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Intersectionality Queer Studies and Hybridity: Methodological Frameworks for Social Research

By Aristeia Fotopoulou¹

Abstract

This article seeks to draw links between intersectionality and queer studies as epistemological strands by examining their common methodological tasks and by tracing some similar difficulties of translating theory into research methods. Intersectionality is the systematic study of the ways in which differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and other sociopolitical and cultural identities interrelate. Queer theory, when applied as a distinct methodological approach to the study of gender and sexuality, has sought to denaturalise categories of analysis and make normativity visible. By examining existing research projects framed as 'queer' alongside ones that use intersectionality, I consider the importance of positionality in research accounts. I revisit Judith Halberstam's (1998) 'Female Masculinity' and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) 'Borderlands' and discuss the tension between the act of naming and the critical strategic adoption of categorical thinking. Finally, I suggest hybridity as one possible complementary methodological approach to those of intersectionality and queer studies. Hybridity can facilitate an understanding of shifting textual and material borders and can operate as a creative and political mode of destabilising not only complex social locations, but also research frameworks.

Keywords: intersectionality, hybridity, queer studies

Introduction

Intersectionality is the systematic study of the ways in which differences such as race, gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity and other sociopolitical and cultural categories interrelate. In research employing the formulation of intersectionality (see Crenshaw 1989, 1991), this interrelation - but not conflation - of differences is seen as central in how subordination is experienced and lived. At the same time, queer studies as a distinct approach to the study of gender and sexuality has sought to denaturalise categories of analysis and separate 'the normal (statistically determined) from the normative (morally determined)' (Giffney, 2004, p.75). I thus find it important to trace the two frameworks side by side, and to rethink what they can offer to feminist research. To be sure, neither the concept of intersectionality nor that of 'queer' indicate set tools for conducting

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research. In what follows, I examine existing research projects framed as 'queer' alongside ones that use intersectionality, in order to primarily indicate some difficulties in translating theory and philosophical ideas into research methods; secondly, to consider how the concepts of intersectionality and 'queer' could come together in dynamic ways in interdisciplinary studies; and thirdly, to suggest hybridity as one possible way to creatively and politically address the 'intracategorical complexity' (McCall, 2005) of the research process.

Development of the Concept of Intersectionality

In feminist scholarship, intersectionality has been accepted as an approach of major importance, although it often criticized as ambiguous (Davis, 2008). There are different formulations in intersectionality scholarship, including that of a crossroad (Crenshaw, 1991), of a dynamic process (Staunæs, 2003) and that of 'axes' of difference (Yuval-Davis, 2006). The term was originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) who foregrounded the experiences of women of colour and developed a Black feminist critique of both anti-racist policy discourse and feminist theory. In 'Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex', Crenshaw (1989) began with 'All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies' (Hull et al., 1982), a text issued in 1977 by Black US feminist lesbians of the Combahee River Collective. The latter was an influential manifesto which placed issues of gender, race, class, and sexuality at the centre of any feminist project. Since the late seventies, efforts to tackle class, race and ethnicity differences as single categories (by way of inclusivity) has been criticised as ethnocentric and imperialistic (Lugones & Spelman, 1983; Mohanty, 1988). Crenshaw (1989) additionally explained how such single-axis frameworks in some cases entirely erased the specificity of Black women's social location. By focusing on cases of male violence against women of colour in the US, including rape and battering, Crenshaw (1991) further offered a key multi-dimensional model of intersectionality, as structural (for instance, language barriers to accessing support resources for immigrant women); political and representational (relating to the role of cultural understandings of women of colour in shaping political agendas and resistance practices).

Other US Black feminist theory scholars (Anthias, 1998; Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983; Collins, 2000; Yuval-Davis, 1997) whose work emphasised the marginalisation of women of colour within white, Western feminisms, form a highly influential historical strand in the development of intersectionality. Motivated by political activism and critique, this strand moved beyond the essentialism of 'women' as a 'universal' analytic category for feminism as a whole and undertook a project of addressing the racialisation of gender and the gendering of race.

While theorists of race and gender were critical of what was seen as poststructuralist relativism, postmodern feminists drew critical attention to the terminology used by these race/gender theorists, namely experience, standpoint and identity politics. A second historical strand then within which intersectionality developed, according to a genealogical account given by Kathy Davis (2008), was that of postmodernist thought (for example, see Foucault, 1972; Derrida, 1974). Postmodernist thought, in a broad sense, tends to reject fixed social categories of location and identification (for instance, sexuality, physical capacity, class and gender) and aims to deconstruct long-held binaries in Western scientific thought and scholarship, such as nature/culture and female/male (see Brah, 1996; Butler, 1989; Mohanty, 1988). At the same time, feminist studies of science

and technology like those by Donna Haraway (1989; 1997), Sandra Harding (1986) and Evelyn Fox Keller (1985) examined the androcentrism of scientific methods and the resulting systematic exclusions of women from science.

The “ontological durability” (Cooper, 2009, p.301) of group categories, social locations and identities vary in these different traditions in feminism – in other words the belief that identities endure in historical times and social life varies. However, there is a shared intersectional thinking, in that their common route to social change involved a task of deconstructing 'master' narratives and challenging the normativity of social categories. Although critical feminist theorists of race, class and gender were and still are more concerned with the material consequences of the power dynamics enfolded in and through these categories than with categorization *per se*, intersectionality helps Black feminists move beyond 'triple jeopardy' approaches to class, race and gender (King, 1988). In this sense, it is a working solution that makes visible the social and material consequences of the power systems relating to gender/race/class, but does so by employing methodologies compatible with the poststructuralist project of deconstructing categories, unmasking universalism, and exploring the dynamic and contradictory workings of power (Brah & Phoenix, 2004).

Methodological Implications of Intersectionality and Criticism

Since issues relating to intersectional research practice are not straightforward (McCall, 2005), the concept of intersectionality has introduced new methodological problems. What is actually involved in the process of research when intersectionality is adopted? It is significant to acknowledge the limitations or shortcomings of research practice engaging with intersectionality because different methodologies produce different knowledges and hence can offer different political visions. In the following section, I trace the relationship between research method and the production of knowledge and suggest that social research within an intersectionality framework can create new, overlapping and complex categories of analysis. At the same time, it runs the danger of creating new inequalities and new hierarchies of differences.

For Leslie McCall (2005), the development of diverse research practices involving the concept of intersectionality is inevitable: the complexity of analysis resulting from the multiplicity of dimensions that need to be investigated generates different possibilities for research practice. In a review of various methodological approaches to intersections and complexity, McCall (2005) analyses what categories actually mean for various scholars and how far these can be used to examine the complexity of social life. The first approach she recognises is that of 'anticategorical complexity'. Social life is here viewed as so complex and fluid that it requires a complete deconstruction of finite analytic categories. Research that challenges the formation of hegemonic social groups has been primarily guided by poststructuralism. Ethnographic practice in anthropology, for instance, often recognises how identities once considered fixed, like gender and sexuality, are socially and culturally constructed. Historical research on the other hand, has used genealogy to manifest how ideas such as homosexuality have historically developed. Anti-categorical research builds on these traditions to challenge the universality of established groups, but can become politically ineffective.

Secondly, McCall (2005) suggests that intersectionality can be approached through 'inter-categorical complexity'. In this case, the researcher uses existing analytical categories strategically and temporarily in order 'to document relationships of inequality

among social groups and changing configurations of inequality along multiple and conflicting dimensions' (2005, p.2). The researcher thus needs to undertake endless comparisons between data.

The third approach in McCall's typology, 'intra categorical complexity', focuses on transgressive social groups crossing the boundaries of existing categories and is the one I find most productive in this paper. Intracategorical approach to research reflects the idea that in order to understand the lived experiences of subordinate groups, we have to look at the social settings where oppression intersects. As an approach it may be the most fruitful and political, since the engagement of feminists of colour with intersectionality emerged, as previously mentioned, from a critique to feminist theory and research precisely because single-axis analysis failed to account for the multiplicity of subordinate positions.

One of the main turns feminist research took based on this idea was the turn towards narrative. Carolyn Steedman, for example, in 'Landscape for a Good Woman' (1987), argued that when it comes to narrating such settings of inequality feminist research needs to work against generalisation, universalisation and inevitable simplification. To this end, Steedman (1987) administered narrating the particular and the specific through the use of the autobiographical 'I'. We can think thus how single narratives, either autobiographical, or through in depth case study, can aid the analysis of social locations as intersections because they can account for subjectivity in experiences of class, ethnicity and other registers of inequality. Single person or single group narratives however commonly focus on one aspect of social life in order to minimize the complexity of the research process. If, for example, the identity of the group or person under analysis is that of lesbian, woman, middle class, only one respective dimension of the categories (or axes of analysis) sexuality, gender, class are reflected in the study. Selecting how to narrow down the complexity of a social location and providing a single life narrative relies then on the relationship between the individual (or group) and the researcher which is equally complex (see Ruth Behar, 1993).

Even when social research does not consist of narratives or case studies, the concept of intersectionality highlights how categorical analysis cannot sufficiently reflect the heterogeneity of lived experience. The 'triple oppression' approach - a tendency in intersectionality studies whereby race or other inequalities are simply an added component in social research and analysis - does not work for women whose lives are indeed at an intersection of social divisions and systems of power (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1983). Indeed Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1983) propose an understanding of gender as constituted through race or other aspects of identity and in which 'all three divisions are intermeshed in such a way that we cannot see them as additive or prioritise abstractly any one of them' (p.68). For social researchers this practically translates into aiming, not to classify participants according to singular categories, but to acknowledge the dynamics of intersecting positions. For example, Helen Kennedy (2005) registered the resistance of research subjects when she attempted to classify them into singular categories like class, gender and race. Apart from a constitutive approach to intersectionality then, feminist research needs to avoid generalised conclusions and assumptions about what social divisions mean for the participants of specific studies.

Moreover, the study of cases from the margins makes unequal power relations visible and facilitates the development of political discourse. Chandra Talpade Mohanty (1986; 2003) drew out the connection between feminist activism and feminist scholarship and noted how methodological issues, namely the selection of cases is, a political issue.

Injustice, for Mohanty, is universal and the aim is to develop a 'transnational, anticapitalist feminist critique' (2003, p.510). She used historical materialism and chose to study the lives of marginalized women from developing regions and countries. In contrast to studies of privileged communities, cases 'from below' can benefit from the visibility of unequal power relations and oppression. Looking 'up' can reveal systemic power injustices. Additionally, studies of the particular as developed by both standpoint feminists and post-positivist realists (see Mohanty, 2000; Moya, 2000) have the potential to deconstruct the epistemic privilege of the researcher, a problem mentioned above. For the research participants, this type of study can be beneficial because they can negotiate existing power structures and can become empowered by critically reflecting in their everyday lives. A good example of 'a transnational, anticapitalist feminist politics' (Mohanty, 2003, p.513) comes from the work of Shiva et al. (2000) who studied the lives and experiences of poor, tribal peasant women in India. Focusing on intellectual property rights and biopiracy, research of this approach fostered struggles against environmental racism by 'reading up' the power structure, including the policies relating to pollution and toxic waste that became legitimised by WTOs.

There is however some criticism towards intersectionality as a methodological approach. What has come to be frequently accepted as feminist methodology is based on Sandra Harding's (1989) classification of empiricism, standpoint and postmodern feminism. However, critical intersectionality does not directly link to a particular method but is rather one possible solution amongst a range of multi-issue theories (Erel et al., 2008). Many scholars have thus studied race, class, gender and other intersections using quantitative methods (see Browne, 1999). For example, in her study of wage inequality and informed by intersectionality, McCall (2001) used a comparative method and noted that experience by itself cannot explain social complexity. It is then pertinent to question how far methods that tend to be considered positivist, for example, advanced quantitative techniques (and thus not compliant with what has been classified as feminist methodology) limit the interdisciplinarity that women's studies could aim for. Methods and the selection of methodology are clearly not merely a matter of epistemological commitment to feminism as a social theory but also a matter of suitability for the subject at hand. Intersectionality as a feminist analytical approach needs thus to reflect the commitment to bring forth the complexity of social life and not stand as an impediment for studies that conflict with a canon or a discipline.

Further, some scholars have focused on exclusions in intersectionality and particularly the paradigm's failure to become something more than an additive approach to social research. As the concept appears like a buzzword with obscure meanings and ambivalent uses, it is in danger of becoming a magic word of depoliticisation (Erel et al. 2008). Umut Erel et al. (2008), in the book chapter 'On the depoliticisation of intersectionality talk: Conceptualising multiple oppressions in critical sexuality studies' argued that research demeans intersectionality of its transformative potential by silencing the theoretical input of political activism and, in particular, that of trans and queer people of colour. Beyond registering the intersections of social differences, feminist projects should investigate how hierarchies have been established and, ultimately, attempt to change them. The authors thus ask, what counts as difference and what does not? They note the absence of sexuality, disability, transexuality and transgender from anti-racist political initiatives and feminisms and contend that these exclusions are not just discursive and methodological. According to Erel et. al (2008), they are material and visible in activist spaces which remain hugely white, able-bodied, young and middle-

class. Intersectionality needs thus to embrace structural inequality in everyday life, as a result of complex intersections, even within the field of feminist activism and theory in order to connect social reality with theory.

Rethinking the Political and Analytical Project of Intersectionality Alongside 'queer'

I have so far recounted that the study of intersectionality has had two main methodological developments: one in which deconstruction of finite categories and identities is central, and another in which adoption of categorical thinking is done critically, strategically and selectively. I will move on from criticism oriented towards intersectionality to suggest that the research process needs to be thought as always political not only because it produces feminist and/or antiracist knowledge on its own right. Importantly, *how* we do research generates relationships through and in the selective steps that determine which differences matter. The question that arises is what can this research practice involve and how we, as researchers, can be responsible and political about the new social realities we produce. In this section, I examine the proposition that positionality is key to any research account and begin to think how the concept of 'queer' could facilitate intra-categorical thinking.

For Erel et al. (2008), one way to address the shortcomings of intersectional approaches is by reflecting on our own positionality within a given disciplinary field. For example, they suggest that in interviewing, questions that seem irrelevant to the subject of study could be asked in order to discover the boundaries of that subject or disciplinary field, precisely because data collection, epistemology and interpretation always operate within certain power systems. Moreover, even when we share something in common with research participants, for example ethnicity or gender, the power relations in field encounters need to be taken into account (Bhavnani, 1994; Fortier, 1998, Gunaratnam 2003; Phoenix, 1994). For instance, when she researched Turkish women, Umut Erel (2007) shared similar background but held different political views. Encarnación Gutiérrez Rodríguez (2006) suggested that when the researcher and research participants have commonalities, for example sexuality or language, there is a risk of assuming common identity. Not accounting for the privilege provided by belonging in academia can lead to research that looks from 'above' rather than 'below'. As researchers, we need to define where we stand, whom we speak for and how we relate to them, even when research is predominately based on texts and/or nonhumans (Haritaworn, 2008). In a study of queer methodology, Jin Haritaworn (2008) reported the conflict which emerged around Judith Butler's text 'Gender is Burning' (1993). Writing about Jenny Livingston's film 'Paris is Burning', Butler used the text as an ethnography of an existing culture rather than an interpretation or a representation. Butler's article was consequently considered to misrepresent the working class trans women of colour due to the author's failure to reflect on her privileged position (non-trans, white) (Prosser, 1998). Reflecting on our own positionality, both within a disciplinary field and on our own privileged positions as academics within a research setting, can help against the reductionism of differences to similarities. In any case, the commitment to 'situated knowledges' (Haraway, 1988), in other words the cultural, local and historical production of knowledge, is key to the production of self-critical and accountable feminist theory (Lykke, 2005).

However, a productive way of thinking in terms of intra-categorical complexity (McCall, 2005) and at the same time maintain a political stand requires taking into account recent trajectories in queer studies and particularly the possibilities offered in attempts to translate queer theory into methodologies. Research which springs from queer

studies often examines intersections of social positions and spaces 'in-between'. Destabilizing categories in the research process is here of key importance, although what constitutes 'queer' may be contested depending on the geographical context (Baldo, 2008) or changing through time (Browne, 2006). For example, Browne (2006) observed that a 'queer' strand in social studies research may now be concerned with deconstructing homosexuality and heterosexuality, man and woman, but this may not be the case at a later point or space.

Thinking through queer theory alongside intersectionality can be fruitful, especially since there are certain similarities between the two projects in the way in which they developed as responses to existing theoretical frameworks. Queer theory evolved in the 1990s from two different stands: one is the post-structuralist thought of Judith Butler, and the other is lesbian and gay politics. Butler engaged with the understanding of sexuality as culturally produced in Foucault's (1980) thought and further deconstructed the link between gender and sexuality. Thus initially, queer studies tried to challenge boundaries and universal 'truths' about sexuality and gender. By using post-structuralist literary approaches, feminism and psychoanalysis, queer studies have tried to unlink sexuality, gender and nature perhaps to a greater extent than the social sciences have (Seidman, 1996). At the same time, queer studies evolved as a response to identity politics to propose a politics of difference (Baldo, 2008). Queer theory questions the assumptions of identity politics, that sexuality constitutes a stable identity which can, in turn, find its way to specific lesbian and gay lifestyles, practices and cultural expressions. The requirement is, as Kath Browne (2006) noted, to render fluid the categories of sexualities and genders and to stress the artificiality of boundaries. More importantly, it is the hierarchical division of certain desires, sexual practices and categories of desiring subjects, frequently excluded as 'dissident' or 'other', that need to be made visible, as these divisions operate within established norms of class, ethnicity, gender and sexuality (Browne, 2006). Further, for scholars like Heather Davis (2005), Noreen Giffney (2004) and Judith Halberstam (2005), 'queer' is not a term that should function as an umbrella for lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans (LGBT) studies or activism. Giffney (2004) in particular, emphasised that the personal investment of lesbian and gay studies in the study of lesbian and gay lives did not express the project of queer studies. 'Queer' rather stands against homogenizing and contests normativity, whether such practices descend from hegemonic heterosexual discourses or from mainstream lesbian and gay politics (Seidman, 1997). Reducing the concept of 'queer' to an identity category in LGBT studies heavily limits its political potential. The critical edge of queer theory lies in the framing of 'queer' as a site of 'becoming' (Edelman, 1995) and of constant questioning of norms. We may thus want to consider a 'queer' approach to research, a distinct methodological approach that aims to perform an act of 'queering', to de-naturalise taken for granted categories of analysis, even beyond issues of sexuality and gender.

Revisiting 'Borderlands' and 'Female Masculinity'

The problems emerging in social research of sexualities apply both to quantitative and qualitative methods. This section revisits Judith Halberstam's (1998) 'Female Masculinity' and Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) 'Borderlands' in order to problematise the act of naming and to convey that thinking through *hybridity* can be helpful in destabilising not only complex social locations, but also research frameworks in their entirety.

To begin with, qualitative inquiry facilitates queer theory because it enables the exploration of difference, fluidity of identities, hierarchies and spaces (Valocchi, 2005).

In 'Selling My Queer Soul or Queering Quantitative Research?', Browne (2007) carried out a large scale quantitative research of 7,212 respondents. The research event, called 'Do it with Pride', addressed 'deviant' sexualities. In a reflection of methodological issues, Browne explained how the use of the term 'queer' was negotiated and what this negotiation meant for the researchers, the respondents and the questionnaire. In the study, which concerned the Brighton and Hove Pride, the research team eventually decided that the word 'queer' would be excluded from questionnaires because 'queer' could be emotionally challenging for participants who had experiences of bullying. According to Browne (2007), a 'queer' questionnaire would need to be open-ended and qualitative in order to allow crossing between existing categories of sexualities and acknowledge the temporality and fluidity of Pride spaces.

These kinds of exclusions manifest how the 'normal' is constructed during research design. Browne (2007) argued that even though sexualities are included as categories of difference in research, these categories are homogenizing. The assumption behind the way these categories are created and used for research is that of an essentialised identity that is expressed rather than (per)formed in certain sets of common practices within groups, for instance common lifestyles. But these common attributes cannot be objectively observed and statistically measured. Once these categories are consequently shaped into fixed variables in the research, they generate statistical results within normative frames. In other words, the same 'normal' created during the design is later reaffirmed with the use of statistical data. To solve this problem, Browne (2007) suggested the construction of non-normative gender questions, the re-coding of sexuality categories and the design of a questionnaire which, when analysed, would not recreate 'sexuality and gender categorisations that are inherent to the results of the research' (Browne 2007, np). There is thus clearly deconstructive potential in quantitative social research methods.

Similar to large scale surveys, ethnographic studies like Judith Halberstam's 'Female Masculinity' (1998) tend to make some assumptions about collectivities. 'Female Masculinity' (1998) is a book that filled a huge gap in scholarly work on female masculinities at the time and introduced a way in which to talk about masculinities for women that had been previously unacceptable, even within academic discussions. As it explicitly deployed queer methodologies, Halberstam's interdisciplinary project used a 'combination of textual criticism, ethnography, historical survey, archival research, and the production of taxonomies' (1998, p.10). Queer methodology is within this project understood as a refusal of research norms and expectations that lock subjects in taxonomies. In particular, instead of comparing female to male masculinities, Halberstam (1998) used male masculinities only as a counter-example to female masculinities (such as butch lesbians and female-to-male transsexuals). This strategy of 'queering' masculinities translates into directly including and excluding research subjects. White male masculinity, for example, was excluded because it was regarded incapable of taking part in the project of social change.

Halberstam (1998) was distinctly aware of the methodological issues in queer studies, as this appears in the introductory chapter of the book. How do we collect information about sexual identities if not through narratives? Is enough attention paid to the materiality of queer life (if we accept that there is such thing)? Does quantitative data reproduce sexuality categories that are already known? For Halberstam, surveys that expect 'to squeeze truth from raw data' (1998, p.10) are inappropriate for the study of sexualities and queer subcultures. Because there is no way of participatory observation in

this type of study, Halberstam (1998) suggested that all research is done as if it was textual. It is, after all, texts of interviews or stories that researchers explore. Although the methodological aspiration was for the book to be a combination which 'refuses the academic compulsion toward disciplinary coherence' (Halberstam 1998, p.13), as I explain next it is largely a cultural study of distinct but well-defined groups of people. Reading 'Female Masculinity' can raise the following question: does the analysis of queer sexualities and queer lives connote that a 'queer methodology' has been used? If we accept that a 'queer' research would question how certain sexual identities appear legitimate and even sanitised, then naming of such sexualities may also need to be questioned. In Halberstam's (1998) text however masculinity appears as an attribute one *has* and therefore *is* 'butch', 'femme' or/and 'tomboy'. This approach is strategic since for Halberstam (1998) it is important to reclaim the action of naming back from dominant structures and power systems. For example, through a personal autobiographical account of growing up in a world that does not tolerate tomboys after they reach puberty, the project shows its commitment to make 'masculinity safe for women and girls' (Halberstam, 2008, p.268). In the discussion on drag kings, the interpretation of non-performativity is regarded as a problem of masculinity. By challenging the invisibility of women boxers and women in sports more generally, 'Female Masculinity' deconstructs the privilege and legitimation of male white masculinity as the only acceptable one. The analysis focuses on the 'representation' of masculinity and the inclusion of masculine women by means of lesbian film, boxing and drag king performance. However, this process does not deconstruct the connotation of strength in the concept of masculinity but rather celebrates how this strength is now available to women. For instance, in the text high heels and hairstyles are reproduced as elements of dominant femininities. Consequently, the binary of masculinity and femininity, or the privileging of masculinities, and with them the sets of hierarchical gender and sexuality definitions (and prohibitions) are reinforced. As was the case in some intersectionality research analysed above, the limitations of existing queer methodologies seem to relate to a tendency to re-establish norms where categories have initially been denaturalised. Categories that have aimed to function as complex, non-normative analytical axes may undermine research efforts to foreground the dynamic aspects of difference and inequality.

I would like here to turn to Gloria Anzaldúa's (1987) highly influential book 'Borderlands: La Frontera', precisely because it is exemplary in overcoming some of the limitations of queer methodological approaches to research that includes but is not limited to identities of sexualities. In what follows, I note how identities, even when they have been constructed for the purposes of communicating and making research meaningful, in order to be maintained need repetition and reinforcement of particular discourses. Queer approaches could demonstrate how differences and identities are contextual and always 'becoming' according to what is socially acceptable within a given geography.

Anzaldúa's (1987) 'Borderlands' is an unconventional text which employs multiple techniques: essays of autobiography, poems, cultural studies and politics appear in the same text. The way it is written reflects the multiplicity of identities articulated through the 'mestiza' metaphor. The 'mestiza' stands for a new border consciousness, one which serves to break down dualisms restrictive for women crossing the US-Mexico border. The 'mestiza' is not an essentialist self. She invents herself through the narration of her history and thus becomes a subject in language and writing: as a gender both female and male she declares herself queer; as a fusion of English and Spanish she writes

in Chicano language; and as a mixture of races, she becomes the 'mestiza'. The 'mestiza' metaphor has been widely adopted by white feminist researchers and much criticised by Chicana/o academics (Yarbro-Bejarano, 1994). Yvonne Yarbro-Bejarano (1994), in an analysis of Anzaldúa's work, emphasised that the concept has been in some cases universalised whilst the text has become isolated from the community that produced it. My own first reading of Anzaldúa's 'Borderlands' was exactly that: I treated the text as a mirror for my own subjectivity in formation as a Greek student in the UK, a materiality that had little to do with the specific histories and cultures the author spoke of. In examining a polemic text like 'Borderlands' as a research project here, I am not attempting to generalise the 'mestiza' or remove it from its context. I rather seek to emphasise how a project that articulates a politics of difference can lend key elements to research projects aiming at equality and social justice.

In 'Borderlands', the history of Chicana origins is not a linear presentation of facts, but rather a gathering of traditions, rituals, and personal testimonials. Sonia Saldivar-Hull (1999), introducing the second edition to 'Borderlands', called this method 'autohistorias': the author moves beyond autobiography to include their cultural history. Seen as feminist historiography, 'Borderlands' disrupts both Anglo-centric nationalist histories and Chicana nationalist agendas. The 'mestiza' in this sense can be seen as a hybrid subjectivity which is informed by these intra-secting histories and shifts in accordance with the shifting dynamics of power that define the physical border. Hybridity is further cultivated with the concurrent use of both English and Spanish language in the text, which operates as a political act against cultural assimilation.

Hybridity has functioned as an alternative formulation in the analysis of social positions within complex and intersecting systems of power for other scholars. In an ethnographic study, María Amelia Viteri (2008) examined the intersections of race, ethnicity, sexuality and citizenship within a transnational context. Locating herself as someone who is also dialogically produced within and through the research, she constructed hybrid identities that crossed between those of 'Latino' and 'queer'. Multilingual hybridity and hybridity more generally, beyond the mestiza figure, could thus be thought as a methodological approach oriented towards an understanding of shifting textual and material borders, in different but complementary ways to those of intersectionality and queer studies. Not only does it convey reflexivity for the researcher and disrupts the power relations embedded in the acts of naming and narrating the 'other' through social categorisation from the top down. It further allows space for the research process to be understood as a dynamic process itself transforming both researcher and participants. This recognition is decisive precisely because scholarly work employing an intersectionality or queer studies framework occurs within the shifting boundaries of academic and activist networks. Such an approach would still be consistent with the epistemological request of 'queering', one that 'does not mean improving upon or substituting one set of foundational assumptions and narratives for another, but leaving permanently open and contestable the assumptions and narratives that guide social research' (Seidman, 1997, xi). As a new consciousness of borders, not only physical but also epistemological, an approach incorporating context specific elements from both queer and intersectionality studies could then be both political and dynamic beyond the 'mestiza' metaphor and beyond the study of sexualities.

Conclusion

Both methodological traditions in intersectionality and queer studies can benefit from an interchange of ideas. Through a brief outline of the development of intersectionality and of existing scholarship in women's studies, I have argued that this approach is indispensable for research that accounts for the multiple levels across which oppression operates. There are also clearly diverse research strands in intersectionality studies in terms of their understandings of complexity (McCall, 2005). At the same time, research employing queer studies seeks to deconstruct identities and normativities. As is the case with intersectionality, queer methodological frameworks do not come with a set of tools or preferred subjects of study. Queer research may thus expand well beyond the field of sexualities projects towards the 'analysis of the production of that knowledge itself' (Scott, 1992, p.37).

As methodological approaches however, both intersectionality and queer studies run the danger of constituting all-encompassing systems which can create new kinds of fixed categories and, with them, new kinds of power systems. I have suggested that thinking through hybridity may be a useful way in which to foreground the *doing* of social research and the production of responsible, political and dynamic knowledge. We may think of the research setting as itself a site of intrasecting complexities, between disciplinary power systems and the shifting boundaries of the academy and activism. Through deconstruction, ethnography, self-narratives, case studies or other creative methods, multilingual and multicultural hybridity may facilitate the common values underpinning queer studies and studies of intersectionality. Queer and feminist researchers could this way employ queer studies and intersectionality not only for academic and research purposes but also as political tools in the creation of epistemologies, histories and practices of resistance.

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