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When Black + Lesbian + Woman ≠ Black Lesbian Woman: The Methodological Challenges of Qualitative and Quantitative Intersectionality Research

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Abstract The notion that social identities and social inequality based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, and sex/gender are intersectional rather than additive poses a variety of thorny methodological challenges. Using research with Black lesbians (Bowleg, manuscripts in preparation; Bowleg et al., *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 2008; Bowleg et al., *Cultural Diversity & Ethnic Minority Psychology* 10:229–240, 2004; Bowleg et al., *Journal of Lesbian Studies*, 7:87–108, 2003) as a foundation, I examine how these challenges shape measurement, analysis, and interpretation. I argue that a key dilemma for intersectionality researchers is that the additive (e.g., Black + Lesbian + Woman) versus intersectional (e.g., Black Lesbian Woman) assumption inherent in measurement and qualitative and quantitative data analyses contradicts the central tenet of intersectionality: social identities and inequality are interdependent for groups such as Black lesbians, not mutually exclusive. In light of this, interpretation becomes one of the most substantial tools in the intersectionality researcher's methodological toolbox.

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Introduction

Black lesbian poet Audre Lorde's (1984) description of "... constantly being encouraged to pluck out some aspect of myself and present this as the meaningful whole, eclipsing and denying the other parts of the self" (p. 120) highlights eloquently the complexity of intersectionality. For Lorde and other Black lesbians, one's identity as a Black lesbian is the meaningful whole; it is not a mere addition of ethnicity, sexual orientation, and sex/gender. For researchers interested in designing and conducting intersectionality research, the notion that social identities and social inequality based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, sex/gender (and one could add a host of other identities such as class, disability status, etc.) are interdependent and mutually constitutive (i.e., intersectional; Collins 1995, 1998; Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Weber and Parra-Medina 2003), rather than independent and uni-dimensional poses a variety of thorny methodological challenges. These challenges shape key aspects of the research process such as measurement, data analysis, and interpretation. Using research with Black lesbians as a foundation (Bowleg, manuscripts in preparation; Bowleg et al. 2008, 2004, 2003), I focus in this article on some of the methodological challenges of conducting intersectionality research using qualitative and quantitative methods.

The solipsism that equates women with Whiteness, and Blackness with men rendering the experiences of people who are women and Black invisible (Hull et al. 1982; Spelman 1998) pervades contemporary scholarship, policy, and thought. Copious examples exist, but one will suffice. In

1994, the National Institutes of Health released guidelines requiring researchers to describe their plans for the "Inclusion of Women and Minorities." The rationale for the guidelines were sound but the continued declaration of "women and minorities" as if these were two mutually exclusive groups signaled an entrenched misunderstanding of how women's experiences as women also intersect with their experiences as members of ethnic minority groups, as well as other historically oppressed social groups.

The discipline of psychology has not fared well in terms of promoting the understanding of intersectionality. Despite an abundance of theories on social identity within psychology, the prevailing view of social identities is one of unidimensionality and independence, rather than intersection. A notable exception is Ransford's (1980) multiple jeopardy-advantage (MJA) hypothesis which posits that people occupy various social status positions that intersect to create a "unique social space" (p. 277). This unique space manifests as outcomes that one's social status location (e.g., race) alone cannot explain. Instead, this space can be explained only by the intersection of one of more social status positions (e.g., race, sex, class, sexual orientation) to yield multiple jeopardy (i.e., the intersection of two or more low social status positions) or multiple advantage (i.e., the intersection of two or more high social status positions). Deaux's (1993) work reconstructing social identity to recognize multiple dimensions of social identity is another exception to the rule, as are numerous examples within feminist psychology. Though explicit mention of the term *intersectionality* is rare, feminist psychology has been far more progressive than mainstream psychology in recognizing the intersections between women's experiences of structural inequality based on race, gender, class, and sexual orientation (e.g., Greene 1997; Reid and Comas-Diaz 1990; Weber 1998).

Not surprisingly, the Black feminist literature is replete with narratives and analysis of Black women's experiences of the intersections of race, gender, class, and/or sexual orientation (see Collins 1991; Davis 1983; Hooks 1981) and notions of double (Beale 1970) and triple jeopardy (Greene 1995) based on these identities. But while a plethora of scholarship on the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation exists in the multidisciplinary literature, there is a paucity of literature on intersectionality from a methodological perspective (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999; McCall 2005). Thus, researchers interested in conducting intersectionality research often have to self-teach and learn through trial and error. My goal in writing this article is to help intersectionality researchers sidestep some mistakes, as well as learn from the insights gained from the qualitative (Bowleg, manuscripts in preparation; Bowleg et al. 2008, 2003) and quantitative (Bowleg et al. 2004) intersectionality research with Black lesbians of Bowleg et al. Far from being a comprehensive treatise of the methodological issues that arise in intersectionality research, I address here three issues with which intersectionality researchers must grapple: developing questions to measure intersectionality, analyzing intersectionality data, and interpreting them.

Black Lesbians in Micro and Macro Perspective: A Brief Overview

Because the lives of Black lesbians are rooted in structural inequalities based on the intersections of sexual orientation, sex, gender, and race (see Greene 1995), Black lesbians are an ideal population in which to study intersectionality. Intersectionality examines how distinctive social power relations mutually construct each other, not just that social hierarchies exist (Collins 1998). At the micro level, a small empirical literature base has examined the intimate relationships (Hall and Greene 2002; Mays and Cochran 1988; Peplau et al. 1997), health care (Cochran and Mays 1988), mental health (Cochran and Mays 1994), workplace (Bowleg et al. 2008), active coping (Bowleg et al. 2004), and multiple minority stress and resilience (Bowleg et al. 2003) experiences of Black lesbians. Other relevant scholarship, most of it focused on predominantly White middle-class lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) populations has addressed the minority stress experiences of LGBs (Brooks 1981; DiPlacido 1998; Meyer 2003) and the dual-identity experiences of lesbians (Fingerhut et al. 2005).

A macro level analysis of economic inequality from an intersectional perspective demonstrates aptly how the social hierarchies of race, sex, and sexual orientation are mutually constructed in the lives of Black lesbians. According to the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force's (NGLTF; Dang and Frazer 2004) analysis of Black same-sex household data from the 2000 U.S. Census Bureau, Black same-sex couples reported an annual median household income ($49,000) of $2,000, lower than that of their Black married heterosexual counterparts ($51,000). Black female same-sex couples however reported a median income of $9,000 less than Black married heterosexual couples, $7,000 less than Black male same-sex couples, and a stunning $21,000 and $29,000 less than White female and male same sex couples respectively, illustrating clearly how structural inequalities grounded in intersections of race, sex, and sexual orientation affect Black female same-sex couples adversely.

Pitfalls and Insights: Lessons from Intersectionality Research with Black Lesbians

Two studies, the *Black Lesbians Stress and Resilience Study* (BLSR), a mixed methods study with Black lesbians in southern California (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation;

Bowleg et al. 2008, 2004, 2003), and a qualitative study with a subsample of Black lesbians in Washington, DC who were part of the *Trials and Tribulations Study* (TT), a larger study of Black lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) provide the foundation for the methodological challenges that I highlight in this article.

The goal of both studies was to explore and examine experiences of multiple minority stress and resilience relevant to the intersections of race, sex/gender and sexual orientation for Black lesbians. Despite the researchers' interest in the intersection of and social inequality based on these identities, much of it prompted by the primary author's own experience as a Black lesbian, the research team knew virtually nothing about intersectionality theory or research. The proof: none of the literature review sections of these articles reference a single intersectionality theorist, or even mention the word *intersectionality*. Instead, the prevailing wisdom of the triple jeopardy approach to Black lesbians' experiences (e.g., Greene 1995) informed much of the empirical exploration of what Bowleg et al. (2003) called at the time "multiple marginalized identities" (p. 89). The researchers' realization that virtually every methodological choice made in these studies reflected an additive approach (Black + Lesbian + Woman), antithetical to the theoretical fidelity of intersectionality would come later, most of it revealed through the research participants' poignant and complex narratives about the intersections of ethnicity, sex/gender, and sexual orientation in their lives. Thus, trial and error, those two marvelous teachers, inform the methodological issues that I discuss relevant to measurement, data analysis, and interpretation. For each of these three domains, I present a key methodological challenge, use examples from the research of Bowleg et al. (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation; Bowleg et al. 2008, 2004, 2003) to highlight relevant issues, and conclude with insights and recommendations for addressing the challenge.

Measuring Intersectionality

It is so obvious as to not even warrant mention: the wording of questions shapes how participants respond to them. Accordingly, a bounty of excellent resources exist for researchers interested in designing good qualitative (e.g., Patton 2002) and quantitative (e.g., Bradburn et al. 2004) questions. Obviously, asking good questions is vital to intersectionality research too, but doing so well can be quite challenging. At issue is how to ask questions about experiences that are intersecting, interdependent, and mutually constitutive, without resorting, even inadvertently, to an additive approach.

The additive approach posits that social inequality increases with each additional stigmatized identity. Thus, a Black lesbian would be multiply oppressed because of the combination of her ethnicity, sexual orientation, and sex/gender (i.e., triple jeopardy). Critics reject the additive approach because it conceptualizes people's experiences as separate, independent, and summative (Collins 1995; Cuadraz and Uttal 1999; Weber and Parra-Medina 2003). Furthermore, they disavow the additive approach's implication that one's identities and/or discrimination based on these identities can be ranked (Collins 1991; Cuadraz and Uttal 1999; Weber and Parra-Medina 2003). Weber and Parra-Medina (2003) have asked rhetorically: "How can a poor Latina be expected to identify the sole—or even primary—source of her oppression? How can scholars with no real connection to her life do so?" (p. 204). They contend further that people can be members of dominant and subordinate groups (e.g., a White man with a physical disability) simultaneously thereby rendering the ranking exercise futile (Weber and Parra-Medina 2003). Alas, what holds in theory does not always translate easily to practice. Indeed, I would argue that it is virtually impossible, particularly in quantitative research, to ask questions about intersectionality that are not inherently additive.

Lessons from the BLSR and TT Studies of Bowleg et al.

The conceptual framework of triple jeopardy (Greene 1995) shaped the design of both the BLSR (Bowleg et al. 2008, 2003) and TT (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) studies. Applied to Black lesbians, this framework is implicitly additive: Black lesbians are subject to prejudice and discrimination based on their ethnicity, sex, and sexual orientation. Three lessons from these studies are key: (1) ask an additive question, get an additive answer; (2) the problem of attempting to measure intersectionality through addition; and (3) ask precisely what you want to know.

Ask an Additive Question, Get an Additive Answer

Consistent with the additive approach, Bowleg (manuscript in preparation) posed questions in the qualitative phase of the TT study that implied that participants' identities could be isolated and ranked:

> Some of the people we've spoken to have told us that when it comes to their identities, they are Black first, and gay, lesbian or bisexual second. Other people said that they are gay or lesbian first and then Black or female, second. Still others have said that they don't feel as if they can rank these identities. In terms of your life, do you rank these identities, that is by race, sexual orientation, gender or anything else?

Not surprisingly, many interviewees responded in kind. That is, they ranked their identities. For example, Loretta, a

33 year old lesbian noted that she did rank her identities: "I think I do. I'm African American first but for a while I was lesbian first and before that I was just [Loretta] and couldn't understand what all the fuss was about" (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation). Although Maggie, a 27 year old lesbian initially challenged the request to rank her identities, noting, "[No]. I've thought about that and I don't think I can," (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) she nonetheless proceeded to do just that:

> No, I would say that I'm gay first because being a lesbian has had such an impact in my life that it has put me into a different category than just being an African American. It seems like if I were going to be discriminated against about something that would be the first thing. If someone had a choice to hate me or discriminate against me for something that I was that would probably be the first thing picked. And that is the thing I feel I am discriminated against the most. So then that seems to have the biggest impact so I guess that's why it gets first place. And then second place is being Black. Regardless of where I go being Black in any part of the world being Black is an issue. Even in Black countries it's an issue. Black women and White woman get treated differently in every country (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation).

By contrast, others such as Karen, a 36 year old lesbian, reflected the intersectionality perspective with their rejection of the notion that they could rank their identities. Karen observed, "No, I always resort to 'there is no higher political repression.' So I personally don't ascribe to that I'm Black first, lesbian second, woman third. I'm all those" (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation).

Attempting to Measure Intersectionality Through Addition

Another question from the Bowleg (manuscript in preparation) TT study asked: "... If someone dropped in from another planet and asked you to tell them about your life as a Black lesbian woman. First, what would say about your life as a Black person?; Woman? Lesbian?; and Black lesbian woman?" It is obvious now in retrospect that a truly intersectional question would simply ask the respondent to tell about her experience without separating each identity. This is precisely what Karen implied in her response to the question about her life as a Black or African American woman?: "Well, you probably could combine all those statements" (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation). The research suggests that even if the interviewer omitted the question singling out each identity, respondents might still seek to do so. For example, at a later point in the interview when asked, "In terms of your own life, what are some of the things you like most or the advantages about being Black and lesbian?" Karen countered, "Not Black, lesbian, and woman? Just Black and lesbian?" (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation). Her questions seeking clarification highlight the importance of articulating intersectionality explicitly in interview questions. Even if a respondent asks an interviewee to disaggregate identities, it seems advisable for the interviewer not to do so, but to instead invite the interviewee to discuss her identities and experiences however they best resonate with her. Karen's counter questions are also a fitting example of the problem of assuming that the experience of being a woman is subsumed within that of being lesbian.

Ask Precisely What You Want to Know

The aforementioned measurement mistakes notwithstanding, an interview question in Bowleg's (manuscript in preparation) BLSR study elicited narratives that captured the experience of intersectionality. For example, in response to the question, "What are some of the day-to-day challenges that you face in terms of your race, gender and/or sexual orientation?" Nancy, a 44 year old lesbian with a physical disability stated: "Getting listened to. I think that a lot of time people discredit me because I am a Black lesbian, who walks with a cane most of the time" (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation). Ethnicity, sex, sexual orientation and disability intersect in Nancy's narrative, these are not discrete identities.

In the TT study, Johanna, a 36 year old woman who said that she sometimes identified as lesbian and other times as a lesbian-identified bisexual depending on her audience, described the intersection of her identities this way:

> I clearly ... see myself as Black first. Although ... I feel that ... I am not just Black, but I'm also a woman, I'm lesbian identified bisexual, I also come from a working class background. So I see those other parts of myself (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation).

Johanna's presentation of her identities was seamless; the absence of the conjunction *and* in her description underscores her perception of her identities as intersectional rather than additive. Noteworthy in Johanna's mention of socioeconomic class, an identity that the interviewer did not ask about explicitly, is the reality that interviewers are limited in the number of different identities about which they can ask questions. It is simply not practical for an interviewer to ask an exhaustive list of questions about intersecting identities (e.g., class, disability status, etc.). If the researcher asks the question well, however (i.e., by inviting participants to discuss any other dimensions that are important to them), then the interviewee can add, as Johanna did class and other dimensions that the researcher might otherwise have overlooked.

Asked how she typically described herself, Kim, a 33 year old lesbian interviewee from the TT study explained, "I think I usually describe myself as a Black lesbian or African American lesbian cause it feels like I have to carve myself some space for myself there because there isn't already" (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation). Thus, for Kim the intersection of these identities formed an interdependent identity that she presented to the world rather than a summation of additive identities.

By contrast, in response to the same question others such as Leslie, a 48 year old lesbian in the BLSR study (Bowleg et al. 2003) separated each identity, illustrating a disconnect between how the researchers intended to have the question answered (i.e., with a focus on all of the intersecting identities rather than single identities) and how Leslie perceived and interpreted the question (i.e., additively):

> Well, the primary challenge would be around race... Because it's like every day you get up and you don't know if you will get to work without one of these mad dog police pulling you over and getting into a beef and you get arrested; then you lose your job. You don't know if you'll get home at night. You don't know if when you go shopping they'll put security on you and be following you around the store. The queer part is probably something ... I personally encounter in up close relationships so it would probably be in a work environment or just out in the street where maybe a guy is hitting on me or something. And the woman part is kind of like the same [as the queer part] where you interact with men on the street and at work with your coworkers or bosses (p. 14).

As for how one might measure intersectionality quantitatively, none of the options are ideal. For example, in the quantitative phase of the BLSR study, Bowleg et al. (2004) gave participants the option of using a five-point Likert-type scale (1 = strongly agree, 5 = strongly disagree) to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements such as: "Racism is a much more serious issue in my life than homophobia" and "Racism is a much more serious issue in my life than sexism" (p. 234). In retrospect, this approach seems farcical for all of the obvious and previously stated reasons. Nonetheless, it has prompted me to think how I would ask the question with another similar study. I remain stumped. The simplest, albeit inadequate approach appears to be the inherently additive *check all that apply* option:

> In the past year, would you say that you have experienced stress as a result of discrimination due to your race, sex, and/or sexual orientation? If so, please indicate by *checking all that apply* below, the response that best describes the basis for the discrimination you experienced. Was it primarily because of your:
>
> ☐ Race ☐ Sex ☐ Sexual orientation

Insights about Measuring Intersectionality

The BLSR (Bowleg et al. 2008, 2003) and TT (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) research experiences of Bowleg et al. have yielded some clear insights about asking questions intersectionality. The most obvious is that no part of the question should even hint at addition. For example, if I were to ask a question about day to day challenges today, I would ask something like this: "Now, I'd like you to tell me about some of the day-to-day challenges that you face as a Black lesbian woman." That is, I would not use a phrase such as "race, gender and/or sexual orientation" in which the presence of the conjunctions *and/or* could imply that I wanted the experience recounted serially (race, then gender, then sexual orientation) or that these identities could or should be separated.

Going forward, there are two key points to which researchers should attend in constructing questions about intersectionality. First, questions about intersectionality should focus on meaningful constructs such as stress, prejudice, discrimination rather than relying on demographic questions alone (Betancourt and Lopez 1993; Helms et al. 2005; Weber and Parra-Medina 2003). Widespread advocacy for the infusion of multicultural perspectives within psychology (e.g., Sue et al. 1999) notwithstanding, psychologists' tendency for considering ethnic and racial categories to be conceptually meaningful persists in much research. The reality though is that concepts such as race and class are socially constructed, and as such, explain virtually nothing in and of themselves (Helms et al. 2005). Thus, a study with an ethnic minority or ethnically diverse sample that includes demographic measures of racial or ethnic identification, socioeconomic status (SES), and sexual orientation, for example, is not intersectionality research de facto. By contrast, a similar study that focused on the dimensions of experience (e.g., annual earnings, access to health care, stress experiences, etc.) shaped by the participants' experiences of intersecting identities of racial or ethnic identification, SES, and sexual orientation would exemplify intersectional research. Second, questions should be intersectional in design; that is they ought to tap the interdependence and mutuality of identities rather than imply as the BLSR (Bowleg et al. 2008, 2003) and TT (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) studies of Bowleg et al. did, that identities are independent, separate, and able to be ranked.

My clarity on the aforementioned points notwithstanding, there are other measurement issues with which I

continue to grapple, however. For example, I am increasingly agnostic about how much energy ought to be expended on asking the right question to measure intersectionality. Overzealous focus on designing the perfect qualitative or quantitative question harkens back to positivism's ontological tenet that there is some single fixed reality (see Tashakkori and Teddlie 1998) about intersectionality that can be measured if only the researcher had just the right question. Yet, as Nancy (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) and Leslie's (Bowleg et al. 2003) different answers to the same question demonstrate, there is no single reality about the experience of one's intersecting identities, only multiple constructed realities about one's own experience of intersectionality. As for asking questions about intersectionality in quantitative research, I question whether the positivistic assumptions implicit in quantification are compatible with intersectionality research. McGrath and Johnson (2003) have captured the dilemma aptly:

> Quantification imposes a very strong meaning system on the information thus gathered—the meanings that are implicit in various arithmetics and mathematics. This, in turn, imposes many assumptions about substantive elements and relations (e.g., linearity, unidimensionality) that go with the meaning system (p. 36).

Interdependence, multi-dimensionality and mutually constitutive relationships form the core of intersectionality, attributes that contradict the positivist assumptions inherent in most quantitative approaches. Since I use both quantitative and qualitative methods in my research, it should be obvious that I have no interest in resurrecting that tired and ultimately futile debate about the superiority of quantitative versus qualitative methods. Rather, my argument here is that the positivist paradigm that undergirds much (but not all) quantitative research appears to be orthogonal to the complexities of intersectionality. A researcher's philosophical or "qualitative stance" (Marecek 2003, p. 49) exemplified by an epistemological commitment to "situating ... investigations in specific historical, social, and cultural contexts" (Marecek 2003, p. 56) is paramount; not whether the questions they ask to measure intersectionality are qualitative or quantitative.

Analyzing Intersectionality Data

The next step after asking questions about intersectionality is to analyze the amassed data. Quantitative and qualitative analysts face overlapping concerns. First, is the imposition of the researchers' philosophical paradigm and the relevant assumptions with which the analyst approaches the data (Baptiste 2001; McGrath and Johnson 2003); these will "both shape and constrain the meaning(s) of the evidence" (McGrath and Johnson 2003, p. 42). Second, is the transformation of observations into data for analysis (e.g., coding). Thereafter, the analysis of intersectionality data can confound novice and seasoned researchers alike. A few examples from my research with Black lesbians will highlight some of the issues.

Lessons from the BLSR and TT Studies of Bowleg et al.

Data analysis of the Black lesbians' experiences of intersectionality in the BLSR and TT studies highlighted two key methodological challenges: (1) how to handle intersectionality data that are more implicit than explicit; and (2) the additive assumption implicit in both qualitative and quantitative analytical strategies.

Handling Implicit Intersectionality Data

Both the BLSR (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation; Bowleg et al. 2008, 2003) and TT (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) studies abound with poignant narratives documenting the intersections of ethnicity, sexual identity and sex/gender for Black lesbians. Typical is Patricia, a 42 year old lesbian in the BLSR study who described her intersecting identities this way: "Yeah so there's things that, you know being a woman, and a Black and lesbian, I mean it's, I mean...the deck is definitely stacked [against you]. You know, so it takes strength" (Bowleg et al. 2003, p. 18). In contrast, when interviewees did not articulate the experience of intersectionality explicitly, data analysis became more perplexing. Indeed, intersectionality researchers may sometimes find themselves pondering the question: "What counts as data?" (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999, p. 8). For example, in the BLSR study in response to the interview question about the day-to-day challenges that she faced as a Black lesbian, Sylvia a 39 year old mother of a 13 year old girl noted:

> The biggest challenge is staying true to yourself. Because of those multiple identities, there are so many stereotypes and so many roles that you're supposed to be in. You know, there's your church, there's your family, there's your workplace, your personal life, being a mom (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation).

At first glance, it may not be clear how Sylvia's narrative relates to intersectionality. One could argue that the multiple identities and roles (e.g., worker, being a mother, having a personal life) are challenges that most women face regardless of race or sexual orientation. Therefore, an initial analytical strategy is to regard "individual accounts ... as individual experiences" (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999, p. 11). Candace, a 30 year old lesbian and like Sylvia, also a mother of a 13 year old girl characterized the day-to-day

challenges that she experienced as a Black lesbian as "vast and great" (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation). Like Sylvia, self-authenticity was also an important theme for Candace who emphasized the importance of "Having our own truth about who we are and how do we walk through this world [as Black lesbians]." And like Sylvia, Candace also encountered the challenges of modern living, though her narrative focused more explicitly on the challenges relevant to the intersections of racism and heterosexism:

> For example, I work in a national corporation and I live in [large mid-western city] which is an extraordinarily racist place. ... So, the homophobia of other people and having to be so concerned about what other people think so much [in terms of my publicly displaying my affection for my partner], and how that affects simple day-to-day life, i.e., working and a career and being able to pay the mortgage and... and eat. They're basic fundamentals [laughs] (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation).

At first glance, both Sylvia's narrative, and the part of Candace's narrative focused on career and financial independence, mirror the multiple role stress narratives of many contemporary middle-class professional mothers. A subsequent analytical stage seeks to learn how other and different individual accounts are shaped by their location within social hierarchies based on race, sex, and sexual orientation (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999). Rather than viewing Sylvia's and Candace's narratives from an individualistic or idiosyncratic framework, an overlay of historical analysis of the multiple role expectations for Black women (Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003) combined with knowledge about the historical legacy of slavery in creating gender role expectations that Black women be psychologically androgynous (i.e., strong and capable workers, but traditionally feminine in family and intimate relationships; Binion 1990; Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003) deepens understanding about how Black lesbians such as Sylvia and Candace may experience multiple minority stress. Later in her interview, for example, Candace recounted: "I have been fired from two jobs for being out [as a lesbian]. Yes, and there are no laws on the books that protect me in this state" (Bowleg et al. 2008). Far from being just an individual account of a workplace firing, the structural reality that only a handful of states (excluding Candace's) extend antidiscrimination protections to LGBs in the workplace (National Gay and Lesbian Task Force 2005) underscores Candace's position within the social hierarchy of intersections of ethnicity, sex, and sexual orientation. Knowledge about institutionalized heterosexism in the workplace as well as heterosexism in religious institutions and families, further allows the analyst to bridge individual accounts within the historical and contemporary social contexts in which they occur (Collins 1995; Cuadraz and Uttal 1999). Intersectionality research demands that researchers who employ an intersectionality perspective broaden their analytical scope beyond the collected data to become intimately acquainted, if they are not already, with the sociohistorical realities of historically oppressed groups. In so doing, the intersectionality researcher must forgo disciplinary myopia and seek out knowledge about participants' experiences employing the insights of other fields of study, including economics, legal studies, history, women's studies, and ethnic studies to name just a few.

The final stage of analysis examines any contradictions or tensions relevant to these intersections (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999). The fact that Sylvia and Candace are both mothers of 13-year old girls (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) adds one such tension to the analysis. That is, it is important to examine how the experience of being a mother intersects with the other identities and how this relates to social inequality. Again, a social hierarchical analysis is key, as is knowledge about the sociocultural context of motherhood for, in this case Black lesbians. The latest U.S. Census data show for example that 52% of Black women in same-sex households reported living in a house with at least one child 18 years old or younger, compared with 32% of their White counterparts (Dang and Frazer 2004). Indeed, 35% of the Black lesbians in the quantitative BLSR sample reported that they had children (Bowleg et al. 2004). The tendency for Black same-sex households to report higher rates of parenthood than their White counterparts signals additional social inequality for Black lesbian parents: they are likely to bear the disproportionate brunt of anti-gay parenting policies and legislation (Dang and Frazer 2004).

Nor is quantitative research immune from the question of what counts as data. Returning to the example of the *check all that apply* question for experiences of discrimination due to race, sex and sexual orientation that I presented earlier, it is not clear how a researcher might analyze data from respondents who checked say, discrimination due to race, but not sexual orientation. Albeit poorly worded, the quantitative questions from the BLSR study (Bowleg et al. 2004) nonetheless highlight some of the analytical challenges. One question asked, "Racism is a more serious issue in my life than homophobia" (p. 234) to which 5% strongly disagreed, 16% disagreed, 28% were neutral, 29% agreed, and 20% strongly agreed. Another question asked, "Racism, sexism, and homophobia are all serious issues in my life" (p. 234) to which 3% participants strongly disagreed, 6% disagreed, 21% were neutral, 34% agreed, and 32% strongly agreed. I will discuss the implications of interpreting this data in the next section on interpreting intersectionality data.

Additive Strategies

As I noted previously, critics of the additive approach deride the notion that social identities and inequality that are intersectional can be separated, treated independently, or added (Collins 1995; Cuadraz and Uttal 1999; Weber and Parra-Medina 2003). Yet, addition is often a critical step in preliminary analysis. Despite their criticism of the additive approach to intersectionality, Cuadraz and Uttal (1999) concede that isolating the meaning of each identity is an essential analytical step to understanding intersectionality in qualitative research. Thus, the researcher must analyze each structural inequality separately, as well as simultaneously. Another example from the Bowleg's (manuscript in preparation) TT study will highlight the issue. In this account, Karen discussed the times that she had been gay bashed:

> There was a series of a point in my life when I was between 18 and 24 where I had been bashed five times. There was physical assault. There was verbal assault. I found that each time that I was, that that happened to me I was with White women. There came a point in time where I decided I would no longer date White women because they attract too much negativity to me and besides which they don't understand what I'm dealing with. .... But there's something about the... that the bashings were typically done by males and that the bashings were, three out of five cases, were by Black men and so there's something about the disappointment that happened and the sadness that happens when I know I have put my life on the line for Black men and to have a Black man raise his hand to me or raise his mouth, his verbal crap to me is...I will be forever disappointed around that. There's something that's very messed up about that.

Coding would be an initial analytical step. Pursuant to Grounded Theory analytical strategies, my coding typically involves three stages: open, axial and selective coding (Strauss and Corbin 1990). During the open coding phase, I would broadly code Karen's aforementioned passage using multiple and overlapping codes. Thus, there would be a code for heterosexism, another for violence, another for sexism, and a fourth for intersectionality. In the axial and selective coding phases, I would refine each of the separate codes (i.e., sexism; violence; etc.) into more distinct codes (e.g., intersections of sexism and heterosexism, intersections of racism, sexism, and heterosexism, etc.). During the selective coding phase, I would further refine the codes to reflect a specific dimension of an intersectional experience to highlight, for example, how Black lesbians' experiences of violence reflect intersections of racism, sexism, and heterosexism.

The issue of conducting additive analysis prior to interactive analyses also arises with quantitative research. Indeed, most of our statistical methods are implicitly additive, even when testing for interactions. In an ANOVA for example, interactions are contingent on the size of main effects. For example, when significant main effects exist, the probability of finding significant first order (a two-way interaction) or higher order interactions (three, four and *n*-way interactions) decreases because the significant main effects account for the bulk of the variance in the dependent variable (say, discrimination; Landrine et al. 1995). Thus, when the effects sizes of main effects are large, the probability that no interaction effect will be found is greater. When there are no main effects or just a few, predicting whether an interaction will be found and the magnitude of the interaction becomes virtually impossible (Kerlinger 1973 as cited in Landrine et al. 1995). This problem is not a trivial one for intersectionality researchers because interactions between constructs such as race and sexual orientation lie at the heart of intersectionality research. One of the foundations of intersectionality research is the premise that multiple factors uniquely combine to define an individual's experience. For instance, being Black and lesbian confers a unique experience, above and beyond being Black or lesbian. For this reason, investigation of statistical interactions in quantitative intersectionality research is both vital and necessary.

The issue is also more or less one of statistical power and the extent to which the researcher can be confident that mean differences are reliable. In the presence of powerful social forces such as racism, sexism, and heterosexism that directly influence the experiences of individuals who participate in intersectionality studies, the remaining variability in outcomes of interest may be more difficult to explain via interactions between racism, sexism, and heterosexism. In other words, in a given analysis, main effects such as racism, sexism, or heterosexism may swamp the effects of interactions between them. Thus, a finding of significant main effects for all variables (i.e., race, sex, and sexual orientation) would signal a lower probability of finding a significant higher-order interaction. The phenomenon of interactions thus poses a significant challenge to intersectionality researchers who conduct quantitative studies.

Returning to the quantitative results from the Bowleg et al. (2004) BLSR study in which 67% of the sample endorsed the statement that "Racism, sexism, and homophobia are all serious issues in my life," (p. 234) in an ANOVA, the chances of these participants experiencing discrimination because of the intersection of racism, sexism, and homophobia would be low statistically speaking, because the three main effects (i.e., racism, sexism, and homophobia) would likely account for the bulk of the variance in discrimination (Landrine et al. 1995).

Insights about Analyzing Intersectionality Data

Observation is a hallmark of the positivist paradigm. That is, the researcher seeks to "observe the essential elements of the phenomena in question (i.e., the "essences") and render them in systematic and explicit (preferably, mathematical or quantitative) form" (McGrath and Johnson 2003, p. 34). Explaining how intersecting identities mutually construct each other, or to use Ransford's (1980) language, create a "unique social space" (p. 277), however, is not always or necessarily explicit. Rather, the analyst is charged with the task of making meaning of participants' intersections of ethnicity, sex/gender and sexual orientation even when the participants do not explicitly indicate or describe it. As such, what counts as data becomes a less important consideration than the analyst's epistemological framework and ability to analyze data in ways that elucidate how the sociocultural context of structural inequality based on the intersections of race, sex, gender, and sexual orientation shape participants' experiences (Collins 1995; Crenshaw 1989; Cuadraz and Uttal 1999). Far from abandoning scientific rigor and method, I am advocating for a contextualized scientific method. That is, in addition to possessing the ability to analyze data systematically and thoroughly, the intersectionality analyst must be able to analyze research findings within a macro sociohistorical context that transcends the observed data. Using the Bowleg et al. (2004) BLSR quantitative demographic data as an example, it would be insufficient based on mere observation of the data that more than half of the sample reported having a college or graduate degree to conclude that this Black lesbian sample's educational achievements conferred a quality of life or standard living equivalent to that of historically privileged groups such as White, heterosexual, middle-class men with similar educational credentials. Initial analyses would focus on the observed data about the sample's high education accomplishments, followed by analysis of this data within a broader sociohistorical context of earning disparities based on intersections of ethnicity, sex/gender, and sexual orientation for Black lesbians as a whole (e.g., Dang and Frazer 2004).

As for the statistical tools that we use to analyze quantitative intersectionality data, Audre Lorde's (1984) famous quote, the "Master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (p. 111) seems apt here. That is, the statistical methods, even those that test interactions, were not designed with the study of intersectionality in mind. Rather, statisticians rooted in positivistic paradigms developed statistical assumptions of linearity, unidimensionality of measures, uncorrelated error components and the like (McGrath and Johnson 2003) that do not reflect the real world complexities of intersections of race, sex/gender and sexual orientation. In short, we need new analytical tools and strategies to assist us in understanding the complexities of intersectionality.

Interpreting Intersectionality Data

Finally, after the researcher has asked what she or he hopes are the best questions possible about intersectionality, and has analyzed the resulting data, there remains the task of interpreting the data. Here, as with analyzing intersectionality data, the researcher's philosophical paradigm is again paramount. Intersectionality theorists, not surprisingly, are likely to interpret data through the prism of intersectionality rather than other interpretive paradigms such as postmodernism or neo-liberalism (Baptiste 2001). So what does it all mean? This is the key question that all researchers must answer. Qualitative researchers do this through systematic analysis of transcripts or other texts; quantitative analysts through the process of inputting their raw data to software for statistical analysis (Marecek 2003). Thus, the primary goal of interpretation is determining what those raw numbers or reams of codes mean. Marecek (2003) has described the task succinctly: "Whether numbers or words, data do not speak for themselves; they acquire meaning only within a framework of interpretation created by the researcher" (p. 65). For intersectionality analysts, the key interpretative task is to derive meaning from the observed data on the one hand, and to on the other, interpret this individual level data within a larger sociohistorical context of structural inequality that may not be explicit or directly observable in the data (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999). A few examples from the BLSR (Bowleg et al. 2004) and TT (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) studies of Bowleg et al. will highlight the issue.

Lessons from the BLSR and TT Studies of Bowleg et al.

The BLSR (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation; Bowleg et al. 2008, 2003) and TT (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation) studies provided important lessons on two interpretive tasks: (1) how to make sense of quantitative findings about intersectionality; and (2) how to interpret narratives in which interviewees talk about some, but not all of their major intersections of social inequality; for example, the intersections of racism and heterosexism, but not sexism.

Interpreting Quantitative Findings

Admittedly, the quantitative questions in the Bowleg et al. (2004) BLSR study were far from ideal. Given a chance to re-do the study, the researchers would probably not ask these questions because they are so implicitly additive. This notwithstanding, these questions are illustrative of one of the challenges of interpreting quantitative data on intersectionality. For example, only 9% and 21% of the BLSR sample

disagreed or were neutral respectively about the statement, "Racism, sexism, and homophobia are all serious issues in my life" (p. 234). By contrast, more than half of the sample (67%) agreed with the statement that racism, sexism and heterosexism were all serious issues in their lives. The question: how to interpret the 30% who disagreed or were neutral about these issues? Cuadraz and Uttal's (1999) advice that analysts should interpret intersectionality data by bridging the context of the intersection of individual biography and structural inequality, guided my interpretation of this data. Specifically, at the individual level, 30% of the Black lesbians in the study may indeed have had no personal experiences with racism, sexism, and heterosexism. It is also possible that other psychological mechanisms may be at play such as the tendency for some members of historically oppressed groups to minimize their personal disadvantage (Crosby 1984; Crosby et al. 1993). The absence of personal experiences (i.e., individual biography) does not obviate the structural inequality that Black lesbians experience as a group.

The aforementioned NGLTF analysis demonstrating that Black lesbians earn less than their White and Black heterosexual and same-sex counterparts provides one example (Dang and Frazer 2004); Black lesbians' decreased access to health care compared with White lesbians and Black and White heterosexual counterparts is an another (Mays et al. 2002). It is important to note that external factors such as U.S. region (e.g., large cities such as New York City, Philadelphia and San Francisco compared with more rural regions or smaller cities) may also correlate with Black lesbians' income levels and/or access to health care.

Interpreting Narratives Voiced by a Minority of Participants

An interesting finding from the qualitative analyses of the BLSR study was that compared with the overwhelming narratives about the experiences with racism, a few women such as Bernice, a 50-year old lesbian recounted having no experiences with sexism (Bowleg et al. 2003):

> I don't really experience difficulties as a woman. I mean that I don't perceive that I do. I've been able to accomplish what I wanted to from my career. I was not hindered by being a woman. Initially it was because of being Black. I had some difficulties getting into school, but, not, by virtue of being a woman (p. 28).

Although Bernice voiced a minority perspective, in general only a handful of women discussed sexism explicitly (Bowleg et al. 2003). One possible interpretation of the finding that so few of the narratives of the Black lesbians in the BLSR study discussed sexism is that sexism is not a problem for Black lesbians. Such an interpretation would be superficial at best, however. Rather, a more compelling interpretation centers around an appreciation of the Black lesbians' social location, historically and structurally speaking, at the nexus of race, sex, and gender (Collins 1991; Davis 1983; Hooks 1981; Jones and Shorter-Gooden 2003). Therefore, the onus rests not on the individual narrative, but on the researcher interpreting the data "to learn about that context and relate it to the individual's views presented in the interviewees" (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999, p. 10). Returning to the BLSR study, Bowleg et al. (2003) interpreted the finding that the reason that only a handful of interviewees had focused on sexism as stressor was because racism and sexism are linked inextricably in the lives of Black women. Leslie, for example, recounted her frustration with sexism:

> But the part that bothers me is when they try to denigrate you or belittle you because you're a woman, or they don't recognize your input at work because you're a woman, or because you know can't earn what you should earn because you're a woman. And you don't move professionally where you should move because you're a woman; that part pisses me off, and I have very little power over that, and quite frankly I don't know whether it's because I'm Black or because I'm woman or queer (Bowleg et al. 2003, p. 29).

Though Leslie began this narrative with a focus on sexism, she ended it with an intersectionality analysis; namely, that she is unclear about whether the sexism that she experiences is a consequence of the intersection of sexism and racism, or sexism and heterosexism. Betty, a 51-year old lesbian similarly noted her experiences of the intersection of sexism and racism: "Well, I think that I pretty much focus on the fact that I'm a Black female. That's been the major challenge. If I get challenged or become the subject or the object of any bigotry, it's usually because of that" (Bowleg, manuscript in preparation). Thus, the researchers interpreted findings such as these to mean that because sexism and racism are inextricably linked for Black lesbians, few are likely to discuss sexism as a singular experience unrelated to racism (Bowleg et al. 2003).

Insights about Interpreting Intersectionality Data

Intersectionality researchers, regardless of whether they are using qualitative or quantitative methods, bear the responsibility for interpreting their data within the context of sociohistorical and structural inequality. Too often, upon finding that "a dependent variable .... Varies for the different groups categorized by race, class or gender" (Cuadraz and Uttal 1999, p. 6), investigators conclude that the found difference can be explained by race, class, or

gender even though they measured no meaningful constructs relevant to race (e.g., discrimination, stereotype threat), class (e.g., social distancing, prejudice, stereotypes), or gender (e.g., gender role norms; Betancourt and Lopez 1993; Helms et al. 2005; Krieger et al. 1993). Conversely, when they find no differences between socioculturally different groups in a study, researchers readily conclude that dimensions such as race, class, and gender played no role in the study's results. In other words, they homogenize the groups. This erasure of entrenched systems of structural inequality based on race, class, and gender, establishes these differences as a mere socially constructed "never ending string of equivalent relations, all containing race, class and gender in some form, but a chain of equivalences devoid of power relations" (Collins 1995, p. 493).

Nor is this interpretative invisibility limited to quantitative research. Qualitative researchers may also fail to interpret experiences of intersectionality by rendering the missing narratives meaningless or giving more credence to the explicit narratives about an experience. The interpretive task for the intersectionality analyst is to make explicit the often implicit experiences of intersectionality, even when participants do not express the connections. This challenge is hardly unique. Researchers who conduct community-based research with historically disenfranchised communities routinely confront the dilemma of "... connect[ing] theoretically, empirically, and politically troubling social/familial patterns with macrostructural shifts when our informants expressly do not make, or even refuse to make, the connections" (Fine et al. 2000, p. 116). Making these connections through our interpretations, is a key goal of intersectionality research.

Following Truth: Some Concluding Thoughts on Intersectionality Research

Depending on the strength of one's mental constitution, one of the benefits of reflecting on research already conducted is the opportunity to reframe that research through new knowledge gained since the research, and ponder different ways one might approach the research given a chance to redo it. In this article, I have used the research of Bowleg et al. (Bowleg, manuscripts in preparation; Bowleg et al. 2004, 2008, 2003) with Black lesbians to illustrate some of the methodological challenges that arise with regard to asking questions about intersectionality, and analyzing and interpreting intersectionality data. Alas, what I conclude from all of this is that although intersectionality theory provides a conceptually solid framework with which to examine the social location of individuals and groups within "interlocking structures of oppression" (Collins 1995, p. 492; Weber 1998), the methodological choices at our disposal to do so are severely limited. Try as we might, it is virtually impossible to escape the additive assumption implicit in the questions we use to measure intersectionality and in our analysis of the phenomenon. Thus, it is the interpretation of the seemingly un-measurable and un-analyzable data that becomes one of the most substantial tools of the intersectionality researcher. Simply put, intersectionality researchers are charged with the responsibility of making the intersections between ethnicity, sex/gender, sexual orientation (to name just a few) and the social inequality related to these identities, explicit.

Often the stock phrase in peer-reviewed articles is that "more research is needed on *x*." In the case of intersectionality research this is only partially true. Almost 30 years later, Ransford's (1980) declaration that research on multiple jeopardy and advantages of social identities was a "veritable empirical wasteland" (p. 272) remains true. On the one hand, a keyword search for intersectionality or intersections of social identities in the database *Psychinfo* yields just a handful of citations. On the other hand, there is a bounty of social science, epidemiological, and biomedical research, particularly in the area of health disparities, with the potential to answer key questions about structural inequality based on the intersections of race, sex, gender, class, sexual orientation, and disability (e.g., Schulman et al. 1999; Smedley et al. 2003). For a variety of reasons however, these studies tend to have limited ability to answer important questions about intersectionality. First, they often fail to develop meaningful constructs to measure experiences based on the intersections of these social identities, relying instead on the erroneous assumption that variables such as race, sex, sexual orientation, class, and disability are explanatory constructs in and of themselves (Betancourt and Lopez 1993; Helms et al. 2005; Krieger 1999; Krieger et al. 1993).

Another problem is that variables such as social class are often inconsistently or insufficiently measured (e.g., relying on individual-level data only rather than the interaction of individual, household, and neighborhood level data) (Krieger et al. 1993). Moreover, many studies neglect to collect data about identities such as sexual orientation or gender identity (e.g., transgendered, female-to-male transsexual, etc.; Dean et al. 2000) that would facilitate analysis of intersectionality. For example, although Healthy People 2010 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services 2000) includes 29 objectives that address health disparities among lesbians, gay men and bisexuals, only six of the 12 federal information systems used to monitor the objectives have experience collecting sexual orientation data. Nor does a standardized way of collecting sexual orientation data exist (Sell and Becker 2001). Proponents of the collection of sexual orientation data in national population-based research call the absence of data on sexual orientation

"one of the greatest threats to the health of lesbian, gay, and bisexual Americans" (Sell and Becker 2001, p. 876). Thus, more research that asks more and better questions that can be used to analyze intersectionality is desperately needed. It is worth restating, that simply asking questions about demographic difference or comparing different social groups does not constitute intersectionality research. Rather, it is the analysis and interpretation of research findings within the sociohistorical context of structural inequality for groups positioned in social hierarchies of unequal power (Collins 1995; Crenshaw 1989, 1991; Cuadraz and Uttal 1999; Weber and Parra-Medina 2003) that best defines intersectionality research.

Examining intersectionality from multidisciplinary perspectives is a signature strength of scholarship on intersectionality. Scholars from disciplines as varied as women's studies, Black feminist studies, social epidemiology, sociology, critical theory, legal studies, and psychology have all made important contributions to advancing knowledge about the experience of intersectionality. Nonetheless, this disciplinary dispersion also reflects a "balkanization of research on social inequality ... that has precluded integrated knowledge across systems of oppression" (Reskin 2002 as cited in Weber and Parra-Medina 2003, p. 200). An essential response to this balkanization of research is multidisciplinary teams of researchers composed of qualitative analysts and statisticians to develop and advance methodological knowledge about interdisciplinary research. At issue is not just an expansion of methodological expertise; multidisciplinary teams challenge the predominant post-positivist paradigm in which most traditionally trained researchers are steeped by "incorporating more dimensions, situationally specific interpretations, group dynamics and an explicit emphasis on social change" (Weber and Parra-Medina 2003, p. 222).

The inchoate interest in intersectionality within psychology as exemplified by this Special Issue on intersectionality is both exciting and overdue. More noteworthy though is the realization that long before academics ventured into the study of intersectionality, Black women pioneers such as Sojourner Truth (1851) used their own lives to illustrate the experience of intersectionality. Truth's famous "Ain't I A Woman?" speech in which she interrogated the intersections between her experiences as a woman who had "borne 13 children" but because she was Black, had never been "help [ed] into carriages, or over mud-puddles, or giv[en] any best place" as the mores of 19th century White society dictated for economically advantaged White women, remains a poignant description of intersectionality. Indeed, Truth's speech provides an invaluable lesson for the conceptual and methodological advancement of future research on intersectionality. Inherent in Truth's wisdom is a call for researchers to approach intersectionality from the perspectives of ordinary people who live at the crux of structural inequality based on intersections of race, class, sex, gender, sexual orientation, and disability. Approaches grounded in the experiences of ordinary people, in stark contrast to traditional top-down approaches hold incredible promise for helping researchers address and respond to the many methodological challenges of intersectionality research. Indeed the novel perspectives gained from intersectionality research can advance knowledge, inform interventions, and shape public policy in ways that benefit women like Black lesbians and all others who fall through the "women and minorities" gap.

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