



หนังสือปริทัศน์

Intersectionality in Feminist Theory and Feminist Research Approaches

Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women's Commonality. By Naomi Zack. Lamham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005.

“Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective”. By Donna Haraway. *Feminist Studies* (Autumn 1988) 14(3) 575-599.

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Definition of women and intersectionality in feminist theory

Without a doubt, there exists considerable contention within feminist scholarship. Liberal feminisms, associated with the likes of Ester Boserup and Betty Friedan, typically propound the idea that economic independence significantly leads to equality between men and women;¹ Global South feminisms, on the other hand, are usually critical of these approaches, indicating that they do not really help solve the plight of Global South women. In due course, a new feminist movement grew, offering diverse insights: Kimberlé Crenshaw coined intersectionality and argued that it is important to centre on this to bolster social justice;² Chandra Talpade Mohanty offers a ‘decolonialist’ approach and explores how systems of power, such as colonialism, imperialism,

¹ Especially see Ester Boserup, *Women's Role in Economic Development* (Cromwell Press 1989) and Betty Friedan, *The Feminine Mystique* (WW Norton 2010).

² Kimberlé Crenshaw, “Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color”, *Stanford Law Review* (July 1991), 43(6) 1241, 1242-1244.

and capitalism, converge to frustrate women's equality in diverse pasts;³ and so forth. Some feminisms, including those tied to postmodern approaches, have muddied the waters, criticising the concept of 'woman' – this does not essentially exist as 'truth', is socially made, and individuals born as 'men' can become women. For essentialists, this is highly troubling – offering grounds for incredible debate.

One critical scholar that particularly stands out is Naomi Zack, who wrote *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women's Commonality*. In this politically tinged piece, Zack critiques Crenshaw's (and others') concept of intersectionality, claiming that intersectionality frustrates the woman concept by 'multiplying genders beyond necessity', and intersectionality segregates feminist movements.⁴ This can have detrimental effects, namely inappropriately pitting women against each other as differences are imagined, as well as reduced political momentum and rights. Perhaps Zack implies that this can especially devastate women's rights in Global South societies – although this is not consistently argued. In due course, Zack proposes 'inclusive feminism' – producing and popularising a 'universal' definition of women – and, in many ways, this resonates with the essentialist-leaning liberal feminisms and philosophies (of Western pasts). For Zack, we should focus on 'real women'⁵ – the theory should be 'unapologetically' normative⁶ – and so forth.

³ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Duke University Press 2003).

⁴ See Alison Bailey's excellent critical analysis: Alison Bailey, "On intersectionality: Empathy, and feminist solidarity: A reply to Naomi Zack", *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* (2009) 19(1) 14, 14-15.

⁵ Naomi Zack, *Inclusive Feminism: A Third Wave Theory of Women's Commonality* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2005), p. 63.

⁶ *Ibid.* p. 63.

Overall, I take considerable issue with Zack's approach – let alone that it is almost tone-deaf on Global South feminist literature, and, therefore, seemingly tone-deaf on the plight of Global South women. Let us first critically assess Zack's universal definition of women. While it may be easy and therefore practical to bolster political power through an entity encompassing women with identical biological traits, the definition is quite misleading, in that it largely appropriates and naturalises a Western, binary-centric concept: woman, part of the man-woman dynamic that has dominated Western discourse for millennia. Significant scholarship shows us that 'woman' is, in fact, an invention, and this is not only realised in Global South literature, but in practice. In many human societies, people born with male genitalia have become 'women' or at least Third Gender – consider the Two-Spirit people in Indigenous American civilisations.⁷ Europeans usually applied theories like or supportive of Zack's to justify inhumane treatment of these people – which perhaps questions the 'inclusivity' associated with Zack's theory and may align it quite well with colonialist philosophies: this is a warning.

In very general terms, Zack's universal definition of women is very isolating. By pushing for a focus on 'real women' – which, to be clear, is Zack's own invention – there is no 'truth' or 'real women' – Zack is basically asking us to 'throw away' trans women. In due course, they are not included under the 'women' umbrella, and their rights are ignored, trampled on, and destroyed. Of course, they may be included in a 'gay' umbrella – though this is also possibly unlikely, given queer discrimination against trans folk. Trans may have their own umbrella – but as a minority, they have less power. One key example centers on Black Americans; a majority of Black Americans have found themselves oppressed by diverse and pervasive oppressions, including

⁷ Gilbert Herdt, *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History* (Zone Books 2020).

the prison-industrial complex – not because they are Black, but because society abused their socially-produced racial complex and status as a minority group, and, as a minority, it is highly difficult to claw your way out of that.⁸

The important note is that without being included in the ‘women’ umbrella, trans women’s human resources are not applied to benefit so-called ‘real women’. This defeats Zack’s intention: to bolster women’s rights.

Turning next to Zack’s criticism of intersectionality, namely that it is fragmenting, I am not impressed. Nor is Alison Bailey. According to Bailey, this entire approach ‘oversimplifies’ the work needed for ‘sustained coalition building’ – (a) identifying, and (b) appreciating intersectional differences is, in fact, highly useful in building sustainable solidarities.⁹ It forces us to talk about historical tensions, resolve them, and build relationships, which can foster political power.¹⁰ I would like to add that ignoring the differences can be very dangerous, in that we throw the problems under the rug, problems fester, and people under the ‘women’ umbrella may feel compelled to not co-operate with each other. Perhaps we sense this by feeling the angst of Mohanty¹¹ and Vandana Shiva¹² – critical of liberal feminists for ignoring their real issues.

In very general terms, intersectionality is fundamental to feminism, in

⁸ Michelle Alexander, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colourblindness* (Penguin Books 2019).

⁹ Alison Bailey’s excellent critical analysis: Alison Bailey, ‘On intersectionality: Empathy, and feminist solidarity: A reply to Naomi Zack’, *Journal for Peace and Justice Studies* (2009) 19(1) 14, 29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ Chandra Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders: Decolonizing Theory, Practicing Solidarity* (Duke University Press 2003).

¹² Vandana Shiva, *Staying Alive: Women, Ecology and Survival in India* (Women Unlimited 2010).

that it functions as a portal to other realities. This can help us ‘see’ contexts – which can be an object for further research – and this is something increasingly realised by fundamental bodies like UN Women.¹³ At the end of the day, feminism should be about helping ‘women’ (including people identifying as women), and that is exactly what intersectionality does.

Overall, I find Zack’s arguments in the book are weak and tepid at best. In a way, Zack’s arguments are either circular, fallacious, or imaginary – perhaps Zack has too much bias in favour of the highly problematic liberal feminisms of yesterday. If Zack appreciated the value of intersectionality – and guarded against straw man-leaning arguments – Zack may considerably agree with say Global South feminist literature. It is time we made agreements about significant and powerful ideas and move forward – in an age of neoliberalisms, resurgent patriarchies, fascisms, and nationalisms,¹⁴ this is more important than ever.

Feminist research approaches: on the notion of “partial and situated knowledges”

As a women’s studies PhD student, one may realise that there exists a

¹³ UN Women, ‘Intersectional feminism: What it means and why it matters right now’, 1 July 2020, viewed 15 March 2024, <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/6/explainer-intersectional-feminism-what-it-means-and-why-it-matters>.

¹⁴ Thomas Keith, *Masculinities in Contemporary American Culture: An Intersectional Approach to the Complexities and Challenges of Male Identity* (Routledge 2017); Carlen Lavigne, *Post-Apocalyptic Patriarchy: American Television and Gendered Visions of Survival* (McFarland & Company 2018); Marilena de Souza Chauí, ‘Neoliberal totalitarianism’, in Gastón Souroujon and Gisela Pereyra Doval (eds), *Global Resurgence of the Right: Conceptual and Regional Perspectives* (Taylor & Francis 2021), Carl Boggs, *Fascism Old and New: American Politics at the Crossroads* (Routledge 2018); and Robert Schertzer and Eric Taylor Woods, *The New Nationalism in America and Beyond: The Deep Roots of Ethnic Nationalism in the Digital Age* (Oxford University Press 2022).

myriad of feminist research approaches.¹⁵ Perhaps one of the most interesting is an approach that centers on situated knowledges, as propounded by Donna Haraway in her very stimulating 1988 article. In very basic terms, Haraway describes this approach as community-oriented (versus individual-oriented), not only because it draws attention to diverse community-produced knowledges, but also because these knowledges are highly useful in helping us understand and critically evaluate communities.¹⁶ The approach assumes that there is at least a limited degree of value associated with situated knowledges produced in specific contexts, and it is compared with a so-called universal approach, which assumes that universal ideas transcend all human societies.¹⁷

Overall, there exist pros and cons associated with Haraway's approach. Turning first to the pros, the situated knowledges approach encourages us to think beyond the objectivity-subjectivity binary – and perhaps binaries more generally – to highly original and novel ways of thinking. In a very abstract way, the approach encourages us to think beyond a 'Western-centric' way of seeing the world, to grassroots ways, including those that may be highly foreign to some researchers and which may be associated with indigenous contexts.¹⁸ By 'seeing' the indigenous way, we actually 'see' the indigenous way; if we were to 'see' the indigenous way through a universalist approach, we actually do not

¹⁵ The author assumes that these exist; for critical discussion of whether these exist, and an argument against the idea of there being a feminist research method, see Sandra Harding, 'Introduction: Is there a feminist method?', in Sandra Harding (ed), *Feminism and methodology* (Indiana University Press 1987).

¹⁶ Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective', in *Feminist Studies* (Autumn 1988) 14(3) 575, 590-591.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 588-589.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 586.

really ‘see’.¹⁹ This hints at significance, which is core to any research.

Second, Haraway’s situated knowledges framework may encourage us to not only consider knowledge situated in a particular context, but also a myriad of other knowledges. In other words, a situated knowledges framework promotes intersectionality. Intersectionality is critical in that it allows us to discover novel innovations – ways of seeing the world, originating in a particular context – which may offer significant ways of seeing for other contexts, and which may not be readily available in alternative knowledges. As an example – Carol Rambo Ronai’s emotional narratives framework allows us to discover writing emotion-driven field notes, which capture on-the-spot emotions and innovative ways of swapping the ‘researcher’ and ‘participant observer’ hats.²⁰ This can be applied alongside say in-depth, open-ended questioning, to provide a highly holistic and critical perspective of a particular case study.

Third, Haraway’s situated knowledges framework reveals the critical idea that (often-popular) approaches can have limited significance. One great example of a framework that can have limited significance is the scientific method. While this approach may offer a seemingly significant regime to follow, the approach may be reductionist, particularly if we appreciate the idea that it largely incorporates Western ways of seeing²¹ (e.g., there is ‘truth’ and say

¹⁹ For alternative ways of ‘seeing’, see Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (HarperOne 2020); Shannon Dea, *Beyond the Binary: Thinking About Sex and Gender*, 2nd Edition (Broadview Press 2023), 88-90; Baker A Rogers, ‘Queers embracing place in Appalachia: The importance of masculinities for queer acceptance’, in Rebecca Scott and Zane McNeill (eds), *Queering Appalachian Ecologies for a Sustainable Future* (University Press of Kentucky 2024); and diverse other works.

²⁰ Caro Rambo Ronai, ‘The reflexive self through narrative: A night in the life of an erotic dancer/researcher’, in Carolyn Ellis and Michael G Flaherty (eds), *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience* (Sage Publications 1992).

²¹ See Donna Haraway, ‘Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective’, in *Feminist Studies* (Autumn 1988) 14(3) 575, 583.

a ‘real’ man or woman) and not other legitimate ways of seeing. Foucault alludes to this idea in *The order of things: An archeology of the human sciences* – Western science advances certain epistemic assumptions that may not necessarily be ‘truth’ though posits that it is.²² By applying the scientific method, we may additionally abandon aspects that qualitative approaches (i.e., ethnographic research designs) typically showcase – for instance, Ronai’s emotional narratives framework – which can ultimately help us ‘understand’ contexts.²³

Turning to the cons, perhaps the major con is that Haraway offers limited insight on how to apply a situated knowledges framework. More specifically – is there a cookie-cutter way to discover and apply situated knowledges, is there a significant approach to selecting and refining these knowledges to bolster significance of the research, and so forth? While this does not necessarily make the situated knowledges framework ‘bad’ – that would be fallacious – it does mean that we must rigorously expand on this idea and answer these questions, to maximise the utility of the framework. Haraway wrote in 1988; it is now 2024. Karin Reisinger does offer fresh insights on how these knowledges may be produced (and perhaps therefore discovered), but in a highly limited context (post-extractive environments in northern Sweden).²⁴

²² Michael Foucault, *The order of things: An archaeology of the Human Sciences* (Taylor & Francis 2018).

²³ Caro Rambo Ronai, ‘The reflexive self through narrative: A night in the life of an erotic dancer/researcher’, in Carolyn Ellis and Michael G Flaherty (eds), *Investigating subjectivity: Research on lived experience* (Sage Publications 1992).

²⁴ Karin Reisinger, ‘Struggles at the ‘peripheries’: Situated knowledge production and feminist visions for post-extractive environments’, *Action! Feminisms and the spatialization of resistances*, AU22, 2022, viewed 15 March 2024, <https://journals.openedition.org/cidades/6197>.

Overall, the situated knowledges approach certainly resonates with feminist research methods, though of course may be compared with different methods. Perhaps key points of similarity are that these approaches emphasise focus on women's lived experiences, and they often criticise 'objectivity'²⁵ – which is hardly objective when one realises that 'objectivity' curiously supports patriarchy and the oppression of women, by 'naturalising' the idea that men are somehow more powerful and better leaders than women. While feminist empiricism may largely emphasise looking at how specific values, and even politics, mediate the production of knowledge,²⁶ situated knowledges does ask us to find any value that may be extrapolated from the 'objective' scientific method – Haraway is not asking us to throw away science, but instead to be mindful when applying it, and, overall, move beyond a binary involving objectivity.²⁷ While feminist Marxist approaches may emphasise critical examination of gendered structures within capitalist universes, Haraway's approach may ask us to consider this, alongside other aspects, which may touch women's experiences.

To conclude, Haraway's situated knowledges framework is certainly stimulating for any gender studies PhD student. Overall, there appear to be both pros and cons to the approach, and it can readily be compared with other research methods. Gender studies PhD students would be well advised to critically examine the cons associated with the framework and critically research any contemporary literature discussing how to 'best' apply the framework.

²⁵ Donna Haraway, 'Situated knowledges: The science question in feminism and the privilege of partial perspective', in *Feminist Studies* (Autumn 1988) 14(3) 575, 579.

²⁶ Elizabeth Potter and Linda Alcoff, *Feminist Epistemologies* (Taylor & Francis 2013).

²⁷ Martha E Giménez, *Marx, Women, and Capitalist Social Reproduction* (Brill 2018).