but this reterritorialized circulation of power redifferentiates, groups, and sorts identities differently. Because they are horizontally located, it appears as if such politicized identities-as-positions can equally access their own racial-, sexual-, national-, or gender-unique forms of social power. Such constituencies are then perceived as speaking "democratically" to and against each other in a lateral, horizontal—not pyramidal—exchange, although from *spatially* differing geographic, class, age, sex, race, or gender locations. (72–73)

This metaphoric shift has important implications for intersectionality (Collins 2018). Intersectionality as a core conceptual metaphor has travelled well, stimulating much innovative work within intersectionality. Yet the use of metaphoric thinking for intersectional analysis raises several questions. Do

some aspects of intersectionality as metaphor work better in addressing certain social problems and less well with others? What experiences would people need to bring to the metaphoric use of intersectionality for it to have meaning?

Critics raise a valid point about the limits of intersectionality as a metaphor when used to invoke the image of a literal crossroads. In her signature book *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), Chicana feminist writer Gloria Anzaldúa expands upon the metaphor of intersectionality as a literal crossroads managed by traffic cops to that of the borderlands as a meeting place. The borderlands is simultaneously a place, reflecting the social relations of the physical border that influenced Anzaldúa's experiences growing up in south Texas. In this sense, borderlands are structural places that reflect hierarchical power relations and lie outside acceptable categories of belonging (Yuval-Davis 2011). Borderland spaces show the working of hierarchical power relations, or the sedimented effects of, in Sandoval's words, a "sovereign, pyramidal model of power." But Anzaldúa's borderland is simultaneously a way of describing the experiences of navigating marginal, liminal, and outsider within spaces that are created by multiple kinds of borders. This is the potential for "democratic" exchanges within borderland or intersectional spaces.

Anzaldúa's work illustrates the possibilities and limitations of spatial metaphors of power. As AnaLouise Keating points out, Anzaldúa is generally defined as a "Chicana lesbian-feminist" author, but Anzaldúa described herself more broadly as being on various thresholds, simultaneously inside and outside multiple collectivities. Anzaldúa both maintains multiple allegiances and locates herself in multiple worlds:

> "Your allegiance is to La Raza, the Chicano movement," say the members of my race. "Your allegiance is to the Third World," say my Black and Asian friends. "Your allegiance is to your gender, to women," say the feminists. Then there's my allegiance to the Gay movement, to the socialist revolution, to the New Age, to magic and the occult. And there's my affinity of literature, to the world of the artist. 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. (Keating 2009a, 2)

Anzaldúa uses her experiences with multiple groups as the foundation of her analysis, yet she is less interested in finding freedom by extracting herself from multiple groups in order to find herself, but rather in understanding how her sameness and difference across multiple groups fosters

new experiences of self. As Keating describes this positioning, "Although each group makes membership contingent on its own often exclusionary set of rules and demands, Anzaldúa refuses all such terms without rejecting the people or groups themselves" (2009a, 2). For Anzaldúa, the borderlands suggests a place not simply to house experiences but also a way of working, both politically and intellectually.[6]

Intersectionality may be the metaphor that has taken hold as the descriptor to describe the field itself, yet the spatial metaphor of the borderland also deepens understandings of intersecting power relations. Anzaldúa's work links experiences, spatial metaphors, power, and political engagement, signaling an important approach to critical theorizing. In discussing the significance of Gloria Anzaldúa's work within intersectionality, Patrick R. Grzanka describes Anzaldua's "borderland" metaphor as signifying a geographic, affective, cultural, and political landscape that cannot be explained by binary logic (black/white, gay/straight, Mexican/American, etc.) or even the notion of liminality, that is, *the space between*. For Anzaldúa, the borderlands are a very *real* space of actual social relations that cannot be captured within existing social theory. Grzanka describes the connections between the metaphor of intersectionality and that of the borderlands: "Anzaldúa's work exemplifies the concept of intersectionality perhaps better than the traffic intersection metaphor so central to the field and to Crenshaw's initial articulation of the concept, because Anzaldúa denies any logic that presumes there were ever discreet dimensions of difference that collided at some particular point: in the borderlands, mixing, hybridity, unfinished synthesis, and unpredictable amalgamation were always already happening, and are forever ongoing" (2014, 106–107). In this sense, the concept of the borderlands illustrates the power of metaphor that, in this case, not only complements but also deepens intersectionality's metaphoric posture.

As metaphors, neither intersectionality nor the idea of the borderlands provide coherence, consistency, or closure. Both travel, sometimes working in tandem for some projects and apart in others. They illustrate that when a concept is structured by a metaphor, it is only partially structured and can be extended in some ways but not in others (Trout 2010, 13). Metaphors provide a holistic mental picture of interrelated phenomena as well as new insights into and angles of vision on social relations. Heuristics offer tools for investigating the ideas that emerge through intersectionality's metaphoric thinking. Heuristics provide thinking tools that are typically used to solve problems. They are versatile and can be applied to an array of specific questions and concerns.

Intersectionality's Heuristic Thinking

Heuristics are techniques for social problem solving, learning, and discovery. As such, heuristic thinking informs how people approach old and new puzzles, be they social problems in the social world or puzzles of how to do better scholarship. In their everyday use, heuristics include techniques such as using a rule of thumb, making educated guesses, and relying upon common sense. This use of heuristics draws from everyday experiences with an eye toward shaping action strategies in everyday life. In its more technical sense, heuristics also provide a set of assumptions or provisional lenses that can be used to solve social problems within an academic discipline or field of study. According to Abbott, "heuristics is the science of finding new ways to solve problems" (2004, 81).

In essence, the metaphoric use of intersectionality facilitates new angles of vision on many topics. It suggests that shifting from seeing social phenomena as separate and distinct to seeing their interconnections would be beneficial. In contrast, using intersectionality as a heuristic points toward action strategies for *how* to move forward in solving social problems and in grappling with existing puzzles. Heuristics inform the questions for a particular study, for a plan of political action, and for solving problems in everyday life. Heuristics offer guidance, as rules of thumb or common practices, for social action. The common sense, taken-for-granted rules of intersectionality as a heuristic thus provide a preliminary vocabulary for intersectionality's scholarship and praxis.

Using intersectionality as a heuristic has facilitated the rethinking of existing knowledge—namely, social problems such as violence, social institutions such as work and family, and important social constructs such as identity. Kimberlé Crenshaw's classic article "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Color" (1991) illustrates the heuristic use of intersectionality for rethinking existing knowledge concerning violence as a social problem. Crenshaw's immediate concern lay in analyzing violence against women of color, with the goal of strengthening grassroots and legal responses to it. Lacking the term *intersectionality*, Crenshaw draws upon the existing heuristic of race/class/gender as interconnected phenomena as a starting point for problem solving concerning violence. In this regard, her approach illustrates the use of intersectionality (the race/class/gender heuristic) as a way to generate usable knowledge for social science as an instrument for "social problem solving" (Lindblom and Cohen 1979, 4).

Yet, in the context of using the race/class/gender heuristic, she recognizes its limitations for her particular project and adapts it for her specific context. Crenshaw kept the idea of intersectionality, yet incorporated categories that were a better fit for the women of color under consideration. Specifically, Crenshaw underemphasizes class as an explanatory category that explains violence against women of color. Instead, she includes the category of "immigrant status," itself a construct invoking discourses of nation (citizenship status) and ethnicity (culture as proxy for color, race, and often religion). Via this adaptation, Crenshaw argues that the provisional combination of race, gender, and immigrant status better fit the experiences of the group in question as well as the social problems with violence that they encountered. Yet neither the existing race/class/gender framework nor the new framework that emphasizes race, gender, and immigrant status was by itself sufficient. Crenshaw then offers the term *intersectionality* as a way to respond to the challenge of solving social problems that could not be incorporated within the race/class/gender rubric. This shift from race/class/gender to intersectionality illustrates the utility of heuristics—ironically, in this case, in naming intersectionality itself.

Certainly analyses of violence, as well as the intersectional categories that have been used to study it, have expanded tremendously since Crenshaw's signature article. Because violence against women has been such a powerful catalyst for intersectionality itself, intersectional analyses of this topic are not only widespread but have also informed political activism and public policy (Collins and Bilge 2016, 48–55). Analyses of violence that draw upon intersectionality reappear across a wide array of topics, such as the nation-state violence of militarism and war (Peterson 2007), the treatment of sexual violence and ethnicity in international criminal law (Buss 2009), and hate speech itself as part of relations of violence (Matsuda et al. 1993). Solutions to violence against women remain unlikely if violence against women is imagined through mono-categorical lenses such as the gender lenses of male perpetrators and female victims, or racial lenses that elevate police violence against African American men over domestic violence against African American women. Viewing violence through an intersectional lens potentially creates new forms of transversal politics to confront it (Collins 2017b).

Using intersectionality as a heuristic has facilitated the rethinking of social institutions such as work, family, the media, education, health, and similar fundamental social institutions through what seem to be fairly straightforward heuristic approaches. One strength of heuristic thinking concerns its ease of use for criticizing existing knowledge and posing new questions.

For example, when it comes to the study of work, asking simple questions such as, "Does this apply to women?" or "Is slave labor included in the definition of work?" or "Why are white male workers the focus of studies of work?" identifies areas of overemphasis and underemphasis in understandings of work. The experiences of a particular group of working-class, white, male industrial workers or middle-class, white, male corporate managers and executives have garnered the lion's share of scholarly attention. What are the effects of treating findings on this particular group as universal on work-related scholarship? The effectiveness of heuristic thinking lies in its simplicity—its use shifts established perspectives on scholarship and practice. The heuristic of asking how an intersectional framework would shift what is considered to be fixed, and fix what has been in flux, signals a sea change in how to do scholarship.

The greatly changed scholarship on work within sociology after the introduction of intersectionality illustrates this process. First and foremost, the paid work of a particular group of men working in specific jobs within Western societies is no longer assumed to be coterminous with the meaning of work. Intersectionality has opened the door to redefining work. Specifically, work constitutes one important concept that contains highly nuanced scholarship on how labor market organization, occupational segregation, work/family balance, and aspects of paid and unpaid reproductive labor underpin complex social inequalities. These topics have provided an especially rich terrain for intersectional scholarship from the race/class/gender period through contemporary analyses of global capitalism (Ong 1999). Reflecting the social movement origins of race/class/gender studies, intersectional scholarship on work in the 1980s examined segmented labor markets and the ways in which women and people of color were shunted to bad jobs and dirty work (Amott and Matthaei 1991). Building on analyses of capitalism that examined how the good jobs and bad jobs of labor markets were organized using social inequalities of gender, race, and economic class, studies of domestic work in particular opened the door to showing how work was central to the exploitation of women and men of color (Glenn 2002; Hondagneu-Sotelo 2001; Rollins 1985). This foundational scholarship on work foreshadowed important directions within contemporary social science research, such as intersections of race and gender in the labor market (Browne and Misra 2003), how workplace desegregation has proceeded in the private sector (Tomaskovic-Devey and Stainback 2012), the status of African American professional men in the workplace (Wingfield and Alston 2012), and the emerging contours of paid reproductive labor (Duffy 2007).

Using intersectionality as a heuristic has also proven to be especially valuable in rethinking the important social constructs of identity and subjectivity. The now commonsense idea that individual identity is shaped by multiple factors whose saliency changes from one social context to the next owes much to intersectionality's ease of use as a heuristic. On a basic level, an individual need no longer ask, "Am I Black or am I a woman or am I a lesbian first?" The answer of being *simultaneously* Black *and* a woman *and* a lesbian expands this space of subjectivity to encompass multiple aspects of individual identity. Rather than a fixed, essentialist identity that a person carries from one situation to the next, individual identities are now seen as differentially performed from one social context to the next (Butler 1990). The process of crafting a unique sense of self that rests on multiple possibilities generated new questions about how those identities were interconnected and co-forming, rather than how they were or should be ranked.[7]

Intersectionality is not a theory of identity, but many scholars and intellectual activists understand it through this lens primarily because the heuristic use of intersectionality as applied to the topic of identity is commonplace. Given the inordinate attention devoted to identity and its seeming association with intersectionality, returning to Stuart Hall's work, written about the same time as Butler's, may be helpful. Unlike Butler, Hall contends that the performative nature of identity and the frameworks of social structures *both* matter: "Identity is not a set of fixed attributes, the unchanging essence of the inner self, but a constantly shifting process of *positioning*. We tend to think of identity as taking us back to our roots, the part of us which remains essentially the same across time. In fact identity is always a never-completed process of becoming—a process of shifting *identifications*, rather than a singular, complete, finished state of being" (Hall 2017, 16). Other scholarship examines identity in relation to social inequality and political action, such as the possibilities of identity categories as potential coalitions (Carastathis 2013), or case studies on how attending to intersecting identities creates solidarity and cohesion for cross-movement mobilization within participatory democracies (Palacios 2016).

Using intersectionality as a heuristic not only has facilitated the rethinking of existing knowledge—violence and similar social problems, work and similar social institutions, as well as identity and similar social constructs—it has also brought new systems of power into view. Intersectional analysis now incorporates sexuality, ethnicity, age, ability, and nation as similar categories of analysis (Kim-Puri 2005). Specifically, increased attention to the themes of nation, nationalism, nation-state, and national identity has aimed

to align the power relations of nation with structural analyses of racism, capitalism, and patriarchy (Yuval-Davis 1997). Literature on the nation-state and its citizenship policies has benefited from intersectional frameworks, the case of Goldberg's (2002) analysis of the racial state, or Evelyn Glenn's (2002) study of work, American citizenship, and nation-state power. Intersectional frameworks have also deepened understandings of nationalist ideologies, as evidenced in Joane Nagel's (1998) analysis of masculinity and nationalism, or George Mosse's (1985) classic work on nationalism and sexuality. The political behavior of subordinated groups as they aim to empower themselves has also garnered intersectional analysis, for example, Ana Ramos-Zayas's (2003) ethnographic study of Puerto Rican identity within a Chicago neighborhood that illustrates the benefits of incorporating nationalism in studies of local politics. Intersectional analyses of nation-state power have expanded to consider transnational processes, for example, placing analyses of transnational tourism within intersectional processes of erotic autonomy, decolonization, and nationalism (M. J. Alexander 1997, 2005a).

The heuristic use of intersectionality has generated a tremendous amount of new knowledge, far more than any one individual or group of individuals can examine. As of this writing, some fields of study have accumulated sufficient scholarly evidence to examine the patterns of intersectional scholarship within their own areas of inquiry. The heuristic use of intersectionality within sociology, history, anthropology, education, social work, and similar established disciplines certainly has led to considerable published research. Yet these communities of inquiry bring their own interpretive frameworks and scholarly conventions to the content of intersectional knowledge created within their parameters. Using intersectionality as a heuristic potentially fosters disciplinary reform. In contrast, interdisciplinary fields of inquiry such as women's, gender, and sexuality studies; ethnic studies; Black studies; media studies; American studies; and cultural studies enjoy similar heuristic use of intersectionality yet face fewer disciplinary barriers. These interdisciplinary fields typically offer more intellectual latitude, but often at the cost of less institutional support. They too are limited to postures of reform, this time not of their own frameworks and practices, but rather those of the universities that house them.

At some point, one bumps up against the limitations of heuristic thinking. In this sense, the ways in which race/class/gender studies have unfolded since the 1980s can serve as a cautionary tale for the vast amount of data that is currently being produced by the heuristic use of intersectionality. Race/class/gender studies laid substantial groundwork for intersectionality's

metaphoric and heuristic use. Scholars and activists working in race/class/gender studies, and similar interdisciplinary endeavors routinely used the phrase "race, class, and gender" for a wide array of projects (Andersen and Collins 2016; Collins and Bilge 2016). The heuristic use of "race, class, and gender" as a provisional, placeholder term across the myriad projects that sprang up within and across academic disciplines catalyzed considerable scholarship. Viewing race, class, and gender as interconnected phenomena seemingly shared a loose set of assumptions: (1) race, class, and gender referenced not singular but intersecting systems of power; (2) specific social inequalities reflect these power relations from one setting to the next; (3) individual and collective (group) identities of race, gender, class, and sexuality are socially constructed within multiple systems of power; and (4) social problems and their remedies are similarly intersecting phenomena. Each of these assumptions served as jumping off points for a range of projects. Intersectionality drew from and expanded the heuristic use of these assumptions that underlay race/class/gender studies.

Race/class/gender studies and intersectionality both rely on heuristic thinking, yet while it may seem that they are interchangeable, they do have distinctive approaches to social problem solving. Using the framework of race/class/gender analysis reminds researchers to attend to race, class, and gender as *particular* categories of analysis. Either singularly or in combination, the categories of race, class, and gender identify distinctive structural foundations for social inequalities, for example, the racism of white supremacy, the class exploitation associated with capitalism, and the sexism inherent in patriarchy. Race, class, and gender not only reference specific systems of power; each category has its own storied traditions of scholarship and activism done by interpretive communities that developed around each category. Ironically, the particular history of the field itself was seen as getting in the way of its universal possibilities. The field was seen as being too particular because it confined analysis to race, class, and gender. Some users erroneously assumed that these particular concepts, when taken literally, must be present in every analysis, and that the absence of any one category compromised the integrity of race/class/gender studies. Because it was deemed to be too closely associated with the particular, subordinated social groups that were central to its creation and growth, the field of race/class/gender was also seen as having another kind of particularity problem. "Race" meant Black people, "gender" meant women, and "class" meant poor people. Yet race/class/gender never argued that its concepts were confined to subordinated people—it was perfectly capable of studying privilege within

the categories of race, class, and gender. Similarly, race, class, and gender were never meant to be used as a fixed list of entities that applied in all times in all places. Rather, race/class/gender was a heuristic that pointed toward other combinations that not only were possible but were better suited for a range of particular issues and contexts.

The heuristic use of intersectionality provides different strengths and limitations. Because intersectionality does not specify the configuration of categories, or even the number of relevant categories for a particular analysis, it seemingly offers more flexibility than race/class/gender studies. By providing a new term that was elastic enough to incorporate the particularities of race/class/gender studies yet expand them to include additional particular concepts, intersectionality ostensibly solved the particularity problem of race/class/gender. Yet intersectionality's quest for universality—and this is important for its status as a social theory in the making—meant that it need not attend to its own particular history. Using intersectionality as a heuristic by referring to a *generic* intersectionality without attending to particulars of the categories themselves, or to the social issues that catalyzed both race/class/gender studies and intersectionality, created new problems. The rapid uptake of intersectionality by adding even more categories suggests a parallelism among these categories, one that implies that each system of power is fundamentally the same. Stated differently, if the categories of race, class, and gender, among others, are equivalent and potential substitutes for one another, then the systems of power that underlie intersectionality are similarly equivalent. Understanding one means understanding the others.

This assumption of equivalence and interchangeability may facilitate intersectionality's ease of heuristic use, but it simultaneously limits intersectionality's theoretical potential. For example, the category of class has been often mentioned within intersectionality yet less often treated as an analytical category that is equivalent to race and gender. Moreover, the categories of nation, sexuality, ethnicity, age, religion, and ability resemble one another but cannot be collapsed into one another under the heading of a generic intersectionality. Each is an analytical category that cannot be simply added together and combined with the others. The relationships among these categories lie in their particulars—they must be empirically studied and theorized, not simply assumed for heuristic convenience. This brief comparison of race/class/gender and intersectionality suggests that if a heuristic device is applied uncritically, more as a formula than as a tool of invention for

critically engaged social problem solving, it may no longer be able to spark innovation.[8]

How might intersectionality make sense of itself, especially in relation to its potential as a critical social theory in the making? Intersectionality offers a window into thinking about the significance of ideas and social action in fostering social transformation. The metaphor of intersectionality puts a name and a face to a common project of using more holistic frameworks to explain and address social problems. Intersectionality as a heuristic offers provisional rules of thumb for rethinking a range of social problems as well as strategies for criticizing how scholarship studies them. In this sense, intersectionality's metaphoric and heuristic thinking provides important conceptual tools for problem solving. These strategies remain important, yet their use should not be conflated with theorizing.

Intersectionality stands in a meeting place of its own making, one where the knowledges and practices catalyzed by its metaphoric and heuristic practices converge and grow. The effects of intersectionality are far-reaching—it has catalyzed significant changes within academic disciplines concerning some of their cherished frameworks, such as the aforementioned case of sociology and work. Intersectionality has also influenced the contours of women's, gender, and sexuality studies; media studies; and similar interdisciplinary fields of inquiry. Intersectionality's knowledge and practices stemming from how its practitioners use it might have catalyzed a wealth of new knowledge across many fields of study. To me, intersectionality has reached an important milestone in its own journey, a place where it has catalyzed paradigm shifts across many fields of study, but one where it also must spend time examining its own paradigmatic thought. Stated differently, attending to intersectionality's *paradigmatic thinking* adds another dimension to its cognitive architecture.

Intersectionality and Paradigm Shifts

Paradigms provide frameworks that describe, interpret, analyze, and in some cases explain both the knowledge that is being produced as well as the processes that are used to produce it. Paradigmatic thinking involves having a model or provisional explanation in mind, a typical pattern of something, a distinct set of concepts or thought patterns. Such thinking is often difficult to recognize as such, because paradigms are often implicit, assumed, and

taken for granted. For example, for some time, assumptions about biology and the natural world exerted enormous influence on research on gender and sexual identities, on public policies that understood citizenship through binaries of fit and unfit bodies, as well as on broader evolutionary explanations of the natural and social worlds. The reliance on biological explanations seemed more like the truth itself, rather than just one paradigm among many.

When the paradigmatic thinking in a field changes, the ideas and social relations within that field can also change quite dramatically. Thomas Kuhn's (1970) description of how paradigm shifts occur in the natural sciences provides a useful rubric for understanding intersectionality's effects on existing fields of study. Ironically, Kuhn analyzed the way that paradigms changed within the natural sciences as an implicit critique of the social sciences; he wanted to demonstrate how paradigms in the natural sciences provided certainties for scientific disciplines—certainties that the social sciences seemingly lacked. Yet this dimension of his work has been overshadowed by how rapidly the concept of a paradigm shift travelled into the social sciences, as well as into everyday language.[9]

A paradigm shift is a change not just in ideas, but also in how a field of study reorganizes its practices to facilitate its problem-solving objectives. When fields encounter anomalies, or puzzles that can no longer be solved within the conventions of their dominant paradigm, they shift, often rather dramatically. The old paradigm can disappear rapidly, with a new one emerging to take its place. A paradigm shift occurs along three dimensions: the new paradigm (1) convincingly resolves previously recognized problems; (2) has enough unresolved problems to provide puzzles for further inquiry; and (3) attracts enough specialists to form the core of new, agreed upon provisional explanations for the topic at hand. When applied to intersectionality, the concept of a paradigm shift suggests that intersectionality convincingly grapples with recognized social problems concerning social inequality and the social problems it engenders; that its heuristics provide new avenues of investigation for studying social inequality; and that it has attracted a vibrant constellation of scholars and practitioners who recognize intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis. This newly formulated, heterogeneous community of inquiry both resonates with the metaphor of intersectionality as a collective identity and relies on heuristic thinking for social problem solving.

This concept of a paradigm shift is especially useful for thinking through the changes that intersectionality has engendered within disciplinary and

interdisciplinary fields. Kuhn's argument is targeted toward changes within the natural sciences, where paradigms consist of shared assumptions within an *existing* field of study, subfields within a particular discipline, or both. Yet when uncoupled from the assumption that paradigm shifts occur primarily within existing fields of inquiry, Kuhn's basic argument concerning paradigm shifts also applies to broader interpretive frameworks. Paradigm shifts are significant because they describe what happens when traditional frameworks no longer sufficiently explain social realities and thus become ineffective. In this sense, the concept of a paradigm shift is especially important for intersectionality as a critical social theory in the making, because a paradigm shift identifies a significant turning point when established social theories lose their critical edge and when other social theories displace them.

Intersectionality has certainly contributed to paradigm shifts in thinking about how mutually constructed power relations shape social phenomena. Across academic disciplines, traditional paradigms approached racial inequality and gender inequality, for example, as distinct, separate, and disconnected phenomena. Because race, class, gender, sexuality, age, ethnicity, nation, and ability were conceptualized as separate phenomena, their interactions remained invisible because no one thought to look for them. Using intersectionality as a metaphor fundamentally challenged this taken-for-granted assumption, and using intersectionality as a heuristic developed new knowledge as evidence for intersectional claims. In this sense, intersectionality was not just an adjustment to business as usual. It pointed toward a fundamental paradigm shift in thinking about intersecting systems of power and their connections to intersecting social inequalities.

Thinking through how intersectionality has fostered paradigm shifts within existing fields of study raises one fundamental question: Is intersectionality itself emerging as a paradigm in its own right? Using intersectionality as a metaphor did not specify its content. That's part of what made it so easy to use and to take up. Similarly, using intersectionality as a heuristic means applying its rule-of-thumb strategies to specific topics and problems. In contrast, exploring intersectionality's paradigmatic thinking means turning the analytical lens back onto intersectionality itself. It requires a sustained, self-reflexive analysis of intersectionality's internal ideas and practices.

In the following section, I sketch out selected core constructs and guiding premises of intersectionality that are drawn from my readings of intersectional inquiry as well as my understandings of intersectional practice. When

TABLE 1.1
Intersectionality's Paradigmatic Ideas

CORE CONSTRUCTS	GUIDING PREMISES
Relationality Power Social inequality Social context Complexity Social justice	(1) Race, class, gender, and similar systems of power are interdependent and mutually construct one another. (2) Intersecting power relations produce complex, interdependent social inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, ability, and age. (3) The social location of individuals and groups within intersecting power relations shapes their experiences within and perspectives on the social world. (4) Solving social problems within a given local, regional, national, or global context requires intersectional analyses.

combined, these core constructs and guiding premises provide a provisional template for analyzing intersectionality's ideas and practices. My goal is to address some ideas of intersectionality's paradigmatic use—namely, the core constructs and guiding premises within intersectionality's critical inquiry.

Table 1.1 provides a provisional schema of the paradigmatic ideas that form the content of intersectionality's critical inquiry. These ideas come from its metaphoric, heuristic, and paradigmatic uses. This schema distinguishes between the core constructs that reappear across intersectionality and guiding premises that inform intersectional analysis.

Intersectionality's core constructs routinely appear within intersectional inquiry, either as topics of investigation or as methodological premises that guide research itself. They are (1) relationality; (2) power; (3) social inequality; (4) social context; (5) complexity; and (6) social justice (Collins and Bilge 2016, 25–30, 194–204). For example, when it comes to social science research, intersectionality requires attending to complexity, whether in the questions asked, the methods used in a study, or the interpretation of findings. Intersectional analyses are by nature complex and complicated.

Intersectionality's guiding premises are working hypotheses or assumptions that inform intersectionality's inquiry and praxis. These ideas inform

specific scholarly and political projects. These guiding premises are recognizable to intersectionality's practitioners. Just as biologists or human rights professionals know that, by working within their field, they share certain assumptions about biology and human rights with others in their field, people who see themselves as doing intersectional inquiry would share common questions, approaches, and rationales for why they do intersectionality in the first place. Together, intersectionality's core constructs and guiding premises are foundational to intersectionality's critical inquiry because they constitute building blocks for the content of intersectionality as critical social theory and processes of critical theorizing that might characterize intersectionality's praxis.

Core Constructs and Guiding Premises

Intersectionality's core constructs constitute one important dimension of intersectionality's paradigmatic thinking. The themes of relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice reappear across intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and practice (Collins and Bilge 2016, 25–30, 194–204). When it comes to scholarship, these themes are not all present in a given work, the treatment of them varies considerably across research traditions, and the relationship among them is far from coherent. My goal here is to identify intersectionality's core constructs that, either singularly or in combination, reappear within intersectional scholarship. Significantly, none of these themes is unique to intersectionality in the academy. They also appear across diverse projects with little apparent connection to intersectionality. In this sense, intersectionality often shares terminology and sensibility with similar projects but is not derivative of them. Identifying these core constructs constitutes a promising first step in sketching out intersectionality's paradigmatic use in scholarship. Significantly, how these constructs are used within intersectionality offers a window into intersectionality's critical inquiry.

Relationality constitutes the first core theme that shapes heterogeneous intersectional projects (Phoenix and Pattynama 2006, 187). This emphasis on relationality shifts focus away from the essential qualities that seemingly lie in the center of categories and toward the relational processes that connect them. The idea of relationality is essential to intersectionality itself. The very term *intersectionality* invokes the idea of interconnections, mutual engagement, and relationships. Race, gender, class, and other systems of power are constituted and maintained through relational processes, gaining meaning

through the nature of these relationships. The analytic importance of relationality in intersectional scholarship demonstrates how various social positions (occupied by actors, systems, and political/economic structural arrangements) necessarily acquire meaning and power (or a lack thereof) in relation to other social positions.[10]

The significance of *power* constitutes a second core theme of intersectionality's critical inquiry. Intersecting power relations produce social divisions of race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, age, country of origin, and citizenship status that are unlikely to be adequately understood in isolation from one another. Non-intersectional scholarship assumes that race, class, and gender are unconnected variables or features of social organization that can be studied as singular phenomena—for example, gender or race as discreet aspects of individual identity, or patriarchy or racism as mono-categorical systems of power. Intersectionality posits that systems of power co-produce one another in ways that reproduce both unequal material outcomes and the distinctive social experiences that characterize people's experiences within social hierarchies. Stated differently, racism, sexism, class exploitation, and similar oppressions may mutually construct one another by drawing upon similar and distinctive practices and forms of organization that collectively shape social reality.

Third, intersectionality has catalyzed a rethinking of *social inequality*. Within the academy, prevailing frameworks explained social inequalities as separate entities, for example, class inequality, racial inequality, gender inequality, and social inequalities of sexuality, nation, ability, and ethnicity. The causes of social inequality often lay in fundamental forces that lay outside the particulars of race, class, gender. Yet treating social inequality as a result of other, seemingly more fundamental social processes suggested that social inequality was inevitable because it was hardwired into the social world, into individual nature, or into both. Intersectionality rejects these notions that normalize inequality by depicting it as natural and inevitable. Instead, intersectionality points to the workings of power relations in producing social inequalities and the social problems they engender.

A fourth core theme within intersectionality's critical inquiry stresses the significance of *social context* for knowledge production. This theme is especially important for understanding how interpretive communities, both academic and activist, organize knowledge production. This premise applies to the internal dynamics of a given interpretive community, for example, how sociologists or women's studies scholars go about their work; to the relationships among interpretive communities, such as how sociology and Africana Studies within academia develop different interpretations of race

and racism; as well as to how communities of inquiry are hierarchically arranged and valued, for example, how Western colleges and universities rank the sciences over the humanities. Social context also matters in understanding how the distinctive social locations of individuals and groups within intersecting power relations shape intellectual production.[11]

Managing *complexity* constitutes a fifth core theme of intersectionality's critical inquiry. Intersectional knowledge projects achieve greater levels of complexity because they are iterative and interactional, always examining the connections among seemingly distinctive categories of analysis. Complexity is dynamic—intersectionality's categories of race, class, gender, and sexuality, among others, are a useful starting point for inquiry. Bringing multiple lenses to intersectional inquiry facilitates more complex, comprehensive analyses. Managing complexity also speaks to intersectionality's methodological contours. Complex questions may require equally complex strategies for investigation.

Social justice constitutes another core construct that underlies intersectionality's critical inquiry. The construct of social justice raises questions about the ethics of intersectional scholarship and practice. Within contemporary academic venues, the significance of social justice as a core theme within intersectionality is increasingly challenged by norms that place social justice, freedom, equality, and similar ethical issues as secondary concerns within acceptable scholarship. Viewing theory and practice in binary terms not only fosters a division between truth and power within intersectionality; it also challenges intersectionality's long-standing ethical commitment to social justice. Historically, social justice was so central to intersectionality that there was little need to examine it or invoke it. Currently, many intersectional projects do not deal with social justice in a substantive fashion, yet the arguments that each discourse makes and the praxis that it pursues have important ethical implications for equity and fairness.

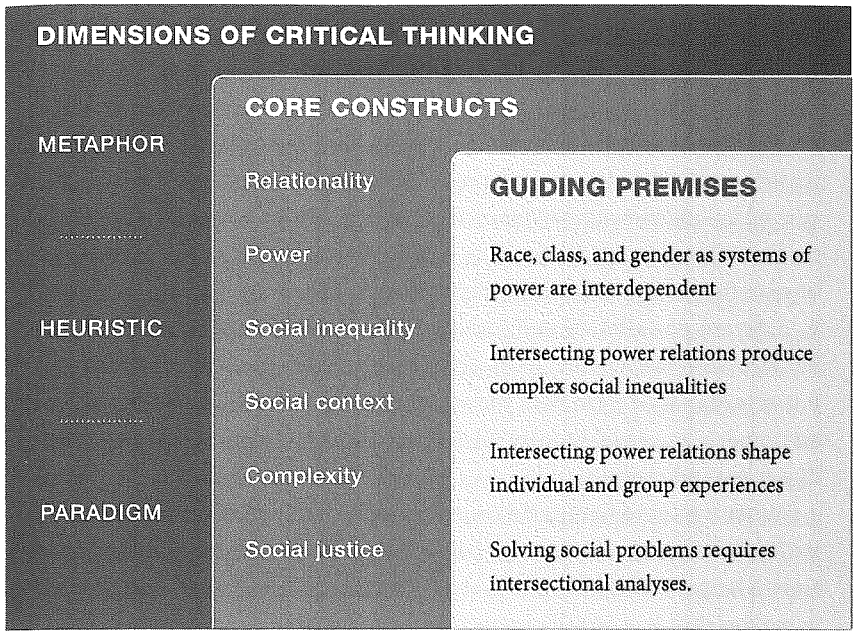
I've introduced relationality, power, social inequality, social context, complexity, and social justice as discrete categories, but in actuality these core concepts inform one another. Varying intersectional projects place varying degrees of emphasis on each one. In fact, examining how scholars and practitioners use the core constructs within their projects provides a useful way of mapping intersectionality over time, which is the case, for example, of the waning influence of social justice within intersectionality. Similarly, the growing influence of complexity studies as well as developments within intersectionality itself signal new ways of thinking about intersectionality and complexity (Walby 2007). Rather than using these core constructs as a

checklist to see which boxes a particular project checks off, it may be more useful to investigate how and in what ways these concepts reappear, either singularly or in combination, within intersectional inquiry.

How might these core constructs within intersectionality's critical inquiry shape it? Some concepts are so fundamental to intersectionality itself that removing them would compromise the very meaning of intersectionality. Relationality constitutes one core construct. It is reflected in the name of the field itself, it shapes the methodological premises of intersectional projects, and it describes the content of intersectional knowledge. The very question of the connections *among* intersectionality's core constructs is fundamentally one of relationality. In contrast, other core themes are more contingent. For example, intersecting systems of power as well as social inequalities of race, class, gender, and similar categories of analysis occupy prominent positions within intersectionality. Yet, does the absence of a particular category of analysis within intersectional inquiry somehow lessen its value? Similarly, some intersectional scholarship is inattentive to power relations or ethical standards of social justice. Does this absence make these projects less authentically intersectional? Some core constructs are differentially contingent. They can be used to structure a study itself, the case of attending to social context, or they can be used to evaluate outcomes; for example, is a particular study stronger because intersectionality has fostered greater complexity?

This brings me to another important dimension of intersectionality's critical inquiry—namely, my provisional list of guiding premises that distinguish intersectional scholarship (see Table 1.1). Such premises should be recognizable to intersectionality's practitioners in the ways that those of any field of inquiry are to its researchers, teachers, and students. These guiding premises synthesize the assumptions that intersectionality's practitioners take into their projects in order to guide their work: (1) Race, class, gender, and similar systems of power are interdependent and mutually construct one another. (2) Intersecting power relations produce complex, interdependent social inequalities of race, class, gender, sexuality, nationality, ethnicity, ability, and age. (3) The social location of individuals and groups within intersecting power relations shapes their experiences within and perspectives on the social world. (4) Solving social problems within a given local, regional, national, or global context requires intersectional analyses.[12] Together, these core constructs and guiding principles provide a vocabulary for describing intersectionality's paradigm shift. This shift raises important questions about how intersectionality's cognitive architecture might inform intersectional theorizing. This framework

FIGURE 1.1 Intersectionality's cognitive architecture.



of core constructs and guiding premises also offers a way of seeing the limits of paradigmatic thinking and the possibilities of the beginnings of theorizing. How might intersectionality's core constructs inform the guiding premises within the field of intersectionality itself? Conversely, how might these guiding premises shed light on the meaning of intersectionality's core constructs?

Figure 1.1 organizes the dimensions of intersectionality's cognitive architecture—namely, the thematic content of intersectionality as social theory and the processes of how intersectionality might theorize the social world. These core constructs and guiding premises provide tools for mapping the specific content of intersectional knowledge. In the case of intersectionality, because its core constructs are shared by many other projects, specifying what is meant by these constructs and how they will be used within intersectional inquiry constitutes an important, ongoing challenge. Similarly, the guiding premises constitute a starting point for identifying the shared assumptions that organize intersectionality's knowledge base. Metaphoric, heuristic, and paradigmatic thinking constitute the critical thinking tools that surround the process of doing social theory. Figure 1.1 identifies

the dimensions of critical thinking that potentially inform theory within intersectionality's current use. Paradigmatic thinking is most closely aligned with theorizing because it does specify core concepts and guiding premises. Yet scholarly literature is unclear about whether social theories are housed within paradigms, the case where a scientific discipline has one overarching paradigm that houses several theories that work within its parameters; or whether paradigms are housed within social theories, the case where philosophy or literary criticism provides an overarching social theory of poststructuralism that houses lesser explanatory frameworks or paradigms. The difference might be semantic, one of parsing words to fit different disciplinary and interdisciplinary realities. My sense is that, because intersectionality itself encompasses a constellation of different projects that draw from both the social sciences and the humanities, intersectionality as critical inquiry might house multiple paradigms to guide its discovery and analysis.

Either way, paradigm shifts matter because they mark the moment when traditional frameworks become ineffective, and when existing social theories no longer sufficiently explain social realities. In this sense, the idea of a paradigm shift is especially important for developing a social theory generally and a *critical* social theory in particular, because paradigm shifts identify especially rich possibilities for critical theorizing. Stuart Hall describes these connections between paradigm shifts and doing social theory, suggesting that "if paradigms are closed . . . new phenomena will be quite difficult to interpret, because they depend on new historical conditions and incorporate novel discursive elements. But if we understand theorizing as an open horizon, moving within the magnetic field of some basic concepts, but constantly being applied afresh to what is genuinely original and novel in new forms of cultural practices, and recognizing the capacity of subjects to reposition themselves differently, then you needn't be so defeated" (Grossberg 1996, 138). In other words, intersectionality moves toward an "open horizon" suggested by its use of metaphor, heuristics, and paradigms, recognizing how its core constructs and its guiding premises constitute a paradigm shift. In this sense, intersectionality's paradigmatic use via this current constellation of core themes and guiding premises, as described here, constitutes more a starting point for developing a critical social theory, and not the end point of intersectionality as critical inquiry.

Intersectionality, Social Theory, and Theorizing

The seemingly cavalier characterization of intersectionality as a social theory within intersectional scholarship is one reason I decided to write this book. Every time I encounter an article that identifies intersectionality as a social theory, I wonder what conception of social theory the author has in mind. I don't assume that intersectionality is already a social theory. Instead, I think a case can be made that intersectionality is a social theory in the making. But what kind of social theory, toward what ends, and using what tools?

Commonsense understandings of social theory and theorizing provide a good starting point for answering these questions. Sociologist Richard Swedberg, for example, contends that "theory is . . . *a statement about the explanation of a phenomenon.* And theorizing, from this perspective, is *the process through which a theory is produced*" (Swedberg 2014, 17; italics in original). Here Swedberg introduces the important distinction between social theory as a body of knowledge that explains a phenomenon, and social theorizing as the process used to create that body of knowledge. Within this framework, intersectionality as a social theory would need to *explain* a given social phenomenon, not simply describe it. And intersectional theorizing would be the *process* or methodology used in developing those explanations.

This definition provides a useful starting point, but it also obscures some fundamental differences in how different disciplines and fields of study conceptualize social theory as well as the processes they use to generate it. Intersectionality needs to navigate some significant differences that distinguish how social sciences and the humanities understand and produce social theory. Western social sciences rest on a specific view of social theory. Within sociology, political science, economics, geography, and anthropology, theorizing emerges in explaining the truths of the social world. The social world itself is not simply an accumulation of individuals. Rather, the social world has social structures that can be uncovered via scientific processes. Social theories rely on empirical data to buttress their explanations, but the truth of social theories lies in whether they can be reliably tested. A scientific truth is not an absolute, but rather is the best explanation for empirical evidence. Within social science, a social theory is an explanation for a social phenomenon, and methodology describes the process of arriving at that truth. The scientific method is a paradigm that guides the process of theorizing.

The humanities take a different approach. Philosophy, literary criticism, and history, as well as interdisciplinary fields such as cultural studies and media studies that have been influenced by the humanities, do not

seek absolute or even provisional truths about the social world, but rather investigate the meaning of the human condition. Theorizing about broad philosophical topics such as democracy, inequality, freedom, social justice and love stems from efforts to make sense of human life and experience. There are no right or wrong arguments, no absolute truths, only narratives or stories that are more or less relevant to the search for meaning. Because intersectionality encompasses both social sciences and humanities, it can be conceptualized alternately as a social theory that guides the search for truth and as a social theory that guides the search for social meaning.[13]

Not only is intersectionality not yet a social theory, if it were to be one, how would it navigate these varying perspectives on truth and meaning as fundamental to social theory? Intersectionality can easily become polarized around these different understandings of social theory. In response to this threat, rather than introducing intersectionality through the lenses of often contentious debates between scientific and narrative traditions, I have entered these debates by examining what already is within intersectionality. My interest lies in existing practices that can provide a foundation for intersectional theorizing. The cognitive architecture of metaphors, heuristics, and paradigms discussed in this chapter not only provide a roadmap for, as Cho, Crenshaw, and McCall (2013) put it, an "intersectional way of thinking," they also provide a vocabulary for analyzing intersectional theorizing. Metaphors, heuristics, and paradigms collectively constitute different aspects of intersectionality's cognitive architecture that are part of the toolkit of intersectional theorizing in both the social sciences and the humanities. The metaphor provides a concept, an idea that marks the visibility of the field. Heuristics provide orienting strategies for getting things done, premises or working hypotheses from or for social action, or both. Paradigms provide frameworks for analyzing and often explaining both the knowledge that is being produced as well as the processes that are used to produce it. There is no inherently linear progression in how individuals actually use or should use these aspects of intersectional analysis. Intersectionality is a collective endeavor, and individuals enter the field at different times, in different places, and through various projects. No intersectional theory is waiting for them when they arrive. Rather, intersectional theorizing or theory-building for intersectionality emerges through the critical thinking made possible by how individuals and groups use these critical thinking tools.

In this volume, I take the position that social science and narrative approaches to social theory and theorizing already coexist within intersectionality, and that this coexistence can be a strength for intersectional

theorizing. Because intersectionality draws on both the search for truth that underpins the social sciences and the search for meaning that characterizes the humanities, preserving the existing creative tension between these two understandings of social theory is important.

The distinctions between social theory and theorizing as the process of generating social theory, the distinctions between social scientific and narrative approaches to theory and theorizing, and intersectionality's metaphoric, heuristic, and paradigmatic uses provide a vocabulary for intersectionality as a social theory in the making. In my investigation of intersectionality as a social theory in the making, I rely on this vocabulary throughout the book. But I also contend that intersectionality is neither an academic fad nor an immature social theory. Instead, I see intersectionality as a different kind of social theory in the making, whereby its association with social justice movements adds another dimension to its theorizing. Intersectionality has been associated with aspirations for social transformation and social change.

By following well-established procedures for theorizing, intersectionality can certainly become a social theory in the traditional sense, as understood within the social sciences and the humanities. Yet would this represent a maturing of intersectionality or an attenuation of its possibilities? At its heart, intersectionality is a set of ideas that is critical of the established social world. What processes lie at the heart of *critical* theorizing? What would it take for intersectionality to develop a *critical* social theory about the social world? As I discuss in the next chapter, simply labeling a theory critical doesn't make it so. How might academic social theories that are already recognized as critical illuminate the meaning of being critical for intersectionality?