Faculty Publications   School of Human Sciences

2020

Tempered Radicalism and Intersectionality: Scholar-Activism in the Neoliberal University

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Richter, J., Faragó, F., Swadener, B. B., Roca-Servat, D., & Eversman, K. A. (2020). Tempered radicalism in the academy: Scholar-activism in the neoliberal university. Journal of Social Issues, 76(4), 1014-1035. http://dx.doi.org/10.1111/josi.12401

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Abstract

Using a collaborative critical personal narrative methodology grounded in intersectionality, we interrogated tensions in identifying ourselves as tempered radicals and scholar-activists who were involved in a local university-community activist organization. We assert the value of informal activist spaces within the university and identify issues related to the lack of recognition of scholar-activism as legitimate scholarship, including the paradox of universities as colonizing and liberatory spaces for community engagement and activism. Our themes highlight how mentorship affects scholar-activism and how activism transforms and disrupts the neoliberal university. Yet, activism is rendered invisible, making homeplaces for scholar-activism critical for students, faculty, staff, and the community to address structural inequalities within and outside of the university. We conclude with recommendations to improve mentorship for scholar-activists, to revise tenure and promotion policies to include scholar-activism, and to recognize spaces within the academy that honor scholar-activism as a critical form of praxis informed by intersectionality.

Keywords: scholar-activism, intersectionality, social justice, collaborative critical narrative

Tempered Radicalism and Intersectionality: Scholar-Activism in the Neoliberal University

We employed a collaborative critical personal narrative methodology to interrogate the structural and systematic inequalities we experience as scholar-activists (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Using intersectionality, we locate spaces and moments where power dynamics around class, race, and gender are necessary to transform higher education (Chatterton et al., 2010; Fine, 2018; Gilmore, 2011; Hale, 2008). We view ourselves as "tempered radicals" (Meyerson & Scully, 1995) who are committed to our organizations as places where structural inequalities can be challenged. We are also committed to social justice practices, such as grassroots organizing, that are at odds with the neoliberal culture of educational systems that prioritize profits over community well-being. Intersectionality focuses our tempered radicalism, allowing us to articulate and recognize our complicity in educational systems (hence the term "tempered" radicalism), especially where we are simultaneously privileged and marginalized (Case et al., in press). We begin with a discussion of how intersectionality and scholar-activism, as forms of praxis, offer a means of challenging neoliberal policies to re-imagine higher education as a liberatory space rather than a hierarchical and exploitative institution.

Intersectional theorists argue for the recognition of how power, privilege, and oppression intersect to shape people's lives (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Moraga &

Anzaldúa, 1981). We identify and analyze ways that intersectionality has informed and shaped the possibilities and limitations of our interventions as tempered radicals by drawing our analysis in part from our experiences and involvement in a university-community activist organization, Local to Global Justice (LTGJ). We use intersectionality to first identify how dynamics of academic mentorship can both undermine and encourage scholar-activism. Second, we discuss examples of activism disrupting neoliberal policies, but also how activism is rendered invisible. Finally, we stress the importance of activist "homeplaces" (hooks, 1990) in academia that nurture and protect activism as a valid form of resistance, using the example of our own experiences participating in LTGJ. We conclude with recommendations for recognizing the importance of scholar-activism in mentoring relationships, for the revision of tenure and promotion policies to include scholar-activism, and for creating and protecting spaces of activism within universities.

Intersectionality as a Framework for Scholar-Activism

Intersectionality allowed us to interrogate institutions as sites of complex networks of discrimination, marginalization, and privilege along multiple axes of identity, including gender, race, sexuality, and class (Cho et al., 2013; Collins & Bilge, 2016). As an analytical tool, intersectionality interrogates the interlocking webs of structures of oppression and matrices of domination stemming from white supremacy, imperialism, capitalism, and patriarchy, alongside systems of privilege (Collins, 1990; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017; Overstreet et al., in press). Black and Women of Color feminist scholars in the 1960s and 1970s contributed to the theoretical development of the concept of intersectionality to recognize that feminist and anti-racist discourses did not address the oppression of Black women (Collins & Bilge, 2016; Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981). Intersectionality recognizes that people's identities

cannot be understood in additive ways, or separated from power relations embedded in social contexts in which these identities are perceived and experienced (Cole, 2009). Intersectionality opposes a logic of separation that emphasizes singular identities (Lugones, 2003) and instead highlights places where power differentials and dynamics are obfuscated, collapsed, and ignored (Chávez, 2012). When scholar-activism is fully grounded in, and engaged with, intersectionality, seemingly disparate single-focus issues are seen as interrelated and connected by structural inequities. Each of us has experience in multi-issue activism and has worked with models of anti-oppressive and social justice education. These standpoints and experiences have foregrounded intersectionality as a means of understanding patterns of oppression, and who is most affected.

Intersectionality provides a critical analytical framework for analyzing how we, as tempered radicals, interrogate and challenge the ways that neoliberal higher education institutions remain sites of structural oppression, and how we try to leverage our positions for more equitable conditions. Tempered radicals understand how their intermeshing commitments, identities, and networks expose them to multiple logics, in order to maintain a critical consciousness (Meyerson & Tompkins, 2007). As part of institutions, tempered radicals exert change from within by means of diverse incremental and subversive change tactics ranging from everyday practices to isolated acts and coalition building. Marginalized within the institution they wish to change, tempered radicals are scholar-activists who are exposed to contradictions between their interests or identities and the dominant logic. Working at the hyphens of scholarship and activism, tempered radicals in educational settings balance their critical consciousness with institutional legitimacy to provoke change (Fine, 1994). Intersectional praxis is a critical means of understanding how our individual experiences are parts of larger patterns of structural and invisible oppressions in academia. In this paper, we use intersectionality to

examine how activism embodies theory and praxis in creating knowledge that is valid and critical for structural change, and to identify unexamined power dynamics that limit the recognition of scholar-activism in the academy (Collins & Bilge, 2016).

Scholar-Activism: A Challenge to Neoliberalism

We argue that intersectionality is critical for scholar-activism to interrogate the oppressions and inequalities that educational settings perpetuate. There are different ways of blending scholarship and activism that include research (Fine, 2018), social activism (VänderPlaat, 1999), community engagement (Pulido, 2008), teaching-mentorship (Hytten, 2017; Singh & Matthews, 2019), and policy making (Case et al., 2012). Scholar-activism is an organic praxis that combines rigorous scholarship and committed action, demanding the identification and analysis of the structural inequities that shape social relationships (Gilmore, 1993). Debates regarding scholar-activism point towards the need to overcome the false distinction between academia and wider society as sites of struggle and knowledge production (Chatterton et al., 2010). Constructing a life as a scholar-activist acknowledges the vexed convergences between politically and socially diverse communities and institutions we are part of (Carrillo-Rowe, 2012). This paper contributes to the call in the literature to recognize institutional educational settings as important sites of struggle (Chatterton et al., 2010) and to make academia a welcoming place for all (Suzuki & Mayorga, 2014), including for the most marginalized communities (Cohen & Jackson, 2016).

The academy remains a site of unaddressed structural oppressions (Niemann et al., 2020), as increasingly narrow framings of the policies and goals of educational institutions negate how authority and hierarchies silence difficult discussions about racism, sexism, classism, and ableism. As academics, we are trained to examine society, but we are rarely encouraged to look

inwards and examine the institutions where we are educated and employed. Our institutions have adopted neoliberal forms of operation which bend research and teaching towards impacts that are profitable for private interests, rather than prioritizing critical thinking and community well-being (Mountz et al., 2015; Rhodes et al., 2018). Neoliberalism is also marked by the precarious employment of non-tenured and contingent faculty, rationalized by economic conditions, which also contributes to systemic vulnerability amongst affected faculty who fear retaliation. The prioritization of profit, management, and labor intensification views students as individual customers rather than as holistic members of larger communities, and views faculty as education managers (Hartman & Darab, 2012; Perez & Salter, 2019; Välimaa & Hoffman, 2008). This neoliberal emphasis is now more evident during the COVID-19 pandemic, as universities rush to reopen campuses to avoid loss of tuition, while putting faculty, staff, and students at risk (Yamey & Walensky, 2020). The inequitable effect of this implicit meritocracy is disproportionately borne by students and faculty of Color, women, LGBTQIA+, and others who are ignored, silenced, and pushed out (Gutizérrez y Muhs et al., 2012; Niemann et al., 2020).

Scholar-activists question boundaries and borders by interrogating the inside/outside logic of what is considered valid knowledge in formal educational settings. Intersectionality informs scholar-activism by articulating ways that neoliberalism's race-avoidant and ahistorical approaches to academia negatively affect staff, faculty, and students (Dancy et al., 2018; Perez & Salton, 2019). Black feminist teaching and scholarship has been fundamental in mentoring young activists about alternative forms of organizing and leadership bridging different positions, situations, and identities (Cohen & Jackson, 2016).

Positionalities as Tempered Radicals

The authors know each other through our experiences as organizers with Local to Global Justice (LTGJ), which was founded in 2001 at Arizona State University (ASU) to bring together social justice activists from campus and the community in ways that connect local issues to global struggles (Farago et al., 2018). The LTGJ teach-in evolved to an annual three-day forum and festival with participants of all ages that reflect our collective commitment to the principles of intersectionality, namely challenging interlocking webs of colonialism, capitalism, militarism, ageism, racism, and sexism (Collins & Bilge, 2016). For each of us, LTGJ was a major part of understanding how intersectionality was integral to the praxis of scholar-activism. As scholar-activists, we understand ourselves as classed, gendered, raced, and sexual people who are not objective and neutral (Fine, 2018; Giroux & McLaren, 1991).

Jen identifies as a first-generation biracial Vietnamese/German cisgender woman, who was raised in a predominantly white middle-class suburb of Washington D.C. and has lived in the Southwest since 2003. She is entering her final year on the tenure-track at a large public research university in the Southwest U.S., and researches environmental justice and energy policy. She has been a co-faculty adviser (with Beth) of LTGJ since 2015. Flóra identifies as a bilingual Hungarian immigrant, cisgender, white, Jewish woman. Flóra is a tenure-track faculty in rural East Texas at a small public state university and researches gender and racial socialization with children, parents, and educators. Flóra was a graduate student co-leader of LTGJ for three years and has participated in LTGJ since 2012. Beth, a full professor, identifies as a white, heterosexual, woman who grew up in a working-class, predominantly white Indiana city in the late 1960s. She has long done work at the intersections of race, ability, and colonialism and considers herself an accomplice against oppression. Beth has done work in sub-Saharan Africa since the late 1980s, and has been active in faculty unions, campus organizing for

social justice, and multiracial women's alliances. Beth was a co-founder of LTGJ and has served

as a faculty co-advisor since 2001. Denisse is a Latin American woman of mixed European,

African, and native Abya-Yala[1] descent, and was raised in Peru in a middle-class family while

witnessing internal armed conflict and segregation in her home country. She was a graduate

student co-leader of LTGJ for six years, and currently lives in Colombia. Denisse is an associate

professor at a private Catholic university, researching water justice, political ecology, and

alternatives to development. Kimberly is a white, heterosexual, middle-class, cisgender woman

who grew up on a dairy farm in rural Minnesota, surrounded by "conservative" values around

gender, religion, and race, and was regularly silenced for questioning these messages. Her early

years were also marked by blatant and persistent body shaming. She wrote her dissertation on

teacher activism, and served as a graduate student co-leader of LTGJ for five years. Her current

work focuses on coaching public-school teachers in equitable and culturally responsive teaching

practices.

We articulate our personal positionalities to highlight our different positions within and

outside of the academy, and also to show how we understand ourselves as belonging

simultaneously to different social groups that inform our approach to scholar-activism (Cole,

2009; Settles et al., in press). Rather than privileging a reflexivity that solely emphasizes our

individual identities, we discuss the economic, political, and institutional processes and

structures that provide the context for understanding our situated solidarity as scholar-activists in

educational settings (Houston & Lange, 2017; Nagar & Geiger, 2007).

Methodology: Collaborative Critical Personal Narrative

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[1] Abya Yala is the name given to the continent today known as America by the Indigenous Kuna people. The name is widely accepted by several of the current Indigenous nations as the official name of the ancestral continent as opposed to the foreign name America.

To explore our scholar-activism in relation to our positionalities, we engaged in a series of semi-structured written and oral conversations over a year to explore the contradictions of tempered radicalism in neoliberal educational settings using intersectionality as a framework. We reflected on our own sites of privilege and where we have felt, and continue to feel, silenced and oppressed, employing a collaborative critical personal narrative approach (Burdell & Swadener, 1999), which was inspired by autoethnography and critical personal narrative methodologies (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). Each participant had an independent voice, yet contributed to the collective narrative over a year of dialogue. These collective analyses enrich data by encouraging power sharing among researcher-participants, stimulating learning about the self *and* others, and building community among researchers (Chang et al., 2013).

In our individual narratives, we addressed collectively-created prompts regarding our values around scholar-activism and its role in our research and organizing today. We individually discussed why we were specifically drawn to scholar-activism as a space to recognize, name, and challenge the systemic and structural barriers that intersectionality reveals. We identified and wrote about our personal experiences where scholar-activism was challenged, negated, ignored, or punished, as well as about instances of our complicity in and subjection to oppression within the academy. We then collectively discussed and analyzed our experiences to identify patterns of structural and systemic oppressions and conflicts in our institutions and organizations. This collaborative process of analysis allowed us to use intersectionality as a framework for understanding our social positions, locations, and contexts as tempered radicals in the academy, and to better understand where and how we exert power and privilege based on the multiple standpoints and identities that we each encompass (Chari & Donner, 2010; Collins, 2019).

Critical Themes

In collectively analyzing our discussions and narratives, we focused on three emerging areas where intersectionality is critical for addressing systemic inequities in the academy. Issues around effective and supportive mentorship, recognizing scholar-activism as disruptive and transformative labor, and creating homeplaces for scholar-activism in academia were the main foci for our intervention.

Tensions and Supports in Mentoring Scholar-Activists

Collectively, we found that our identities as tempered radicals were shaped by our experiences with mentorship as students and educators. Intersectionality provides a means of interrogating not only the structural frames of how academics are trained, but also how values are transferred generationally through unquestioned assumptions within dominant discourses (Collins, 2019). Interweaving intersectionality into mentorship, including into pedagogy inside and outside of the classroom, allows for students and faculty to examine how their experiences with marginalization and privilege impact their lives, communities, and their own perceptions and behaviors (Case, 2017a).

Resistant/Resisting Mentorship

Especially as early career scholars, we were uncomfortable questioning the advice of our mostly white, heterosexual, and male mentors, in regard to what is considered acceptable as research and how to advance our careers. As Denisse described,

> I remember the first time a professor told me that if I wanted to be a scholar, I had to quit being politically active in the community and focus on building my academic career. But how was an academic career separated from social reality, community work, and social change? How could I possibly detach researching oppression from the practice of justice

and liberation? I constantly fought against professors and peers, who kept telling me to

"just" focus on my research and that activism could not be real scholarly work.

Denisse's refusal to accept this false dichotomy, between what is considered traditional academic

research versus activism on behalf of communities, is supported by intersectional framings of

scholar-activism. When viewed through the lens of intersectionality, scholarship and activism are

inherently connected, and informed by the social contexts and power dynamics shaping the

scholar-activist (Collins & Bilge, 2016). Separation between activism and scholarship renders

academic labor towards systemic change for more equitable outcomes as invisible, such as

collective work, public engagement, and advocating for causes (Blomley, 2008). In academic

settings, legitimate knowledge stems from the strict training of researchers to focus on becoming

objective producers of knowledge (Collins, 2019). Creating scholarship that is connected to

social change is increasingly recognized as meaningful research, yet academic mentors often

advise against activism because they do not value activism in their scholarship, or view activism

as scholarship at all. This creates a dichotomy between academia as a place where one will be a

contributor to transforming society to more equitable ends, and academia as a place where one

will be trained to produce objective knowledge to become an expert. Several of Flóra's white,

male mentors clearly delineated what is truly academic and what is not:

> ...they told me that I should develop a laser-focus, or as they say in Hungarian, "go
>
> forward like a cannonball." The laser focus could only encompass strictly academic
>
> activities that advanced my career – course work, conferences, and publications. I was
>
> conditioned to believe that everything else was a "waste of time." Once I established
>
> myself as a reputable scholar, I could then get involved in activism.

This false dualism of expert/non-expert is a legacy of positivism in the hard sciences, which values objective data that can be universally applied and research that is "untainted" by personal biases or cultural values, rather than valuing knowledge that is situated, partial, and contextual (Haraway, 1991; Harding, 2008). Intersectionality, when interwoven into teaching and mentorship, allows scholars to interrogate assumptions regarding who produces legitimate knowledge, making structural marginalizations and oppressions in knowledge production visible (Case, 2017).

Intersectionality reveals the unexamined foundations of positivism that are supposedly objectively-produced and universally-applicable, by articulating how higher education globally privileges the English language, the global North, liberalism, and white patriarchal thought. Denisse felt that her very presence in the classroom disrupted and destabilized invisible academic hierarchies:

Sometimes because of intersecting issues of language and particular knowledge construction barriers, I felt excluded and alienated from the conversation. Other times, even with my accented English, I felt redeemed after participating in important class debates and talking about how we, in Latin America and Peru, experienced global policies and produced knowledge. Knowledge that was not counted in Western academia.

Denisse's experience underscores the importance of recognizing how admitted international students are unsupported culturally, once they are in the host country. Intersectionality provides a context for recognizing and analyzing how a Woman of Color from the Global South would experience alienation related to classroom management, where students are placed in competition with each other to assert their expertise, rather than encouraged to create supportive dialogues that recognize their positionalities and experiences (Mohanty, 1991). Denisse's

experience at a neoliberal university reflects how ethnocentrism and assumptions about universal knowledge inform instruction in US classrooms. Intersectionality insists on acknowledging the contrasting epistemologies and ontologies of situated and place-based knowledge, which strengthen class discussions, rather than silence students who have critical insights about addressing systemic inequities.

A lack of recognition and support for scholar-activism from mentors who are also unaware of intersectional oppressions perpetuates a power dynamic in which mentors refuse to acknowledge activism as a source of valid knowledge production. For example, after several years as an elementary school teacher, Kimberly entered graduate school to research ways of supporting teachers as activists. She quickly learned that her identity as a teacher of young children was not valued by the institution:

> I recall sitting in my first mentor's office to discuss my dissertation goals. I had made it very clear that I wanted to examine teacher activists and eventually work in teacher preparation. He scoffed and asked me, 'Why am I wasting my time with you if you are going to just go back to teaching?' He told me I showed great promise as a scholar, but as soon as I stood my ground on the importance of studying and working with teachers, I suddenly wasn't as promising anymore.

Kimberly's experience reflects a central conflict we encountered about becoming "experts" as oppositional to activism and advocacy. In academia, the researcher is supposed to be an expert, someone whom the public, private industries, and policy makers can trust on a specific topic (Ellis & Bochner, 2000). The PhD is a signifier that one has been sufficiently trained into a mode of thinking that designates one as an expert. Yet, this expert pathway is filled with oppressive forms of control that elide collective and communal knowledge, by ignoring and negating the

positionality of students and why they are invested in understanding structural inequalities in their communities. Such power dynamics create internalized oppression that affects the ability of scholar-activists to believe in the importance of their research. Kimberly shared that making the choice to leave academia was a very difficult one because of this false dichotomy between expertise and activism:

> I agonized over the decision to resign from my tenure-track position to be closer to family and to do more grassroots activism. I felt like I was betraying and disappointing my mentors and disrespecting all the work they had done to help me earn my space in academia. I had so deeply internalized this idea that "real" work happened in the academy that nearly four years later, I still struggle with feelings of inadequacy, as if I have failed in my career because I left academia.

For Kimberly's initial mentor, her desire to work with female activist teachers could not be reconciled with the pursuit of a PhD; hence, she decided to leave academia. Kimberly's experience underscores her internalization of her mentor's doubt and resistance to activism as a legitimate site of research and participatory action. Mentors who are aware of and informed by intersectionality would acknowledge and respect the different contexts of knowledge production, including activism, to resist the hierarchical and patriarchal approach of mentoring that assumes students will replicate the research and methods of their advisors. The diverse backgrounds and positionalities that shape students' interests should be viewed as an advantage for expanding the depth and breadth of scholarship, rather than as a diminishment of the academy (Collins, 2019).

Becoming Supportive Mentors

One way to address the issue of supportive and effective mentorship around scholar-activism is to expand the diversity of the professoriate. Yet, even as some disciplines are

emphasizing diversity in hiring, early career scholars have very limited power to create more

equitable conditions for all students to succeed and thrive. As a visiting assistant professor who

earned a position as tenure-track faculty, Jen became:

> [t]he go-to person for any student who wanted to research involving justice or equity. As
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> the only Woman of Color on the tenure-track in my newly-formed school, I was both
>
> honored to be seen as an expert, but also annoyed. Why couldn't all my colleagues care
>
> about justice and equity?

Yet, Jen also felt reluctant to challenge the status quo, as this was how she felt she was most

valuable to her department that lacked effective mentors who understood intersectionality as a

core concept that informs research and activism. She therefore struggled with troubling the

relationship of mentoring in relation to training future experts:

> I currently mentor 13 doctoral students, many of whom have come to me in tears and out
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> of desperation due to lack of support, and denigration of their identities as queer or
>
> Indigenous students. But it's almost impossible to advise them through an opaque
>
> process, while honoring their activism and encouraging them to stay in the academy.

Jen's concerns focus on the structure of invisible power dynamics in academia that perpetuate a

division between scholarship and activism, which can be replicated in mentoring relationships. If

the sole worth of academia is in producing experts, how can we thrive if we reject the "expert"

label as the only measure of our value to academia and society? How might research that takes

the time to engage with a range of community issues and partners in convivial ways be more

valued? More critically, how do we disrupt the unacknowledged hierarchies in academia, and

then guide others through this process while trying to protect them from internalizing

hierarchies? Intersectionality allows us to see our individual experiences with mentorship as part

of a larger pattern of gendered and racialized power dynamics (Park, 2020). Our examples demonstrate how intersectional praxis allowed us to understand our scholarship and value to the academy as we struggled with defining the gray areas between complicity and resistance, and how our self-awareness as women, and in Jen's and Denisse's cases, as People of Color, shaped and continue to shape our roles in systems that confer power through the control of expertise.

For each of us, finding mentors who understood that research was a practice that could encompass activism was critical for developing awareness as scholar-activists. Local to Global Justice (LTGJ) provided a crucial place for mentorship around scholar-activism, and allowed us to meet mentors like Beth. Having mentored over 140 PhD students across a four-decade career, Beth is committed to reciprocal mentoring that challenges hierarchies of knowledge production by focusing on shared intellectual engagement and utilizing intersectional feminist principles of care work (Nagasawa & Swadener, 2015; Swadener et al., 2015). An example of this was the formation of a student writing support group after Beth's college was disestablished and students' mentors were leaving the university:

> Graduate students would come into my office, visibly upset at not getting answers to their many questions, or the support and empathy they needed. I advised them that we were all learning who we can trust and who would undermine us. What moved me was how students channeled their energy into organizing, building on their experience in LTGJ, and created new groups to support each other - it brings to mind Ruth Wilson Gilmore's (2011) advice "organize, organize, organize!"

Beth worked with students to organize a dissertation and writing support group that continues now, a decade later, with over 60 students in several majors having completed degrees over many years of mutual support. In recent years, the group has been comprised of students who

have found it difficult to find support elsewhere, such as students of Color, including Black, Indigenous, and Latina women, as well as white women, international students, and students with invisible disabilities. Many identify as scholar-activists, including a local leader of Black Lives Matter, a disability justice activist, and an advocate for survivors of sex-trafficking, diverse roles which allow for deep engagement across different positionalities and activist concerns. Beth's ethos regarding reciprocal mentoring extends to LTGJ, which became a space in which students, staff, and faculty served as mentors to each other, allowing all to create ways to both challenge systemic and structural inequities, and to subvert the system from within *and* outside the university. LTGJ allows for the merging of scholarship *and* activism, a space where scholar-activism is recognized as a form of intersectional pedagogy outside of the traditional classroom (Case, 2017a).

Scholar-Activism as Disruptive, Invisible, and Transformative Labor

Higher education is increasingly shaped by neoliberal practices that perpetuate systemic precarity for the most vulnerable members in the academy. Scholar-activism that is informed by intersectional praxis reveals and challenges the ways that universities use policies couched as straightforward economic measures to exploit precarity and reduce vulnerable people to expendable commodities. In academic settings, we attempt to disrupt patterns of oppression by leveraging our more privileged positions. However, in doing so, scholar-activists are often silenced and dismissed. In this section, we discuss concrete examples of activism that both challenged our institutions, and we acknowledge our own roles in perpetuating structures of oppression.

Disruption and Erasure of Scholar-Activism

Neoliberal academic institutions are invested in maintaining insecurity and precarity as means of controlling advocacy, activism, and radicalism; yet, as tempered radicals, we also feel invested in our university's success as a transformative educational setting. When activism disrupts institutional policies, focal issues are often delegitimized and scholar-activists are at increased risk of being seen as disposable and replaceable. This even extends to tenured faculty, which serves as a powerful warning against engaging in activism to students and early career scholars. Yet, for scholar-activists, challenging injustices within the university is a logical and critical extension of recognizing and resisting structural inequities outside the university.

An intersectional analysis shows how precarity specifically affects women and People of Color as staff and faculty in a neoliberal setting. This is evident in Beth's experience of co-leading a grievance against the university regarding governance violations focused on a lack of faculty consultation on a specific curricular matter, that affected all programs in the university, and was made with no input from faculty. Over 55 tenured faculty signed the grievance letter, the majority of whom were female. As Beth recalled, "Given my union background, I believed that when you see something wrong, you organize. But when I approached several white male full professors, they declined to sign, some telling me to better 'choose my battles'." Over the course of the next two years, administrators eliminated the undergraduate program, and then cut the graduate program as well, fully disestablishing the College of Education in 2010. As part of an academic program that was known for critical perspectives, the disestablishment of a highly-ranked education college was deeply troubling to Beth and many other faculty. This occurred during a period when several academic programs across the university were combined, and former departments were merged into schools, all without consultation with faculty who were expected to agree to being moved to different programs. Students were also subject to neoliberal

policies, as the multicultural student center was eliminated, disproportionately affecting students of Color who were supported by this space. Neoliberalism served to erase concerns that intersectionality makes evident, and neoliberal logic was used to control activist faculty as well as to rationalize the loss of jobs for more than 60 staff and numerous untenured and contingent faculty, the majority of whom were women. Neoliberalism elides the longer-term consequences of actions that are couched as cost-saving measures. Many of these employees had children who were first-generation students at the university, and who depended on the university tuition reduction to attend. Additionally, all long-term benefits-eligible custodial positions were terminated, and the work was privately contracted with lower wages and no benefits, in order to save money. Tenured faculty were dubbed "free agents" and told to find new departments and schools, even as they tried to counter these decisions. Many faculty ultimately left for positions at other universities. In this instance, neoliberal economic logic was used to control colleges, their curricula, and faculty to put more authority in the hands of upper administration, serving to further disempower faculty who fought against cutting jobs.

As a graduate student at that time, Denisse realized that university professors could not escape the logic of disposability and precarity that was rampant in lower wage jobs, as she witnessed their humiliation and powerlessness. But still, she felt that she could not delay pursuing activism until achieving tenure or some sense of job security. Students involved in Local to Global Justice (LTGJ), like Denisse, felt a sense of urgency in pursuing activism, believing that, as Suzuki and Mayorga (2014) note, "as educator-scholar-activists, we cannot stand idly while the world around us is being destroyed" (p. 19). Around the same time the College of Education was being disestablished, construction workers, mostly Latino and undocumented, were working on a new campus building and were demanding just labor

conditions. Instead of succumbing to cynicism and fear, faculty and students from LTGJ

gathered strength to unite in support of these workers. LTGJ became a hub for various

organizations, a space where people connected and worked together to bring about social change.

Denisse was part of the Living Wage Coalition (LWC), a mostly white American student

organization that fought in solidarity with food service workers on campus. As a Woman of

Color, she remembers the contradictions she felt being a Latina student on a student visa permit

in a mostly American organization, advocating for workers who were also from a Latin

American country, but who did not have the same visa or social class status as she did:

> Sometimes when I spoke with my accented English during meetings with white male
>
> administrators to advocate for food service workers, they were not sure if I was a worker
>
> or a student, much less a doctoral student. They just couldn't understand why I was there,
>
> and why I would care about low-wage workers.

Yet, the connection between an international student researching global environmental policies

and the systemic precarity of laborers in the US linked Denisse with LWC, demonstrating how

intersectionality allows for different social and political contexts to build coalitions. Denisse

recognized that power dynamics were exerted to dismiss the concerns of students, in multiple

layered ways, such as implying that students cannot possibly understand the details of university

finances. Additionally, as a Woman of Color and a foreigner, who often literally translated

concerns of workers at the university, their refusal to make eye contact with Denisse, or by

telling her to get to the point, also underscored her marginalized status. Administrators also used

neoliberal logic to negate the concerns of student organizers and claimed that administration

could do nothing because these companies' practices were outside the aegis of the university.

Denisse's role as an "insider without," who advocated for worker concerns but was in turn made

invisible by administrators, is an example of intersectional praxis, and shows the many tactics used to silence scholar-activist students (Case, 2017b). By uniting efforts with broader national economic justice campaigns that brought together community and student coalitions, ultimately, a food service agreement was established that granted workers a 60% raise in wages, the right to assemble, and established new policies that upheld humane working conditions at the university.

Centering Marginalized Voices

Negotiating personal and professional risks is a constant struggle, leading us to question whether we are being true allies or hiding behind our privileged positions. Beth's recent writing and activism acknowledges the power and persistence of white supremacy and the dangers of becoming part of an "ally industrial complex" rather than an accomplice. For example, Beth shared that much of her scholar-activism in recent years has focused on immigrant and asylum-seeking children in the U.S. borderlands, including those separated from their parents. As a white person, she recognizes she has not faced the same risks as undocumented families and youth, or been on the front lines as much as her Latinx collaborators and friends. She also consciously tries to use her position as a scholar-activist to elevate the voices of activists of Color. At a recent conference, Beth introduced two Latinx activist collaborators, and yielded the floor to them, so that plenary session audience members could hear directly from them as activists and mothers. Beth has also collaborated with Latinx activists on international publications, adding to the visibility and legitimacy of explicitly intersectional activism in the academy and beyond. Beth's activism reveals the dynamics of power in how immigration rights are framed for undocumented mothers, children, and activists, and this directly informs her use of academic contexts as spaces for advocacy and activism.

Following intersectional praxis, Flora believes that as a white faculty member, it is her obligation to call out and challenge racism at her university, so the burden of dismantling racism does not fall on her colleagues and students of Color. However, serving on committees focused on increasing the enrollment of Latinx students has left Flora feeling disillusioned at the futility of such efforts when the institution does not commit resources to serving and supporting students of Color. Committees can serve as rich spaces for discussion that reflect concerns around power dynamics, but have little effect on institutional transformation unless university administration is accountable. Jen has had similar experiences over the past seven years with an overload of service in the name of diversity:

At first, I was eager to serve on committees that were focused on addressing the needs of diverse students to graduate, like single parents or guardians, and first-generation students. I was asked to be on search committees for more diverse faculty, doctoral committees for students who were uncomfortable with their mentors, by-law committees to protect and clarify roles of faculty... But nothing substantial ever seems to come of this time-consuming labor that is so central to building a successful and inclusive school.

Jen's long list of service activities, both internal and external to the university, is a familiar one for other Women of Color on the tenure-track, as this emotionally-taxing labor is lumped under service and framed as a personal choice to serve and mentor, rather than a sign of structural inequalities in the university that demands more labor from untenured faculty (Hanasono et al., 2019; Niemann et al., 2020). While diversity initiatives, new hires, committee work, and activism contribute to the perception of the university as a diverse and inclusive space, the structure of power and the academic expectations within the university often remain unchanged. The countless hours Jen and others devote to community action and engagement in organizing

marches, meetings, and forums with Local to Global Justice (LTGJ), as well as community engagement activities, is at least recognized as part of Jen's service to the university, but this is technically only 20% of Jen's position, and this labor far exceeds that percentage. This "third shift" (Kezar et al., 2011; Quaye et al., 2017) of pursuing transformative action within and outside the university becomes additional unrecognized labor, yet this labor is a core part of our identities, as it seems the most direct way of changing the inequitable structures of the university. Activism rooted in intersectionality, along with community outreach and engagement, needs to be recognized as work that is of critical importance to the institutional mission. Rather than viewing activism as outside of the discrete traditional categories of research, teaching, and service, scholar-activism needs to be acknowledged as holistically bringing together all three to actually and actively transform academic and community spaces.

Kimberly's experiences, while situated in public school settings, parallel these findings, and demonstrate the shallow understanding of intersectionality in educational settings. Kimberly has spent the last three years working as a public school district's instructional equity coach. This past spring, Kimberly's position was cut, and all of her projects were handed off to a colleague. Kimberly critiqued this neoliberal move, as her colleague was already the district's sole equity coordinator and the only person of Color in her department. As Kimberly recalled, "This experience was devastating not only because my work was suddenly made invisible, but also because I could see that the system was burying my colleague in work." Kimberly's experience demonstrates how a focus on diversity in hiring, without attention to intersectionality in relation to the labor that Women of Color are assumed to be more able to take on, results in tokenism. In Kimberly's case, the administration decided to eliminate multiple positions that engaged with increasing equity in an educational setting, citing economic rationales. Yet by placing the

responsibility of creating equitable conditions on one employee, this decision negated the very practices and policies around inclusivity and diversity that were stated as institutional goals. Using an intersectional analysis, the tensions around Kimberly's employment show how decisions that are meant to address equity through diversity initiatives are actually examples of non-reformist reform that reflect and reinforce neoliberal values around individuality and competition (Apple, 1980). Equity becomes performative and leaves structural inequalities unchanged. Kimberly's example also shows that even while trying to center marginalized voices, she remains cognizant of her own white privilege. This requires constant self-reflection that is the core of intersectional pedagogy (Case, 2017a). Equity lenses grounded in intersectionality go beyond shallow diversity initiatives and allow for the incorporation of race, gender, class, citizenship, and other dimensions of identity in the allocation of resources to support students, faculty, and staff (Ahmed, 2012; Niemann et al., 2020).

Local to Global Justice as an Academic Homeplace for Intersectional Activism

Scholar-activists recognize that identities and knowledge production are intersectional, rooted in relational systems of power (Intemann, 2010). As tempered radicals, we found that Local to Global Justice (LTGJ) provided a homeplace for resistance, as bell hooks described (1990). LTGJ has provided us with a sense of connection in the neoliberal university and place for scholar-activism, a space where we felt supported in questioning and challenging structural oppressions. Our experiences underscore the importance of locating scholar-activist homes in university communities, dedicated to including as many people as possible (Suzuki & Mayorga, 2014).

Creating and Finding a Homeplace for Scholar-Activism

For all of us, a homeplace like LTGJ provided an alternate space for understanding how

community concerns could be addressed by intersectional praxis, without having to formally

legitimize those concerns to the academy as research (hooks, 1990). Kimberly recollected the

influence that LTGJ had on her identification as a scholar-activist:

It is an understatement when I say my world shifted the day I attended my first LTGJ

meeting. I didn't have to hide my true self for the sake of "professionalism." Those

meetings were my church - my community, and both my academic and spiritual home.

The tension of carving out separate spaces in our identities between the classroom, our individual

research agendas, and our community activism represents additional emotional and

psychological labor. Being able to let go of these artificial, hierarchical divisions in a safer space

allowed us to collapse these identities, and to holistically express our passion for creating and

supporting transformative action, especially for social justice issues (Kornbluh et al., 2019). We

consider LTGJ as a site of convivial learning, which emphasizes a "collective investigative

approach that…refuses to objectify communities of struggle, engages multiple sites of

knowledge production, and generates new conceptual tools" (Callahan, 2016, p. 1). Convivial

research incorporates intersectionality by foregrounding the ways that power is refracted

unevenly throughout society, and also acknowledges and incorporates the unique experiences

and positionalities of everyone involved in the research as a means of understanding and

identifying patterns of oppression (Callahan, 2016). LTGJ embodies convivial engagement and

research with community members who share their concerns at the organizing table, while we re-

direct university resources (e.g., space, funding) to address community concerns.

Intersectionality is a key element of praxis reflected in the interests of LTGJ's organizing

team, and our focus on coalition building is a form of intersectional solidarity that recognizes the

critical importance of addressing structural oppressions not just at the societal or institutional scale, but at the organizing table as well (Ellison & Langhout, in press). The LTGJ annual forum and festival recognizes the intersectionality of activist concerns, which is reflected in themes such as Justice for Women/Justice for All, Racial Justice, and Compassionate Resistance (immigration rights). We collectively decided to invite speakers whose experiences are informed by intersectionality, including speakers from Trans Queer Pueblo, Students for a Clean Dream Act, Undocumented Students for Education Equity, and Puente to broaden the perception of a singular normative immigrant. As a multi-issue organization, LTGJ addresses marginalization across multiple axes of oppression, such as those impacting women, Black people, Indigenous communities, and transgender undocumented immigrants.

LTGJ is a space where passion for social justice by and for all is appreciated, as the hierarchy between students, faculty, staff, and community members breaks down at the organizing table. For instance, Kimberly found a space where the voices of children, and those of us who worked with young people, were honored, which she hadn't found in other academic spaces. Kimberly immediately joined the LTGJ youth planning committee and worked beside young activists to plan sessions and speakers that addressed issues impacting the young people of Arizona. Intergenerational concerns have always been a core focus of the LTGJ event, driven by the presence and commitment of youth at the organizing table. Beth also found a homeplace in LTGJ where she could work shoulder-to-shoulder with deeply committed youth, university students, community activists, and other faculty in her expanding role as a scholar-activist and mentor (hooks, 1990). Beth described the great joy in witnessing the passion of student activists: "I deeply value seeing students of all ages and backgrounds become leaders in social movements

and finding their voice in confronting injustices, especially as students graduate and come back to the table as community members."

LTGJ remains a critical homeplace for scholar-activism during a pandemic, as members now meet in a virtual space, offering a site of support and engagement for members across the world. We support our members' solidarity work around raising awareness of the entrenched sexisms and racisms that returned Peace Corps volunteers of Color experience abroad and when they return home, and also address the topic of restorative justice in urban school settings. We also work with the Multicultural Solidarity Coalition and Black Lives Matter Phoenix Metro and their collective efforts to create a multicultural student center on campus and work for change in the campus police. For our 20th forum and festival in 2021, having an online or hybrid event offers a more inclusive venue for many who could not otherwise attend.

The idea of building a collective and safe space, where promoting scholar-activism in relation to community struggles was valued, is crucial for current faculty co-adviser Jen:

Local to Global Justice was and is a place where I could "indulge" my need to be connected to political struggles and not just apply theories to injustices, but actually advocate for social change movements. It's messy, inefficient, and frustrating at times, but a balm in the midst of the neoliberal university. I love breaking down the faculty/student divide. I get to learn so much about activism and praxis from the students and youth at the table.

LTGJ rejects hierarchical forms of power by placing equal value on community, faculty, student, and staff voices and experiences (Rhoads, 2016). We focus on empathy, compassion, and an ethic of care for our members, as well as on privileging experts from our communities. We open university spaces and resources for meetings, open our annual forum and festival to the entire

community, and co-sponsor community and university events to re-envision the neoliberal

university as an institution invested in the care of its students, faculty, staff, and communities.

However, we recognize our limitations as a university-community activist organization. In our

tempered radical approach, we have found that for some members, the university is such a racist

and colonizing space, that they cannot come to campus. In response, we moved some meetings

off-campus and now meet completely virtually. Yet, for 20 years, we have been committed to

keeping our events free, open, and welcoming to all, as a nonhierarchical and intergenerational

space of open dialogue and community-sharing.

Policy Recommendations

In this section, we offer recommendations anchored in intersectionality that contribute to

the support of scholar-activism, including 1) reciprocal mentorship, 2) the recognition of scholar-

activism as visible labor and legitimate sites of knowledge production in tenure and promotion

policies, and 3) the importance of homeplaces for scholar-activism in academia. These

recommendations recognize the contributions of tempered radicals within the university setting,

and also demonstrate how intersectional praxis can support and amplify the voices of community

members, students, faculty, and staff who experience structural oppressions in the academy

(Case et al., in press; Case, 2017a).

Reciprocal Mentoring

Our experiences at the organizing table for Local to Global Justice (LTGJ) have shown us

how important trustworthy mentorship is, especially mentors who understand scholar-activism

and intersectionality. Reciprocal mentoring (Swadener et al., 2015) is a critical legacy of LTGJ

that allows us to embrace our shared experiences. Reciprocal mentoring is a form of

intersectional praxis, as it relies on open, trusting, and understanding relationships and

recognizes the breadth and depth of knowledge of scholar-activists as valid and important for

social change. In reciprocal mentorship, the student and the faculty member mutually support,

care for, and collaborate with one another, subverting power hierarchies and traditional

apprenticeship models. However, it is important to acknowledge the implicit and explicit power

relations in mentoring. On one hand, unequal power dynamics allow us to exert our privilege to

interrupt oppression and act as co-conspirators. On the other hand, this can also serve to

perpetuate systemic oppressions through maintaining the status quo.

We urge universities and faculty members to explicitly recognize reciprocal mentorship

as a form of intersectional praxis, in order to create mentor relationships that value the personal

and collective process of creating and sharing knowledge. Further, faculty members should be

encouraged to take students' experiences with racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression

seriously and advocate for all their students, but especially for those who experience

marginalization and systemic precarity. Intersectional reciprocal mentoring is a form of

intersectional pedagogy that entails both faculty members and students reflecting on their own

identities, biases, and assumptions, and how these shape their educational experiences (Case,

2017a). The ultimate goal is to reduce and eventually eliminate discrimination and other forms of

oppression that disproportionately impact students and faculty from marginalized communities.

Revision of Promotion and Tenure Policies

We urge administrators and faculty to re-design universities as spaces that recognize and

advocate for socially-just causes that can contribute to create more equitable, transparent, and

welcoming conditions. Bell and colleagues (2019) pose the question: What would it be like to

work without the pressure of neoliberal competition and producing research that "counts"? What

would it be like to be allowed to fail in research and teaching? Scholarship could be defined

based on its potential to be relevant and transformative to communities, and the university could be a locus of equitable engagement with communities doing convivial research to support the diverse interests of an increasingly diverse academy (Fryberg, 2010).

Tenure and promotion policies should recognize scholar-activism, just as they are increasingly reflecting efforts to support diversity and inclusion (Lisnic et al., 2019; Moore, 2017). Activism for social justice concerns within the university must be recognized as legitimate labor and protected from fear of reprisal. For instance, working for social justice in collaboration with students and community members should be counted as valuable contributions to scholarship, akin to a grant or a publication (Few et al., 2007). Academic work includes long-term collective activist-research engagements, as well as different forms of public and open-access materials, such as reports, videos, and blog posts that provide direct value to communities. Similarly, mentorship in and during the tenure process should count as more than teaching and needs to be recognized and encouraged in ways that render such labor more visible and valued.

Recognition and Protection of Scholar-Activist Spaces

Organizations such as Local to Global Justice (LTGJ) are critical spaces of intersectional praxis and convivial research. While LTGJ as an organization has nurtured us as scholar-activists, this kind of organization is not unique to one university or locale. Activism across college campuses has been a global phenomenon for centuries and has surged in recent years as students have organized on campuses and joined movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, DREAMERs, and #MeToo (Rhoads, 2016). Yet, with its commitment to non-hierarchical collaborative and inclusive group dynamics and a shared commitment to multi-issue social justice work that recognizes the intersectionality of issues as a core concern for transforming

society, LTGJ does address a need within the neoliberal university (Collins, 2019). Ultimately,

we feel that for universities to remain socially engaged and relevant in contemporary society, we

need to advocate for the creation and care of welcoming academic spaces that offer room for

dissent and activism on campus, and that explicitly connect university members to community

concerns and needs around social, political, and environmental justice issues. The need for

identity-safe spaces for students from persistently marginalized backgrounds has been

recognized as necessary to support student success (Covarrubias & Fryberg, 2015), and

organizations like LTGJ can provide supportive spaces within the university for students who are

negotiating their cultural and professional identities as scholars and activists, and for challenging

structural oppressions and hierarchies. Intersectional pedagogy inextricably links teaching and

social action, and encourages students and faculty to work toward dismantling oppressive

systems via service-learning, community engagement, and activism (Case, 2017a). Activist

spaces are not only necessary for the university to practice its mission of education and

engagement, but also to provide spaces for direct action where students, faculty, staff, and

community members can meet without fearing reprisal. Through such spaces, we can advocate

for more equitable and just conditions within and outside the university by challenging structural

inequalities that erase the many facets of our identities.

Conclusion

Intersectionality has helped us to articulate several persistent and structural challenges

facing scholar-activists in higher education and has allowed us to identify how our social

locations in the academy are shaped by neoliberal and patriarchal educational spaces. We

recognize that future work on intersectionality and scholar-activism would benefit from

perspectives of LGBTQIA+, Black, Indigenous, and other faculty and students of Color, to

further identify, articulate, and challenge how unacknowledged white privilege, masculinity, and heteronormativity continue to undergird the academy. Future work could also include perspectives of community members who are not in higher education.

Overall, this project has sought to expand the use of intersectionality to reflect on epistemologies, mentoring dynamics, organizational dynamics, precarious and hidden labor, and the importance of creating more inclusive homeplaces that bridge campus and community. Our collaborative critical narrative process has served to unveil sensitive situations that reflect nuanced examples of intersecting oppressions. Enacting this methodology has many challenges and limitations. It is built on trust, reflexivity, working through the discomfort of unpacking difficult and oppressive situations, and a willingness to confront and discuss our individual and collective experiences. Incorporating and expanding notions of intersectionality widens a space for critical and reciprocal engagement and scholar-activism with communities. Local to Global Justice has offered a space for organizing for social justice issues, flattening hierarchies, and unpacking intersecting injustices. Such homeplaces are needed and can do much to support scholar-activists' work for transformative change inside and outside the academy.

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