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Critical Borderlands & (and) Interdisciplinary, Intersectional Coalitions

CRITICAL BORDERLANDS & INTERDISCIPLINARY, INTERSECTIONAL COALITIONS

K.L. BROAD*

In this piece, I am exploring what it means to participate as an activist scholar in a “politics of difference.” In so doing, I am reading LatCrit as an intellectual legal “movement” enacting a “politics of difference” by embodying ideals of difference, intersectionality, interdisciplinarity, and coalition.¹ I participate in this “politics of difference” by asking how social science and legal scholarship might produce postmodern, partial, and critical knowledges through interdisciplinary efforts in two ways. First, I take an *intradisciplinary* focus to examine the link between identity politics and constructions of situated *sociological* knowledges, suggesting means by which to continue creating critical knowledges in a politics of difference. Second, I take an *interdisciplinary* approach by writing as a sociologist to a LatCrit audience, offering one model by which we might conceive of disciplinary crossing in the production of critical theory. In other words, in this work, I am assuming that we are all players in a politics of difference, albeit differently situated actors, acting and creating knowledges from multiple and varying standpoints. My interest in this piece is to address how we might work in coalition across our situated standpoints and disciplinary knowledges.

* Please direct any correspondence to K.L. Broad, PO Box 117330, Department of Sociology, Center for Women’s Studies and Gender Research, University of Florida, Gainesville, Florida 32611-7330, kendal@soc.ufl.edu. I want to begin this work by thanking Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol and Francisco Valdes who assured me that a feminist sociologist had a place in LatCrit and encouraged me to stretch my definitions of Sociology and Women’s Studies by stepping into LatCrit interdisciplinarity. I would also like to thank LatCrit V participants who helped me to better understand LatCrit while also helping me to better translate my work into LatCrit terminology. Finally, I would like to acknowledge Patricia Hill Collins whose work has greatly influenced my thinking.

1. See generally Sumi K. Cho, *Multiplicities and Intersectionalities: Exploring LatCrit Diversities: Essential Politics*, 2 HARV. L. REV. 433 (1997); Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *The Gender Bend: Culture, Sex, and Sexuality – A LatCritical Human Rights Map of Latina/o Border Crossings* (2000) (unpublished manuscript, on file with author); Elizabeth M. Iglesias & Francisco Valdes, *Religion Gender, Sexuality, Race and Class in Coalitional Theory: A Critical and Self-Critical Analysis of LatCrit Social Justice Agendas*, 19 CHICANO-LATINO L. REV. 503 (1998); Francisco Valdes, *Latina/o Ethnicities, Critical Race Theory, and Post-Identity Politics in Postmodern Legal Culture: From Practices to Possibilities*, 9 LA RAZA L.J. 1 (1996); Francisco Valdes, *Under Construction: LatCrit Consciousness, Community, and Theory*, 85 CAL. L. REV. 1087 (1997); Francisco Valdes, Afterword, *Theorizing “OutCrit” Theories: Coalitional Method and Comparative Jurisprudential Experience – RaceCrits, QueerCrits and LatCrits*, 53 U. MIAMI L. REV. 1265 (1999).

Specifically, this work is asking how we (as activist knowledge producers) can make the move from “identity politics” to a “post-postmodern politics of difference and identification.”² I answer this question from my own lens of social science by examining the challenges to sociological understandings of the feminization of poverty presented, and possibly resolved, by post-modernism. The first part of this piece illustrates how sociological and activist knowledges (feminist and transgender) about the “feminization” of poverty are each situated standpoints sometimes acting as dominant discourses.³ The second part of this essay argues that it remains important for us to create situated knowledges from our outsider standpoints, but to do so without reproducing hegemonic discourse, we must work (politically) in coalition and (epistemologically) create interdisciplinary borderlands. Building off theories of postmodern politics,⁴ I assert that we must construct coalitions through “migration” into strategically intersectional “outsider within” positions.⁵

I. “FEMINIZATIONS” OF POVERTY

I begin with some questions. Why do we not speak of transgender people of color or queer Latina/os when we address the “feminization of poverty?” How is it that the “feminization of poverty” has become un-

2. See generally Valdes, *Latina/o Ethnicities*, *supra* note 1.

3. This is similar to the way in which Critical Race Theory has been described as androcentric, Afrocentric, and heterocentric. Valdes, *Latina/o Ethnicities*, *supra* note 1, at 5. My examination of situated standpoints in sociological knowledge is in many ways illustrating a similar point made by LatCrits about the essentialist dangers of other critical legal endeavors.

4. See generally PATRICIA HILL COLLINS, *FIGHTING WORDS: BLACK WOMEN AND THE SEARCH FOR JUSTICE* (1998); SHANE PHELAN, *GETTING SPECIFIC: POSTMODERN LESBIAN POLITICS* (1994); STEVEN SEIDMAN, *DIFFERENCE TROUBLES: QUEERING SOCIAL THEORY AND SEXUAL POLITICS* (1997).

5. See generally COLLINS, *supra* note 4. In the spirit of doing interdisciplinary work, this piece uses the language of sociology, social movement theory, feminist theory, queer theory, and transgender activism. During my presentation of this work, Professor Athena Mutua acted as commentator and relayed to me that she had to translate much of what I was saying into critical legal studies and LatCrit language. As I understand, my discussion of the tension between a politics of identity and difference is similar to LatCrit discussions of “politics of differentiation and identification.” See generally Valdes, *Latina/o Ethnicities*, *supra* note 1. My interest in partial knowledges and situated standpoints is parallel to “perspective jurisprudence” and “outsider jurisprudence.” See generally MARTHA ALBERTSON FINEMAN, *THE NEUTERED MOTHER, THE SEXUAL FAMILY AND OTHER TWENTIETH CENTURY TRAGEDIES* (1995); Mari J. Matsuda, *Legal Storytelling: Public Response to Racist Speech: Considering the Victim’s Story*, 87 MICH. L. REV. 2320 (1989). My use of “outsider within” and “intersectional” ideas are similar to notions of “multi-dimensionality” and “intersectionality.” See generally Berta Esperanza Hernández-Truyol, *Building Bridges — Latinas and Latinos at the Crossroads: Realities, Rhetoric and Replacement*, 25 COLUM. HUM. RTS. L. REV. 369 (1994); Kimberlé Crenshaw, *Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color*, 43 STAN. L. REV. 1241 (1991). My use of “coalition” is similar to the use of the same term in LatCrit work. See generally Iglesias & Valdes, *supra* note 1. The interesting process for me in this work has been to step into the act of “doing coalition” by presenting this work and finding out “what we shared.”

derstood as an example of “female” subordination curiously distinct from racialized *and* sexualized subordination? How might we attend to these subjugated knowledges from our own locations within a matrix of domination? Specifically, how can I, a white, non-Latina/o, middle class, U.S.-born-and-raised, and gender bending dyke participate in dialogue about the racialized feminization of poverty in the U.S.? In other words, how can a white dyke living in a rabidly heteronormative culture speak to a phenomenon defined in terms of the presumed “failure” of modern day heterosexuality for people of color (replete with white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal stereotypes of single motherhood, welfare babies, and attendant ravages of poverty)? And, how do I speak about the poverty faced by many “women” (and I mean that in the broadest sense of the term) of color, knowing that my “outness” and gender bending are, in many ways, symbolic of my race/class privilege? Are we not speaking across differently-lived specificities of oppression? I am asking how we participate in anti-subordination efforts across our multiple intersections.

I am interested in asking questions about how we can participate in a politics of difference—cognizant of intersectionality, multiplicity, and interconnectedness—while also carrying those aspects of “identity politics” that still resonate within our selves, communities, and lives. Importantly, single-identity political processes are now understood as perpetuating, in fact reifying, elitism and marginality. For example, the works of U.S. feminists of color highlight the limits of a politics based on one identity and call for a politics of difference by challenging mainstream, white, middle class feminism that erases race and class and by challenging ethnic nationalism that erases gendered experiences of racism. Yet, because “the American political environment makes a stable collective identity both necessary and damaging,” the “era” of identity politics is not exactly over.⁶

I begin this inquiry with the recognition that a politics of identity—whereby collective political and cultural identities are constructed through political struggle and commitment—is still viable and necessary in sociopolitical and cultural models of ethnic identity and interest-group politics.⁷ Why else would the “Lat” be a part of “LatCrit”? In my opinion, the task has become one of defining and enacting a politics of difference, clarifying the distinctions from a politics of identity. Another way to think of it is as striving to do a better “identity politics,” which “does not mean finding the best definition of our identities so as to eliminate problems of membership and goals; it means continual shuffling between

6. Joshua Gamson, *Must Identity Movements Self-destruct? A Queer Dilemma*, in *SOCIAL PERSPECTIVES IN LESBIAN AND GAY STUDIES* 589, 599 (Peter M. Nardi & Beth E. Schneider eds., 1996).

7. STEVEN BEST & DOUGLAS KELLNER, *POSTMODERN THEORY: CRITICAL INTERROGATIONS* 205 (1991); Gamson, *supra* note 6, 595.

the need for categories and the recognition of their incompleteness.”⁸ In many ways, I read the work of LatCrit as engaging the complicated move from identity politics to a politics of difference. As such, I see this work engaging the move from identity to difference by exploring the means by which two movements based on differences of identity/oppression (Feminist movement(s) and the Transgender movement) can work in coalition to address a manifestation of multiple oppressions—namely the “feminization” of poverty. Simply stated, my questions at the beginning of this work were asking how we can do coalition/alliance work, especially how we can work in coalition across our multiple intersections and concrete experiences of oppression.

In so doing, I am also asking these questions to highlight the epistemological conundrums we face in post-modernity—puzzles of subjectivity, knowledge and politics. Postmodern theories raise questions of universalism, essentialism, foundationalism and dichotomous thinking that are helpful to anti-subordination efforts and critical theorizing.⁹ As I understand it, LatCrit embraces postmodern concerns through four emphases: 1) production of partial, specific, and subjugated knowledges; 2) construction of transformative knowledge applicable to concrete social change; 3) anti-essentialist/intersectional ideals; and 4) coalitional/community organizing.¹⁰ While LatCrit is a movement based in critical legal theory, it is my understanding that it is also a movement striving toward an interdisciplinary focus. In that spirit, this work takes a critical sociology perspective to address similar theoretical and political questions. In recognition of the epistemological limits of objectivity, I begin this work with personal questions because they serve to contextualize my place within the work, marking my situated standpoint. Because this work is exploring how we work together from our multiple marginalities, as outsiders—differently situated—within, my questions at the beginning were raising the general question of this piece: how we can speak from situated standpoints in coalitional/allied anti-subordination efforts.¹¹

I focus on the feminization of poverty because it represents a matrix of domination that has been both erased and silenced by dominant discourse and also inadequately addressed by identity-based politics. There are other issues that are similarly situated, but I engage this issue because it is one that has been characterized (by law, social science and media) so centrally as the fault of heterosexual, poor women of color while simultaneously portrayed as separate from the everyday experiences of transgender individuals. To me, an issue assumed to be the purview of one

8. PHELAN, *supra* note 4, at 154.

9. BEST & KELLNER, *supra* note 7, at 207.

10. See generally Hernández-Truyol, *supra* note 1.

11. COLLINS, *supra* note 4, at 5.

group but not another seems the ideal challenge for two movements concerned with the intersections of race/class/gender/sexual identities and oppressions, yet situated quite differently. If the feminization of poverty is a “natural” issue for feminists but not for the transgender movement, the question of how theoretical/political ideas from the transgender movement can be applied to an analysis of the issue becomes quite engaging. In my mind, it makes the challenge of talking about intersectional coalitions/alliances quite salient.

I speak here as a non-Latino/a white academic feminist gender bending dyke who has spent a great deal of time striving to sociologically understand social movement processes and, specifically, the ways in which transgender activists manage, negotiate, plan, and succeed in border crossings.¹² In this piece, I begin exploring how gender-based movements (feminist and transgender movements) can work/theorize in coalition/alliance. In particular, I focus my discussion on feminist and transgender/queer activism, movements that theorize/act from differently situated outsider-within locations that “produce distinctive oppositional knowledges that embrace multiplicity yet remain cognizant of power.”¹³ I begin by discussing our current knowledge about the “feminization of poverty,” illustrating the way that it has been constructed by sociological knowledge as an issue about poor women, with little recognition of the sexual and gendered components of “feminization.” I suggest that a critical race feminist understanding of the “feminization of poverty” racializes our understanding of the issue, but still does not address the multiple ways in which we might see a “feminization” of poverty in terms of gender/sexuality. Assuming that the theory/activism relationship does not have to be one dimensional (producing theory to lead activism), I next look to transgender activism to inform our theoretical understanding of how we might expand the domain of “feminization.” In particular, I identify the way that one part of the transgender movement has sought to problematize the stability of gender categories through legal resistance, albeit without specific focus on race and class. Concluding that both feminist and transgender standpoints fall short of addressing an expanded domain of the “feminization” of poverty, the final section explores the means by which coalitions/alliances can be forged across situated standpoints. In the end, I suggest that borderland coalitions/alliances are needed to address the feminization of poverty and other issues that serve to construct boundaries, borders, and subordination.

12. In this paper, I would like to step away from my usual role of sociologist observing/participating/understanding “others” and speak, in many ways, as an activist. In fact, I do not even like creating that false dichotomy between social scientist and activist, but I suggest it here because I want to highlight my own participation in the acts of resistance to which I will refer. As well, I want to be clear that these are my own ideas of how to move forward in anti-subordination efforts – and not those of the activists with whom I’ve interacted and learned.

13. COLLINS, *supra* note 4, at 8.

II. FEMINISMS: SITUATED "FEMINIZATIONS" OF POVERTY

In an academic sense, I tend to see the "feminization of poverty" from the lens of a white feminist sociologist. As such, I understand that the rates of poverty for women and children in the U.S. increased significantly in the last four decades, often as a result of the increasing number of female-headed households. I understand that the concept "feminization of poverty" was introduced by sociologist Diane Pearce in her 1978 article, *The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work, and Welfare*, where she argued that the combination of public welfare and sex-segregation in the workplace institutionalized sexism and fostered poverty among women.¹⁴ Simply stated, sociological knowledge identified an increased rate of women in poverty, explained it as a shift from sex-neutral poverty to gender-specific poverty, and theorized how changes in family structure, women's place in the workforce, and the nature of public services for women and children contributed to an increased proportion of women and children in poverty.¹⁵ If I stop here, it would seem that sociological knowledge etches an image of poverty rates simply characterized by gender in the U.S.

It is important to note that research about the feminization of poverty also emerged from research about race, class and family—a great deal of which was done in response to the Moynihan report of 1965, which characterized the dissolution of the black family (with high rates of female-headed households) as pathologically responsible for poverty.¹⁶ Consequently, sociological research in the 1980s and 1990s highlighted the intersection of race and class in the feminization of poverty.¹⁷ Importantly, this research problematized the assumed primacy of gender in the term "feminization of poverty," suggesting it was not primarily gender that characterizes poverty for women of color but very real subordination based on race and class. It is from research grounded in such critical race theory that we saw how the feminization of poverty was never a *new* phenomenon plaguing all "women" but was actually yet another manifestation of a long established matrix of domination in the U.S. In fact, some scholars argue against using the very term "feminization of poverty" because it brings gender to the fore, such that dynamics of racism, classism, and poverty are erased.¹⁸ So, as a feminist sociologist, I

14. See generally Diane Pearce, *The Feminization of Poverty: Women, Work, and Welfare*, 11(1) URB. & SOC. CHANGE REV. 28 (1978).

15. RENEE FEINBERG & KATHLEEN E. KNOX, *THE FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY IN THE UNITED STATES*, 21 (1990).

16. DANIEL P. MOYNIHAN, *THE NEGRO FAMILY: THE CASE FOR NATIONAL ACTION* (1965).

17. See generally TERESA AMOTT & JULIE MATTHAEI, *RACE, GENDER, AND WORK: A MULTICULTURAL ECONOMIC HISTORY OF WOMEN IN THE UNITED STATES* (1996); *Race, Class and the Feminization of Poverty*, 3 SOCIALIST POLITICS 5 (1985); Rose M. Brewer, *Black Women in Poverty: Some Comments on Female-headed Families*, 13 SIGNS 331 (1988); Linda Burnham, *Has Poverty Been Feminized in Black America?*, 26 BLACK SCHOLAR 14 (1985); Pearce, *supra* note 14.

classism, and poverty are erased.¹⁸ So, as a feminist sociologist, I am left with a complicated body of knowledge that identifies increased rates of poverty among women and children, and especially women and children of color, due to intersecting dynamics of racism, classism, and sexism.

Yet, as a feminist sociologist, I also think it is important to an understanding of the feminization of poverty to examine how sociology (or social science more generally) is also complicit in reproducing and reifying a matrix of domination. U.S. feminist sociologists of color have warned of the dangers of objectivity, universalism, and subject/object dichotomies in the project of a positivist sociology.¹⁹ For example, we know that sociologies of family have served to reify the image of a nuclear family with 2.5 children as “normal,” thereby creating as deviant single-parent households and extended families.²⁰ More generally, we see that social science knowledge must be examined as a dominant discourse. As Charles Lemert states:

It has long been recognized that professional sociologists have resisted a serious taking into account of feminism. If anything, their record has been even more dismal in their unwillingness to read with definitive seriousness the writings of other extramural sociologists—the new developments in queer theory and postcolonial studies, the varied and serious work by African Americanists, the very considerable literature by and about Black feminists and other women of color.²¹

Thus, I approach the issue of feminization of poverty, as a feminist sociologist with the following question: if sociology is understood as a dominant discourse, what “knowledge” do we actually have about the feminization of poverty?

Today, we know that while the overall rate of poverty in the U.S. is decreasing, the rates of women and female-headed families in poverty have been increasing—men and their families are the ones escaping poverty, while women and their children increasingly experience it. Furthermore, we know that Chicano/as and Latina/os experience more poverty overall than do whites, and among Latina/os and Chicanos/as, the women are disproportionately poor. Currently, the dynamics of racism, sexism, and poverty are still quite similar for Latina/os. For example, a

18. See generally FEINBERG & KNOX, *supra* note 15; Burnham, *supra* note 17; Martha E. Gimenez, *The Feminization of Poverty: Myth or Reality?*, 19 INT’L J. HEALTH SERVICES 45 (1989).

19. PATRICIA HILL COLLINS, *BLACK FEMINIST THOUGHT: KNOWLEDGE, CONSCIOUSNESS, AND THE POLITICS OF EMPOWERMENT* (2000); COLLINS, *supra* note 4; Maxine Baca Zinn, *Family, Feminism, and Race in America*, 4 GENDER & SOC. 68 (1990).

20. See generally Zinn, *supra* note 19.

21. CHARLES LEMERT, *SOCIOLOGY AFTER THE CRISIS* 207 (1995).

recent Los Angeles Times article reported that median household assets for Latina/os has declined.²²

Needless to say, this “data” suggests that with regard to racism/classism/sexism, “the more things change, the more they stay the same.”²³ The subordination of women of color in the U.S. capitalist labor market is well established, such that there is a clear historical legacy to the “feminization of poverty.”²⁴ Yet, we must ask whether this construction of “feminization of poverty” is always critical social theory. Patricia Hill Collins notes that “[b]lack feminist thought remains emancipatory in some dimensions, namely, conceptualizing power relations through intersections of race, gender, and class, yet dominant in others, namely, its relative silence on issues of sexual politics and on nationalism.”²⁵ In other words, a construction of the feminization of poverty that only focuses on the intersection of race/class/gender is, itself, a partial knowledge derived from a situated standpoint.

I am suggesting that critical race theory, feminism, and indeed critical race feminism, are not bound by exclusionary identity politics, yet they are situated standpoints that construct dominant knowledges in regards to gender and sexuality. Specifically, the sociological lens by which we view the feminization of poverty is characterized both by white, middle class feminism (emphasizing the salience of gender and women’s subordination) and critical race feminism(s) (emphasizing the intersections of race/class/gender and the subordination of poor women of color). What we do not see is an expanded view of the way poverty is “feminized.”

Where are the lesbians of color within these discussions? If we queer our lens, does the phrase “single women with children” have different meaning? Isn’t our understanding of the “feminization of poverty” dependent on assumptions of heteronormativity that erase bisexual and lesbian women of color? This question is very important, given the centrality of theorizing by U.S. lesbians of color in feminist theories and critical race feminisms²⁶ and the curious way that they are often characterized as simply “U.S. feminists of color” and their critiques of heteronormativity erased. Additionally, where are Male-to-Female transgender individuals in these constructions of “feminized” poverty? Does the matrix of race/class/gender domination explain their daily negotiation of the

22. Mary Williams Walsh, *Latinos’ Net Worth Shrinking Despite Boom Times*, L.A. TIMES, Mar. 25, 2000, at A16.

23. COLLINS, *supra* note 4, at 13.

24. See generally AMOTT & MATTHAEI, *supra* note 17.

25. COLLINS, *supra* note 4, at 89.

26. See generally GLORIA ANZALDÚA, *BORDERLANDS: LA FRONTERA* (1995); AUDRE LORDE, *SISTER OUTSIDER: ESSAYS AND SPEECHES* (1984); CHERRÍE MORAGA, *LOVING IN THE WAR YEARS* (1983).

maze of poverty due to their transgression of gender? Does sociological knowledge about rates of poverty for women and children highlight issues of sexism within a heterosexual paradigm such that the experience of effeminate gay men is subjugated?

When sociological and anthropological literature on Latino sexuality “suggests that Latino men’s sexual identity is determined not by the biological sex of the sexual partner but rather by the culturally defined roles of activo/pasivo (i.e. dominant/submissive) assumed by the actors,” might “feminization” also describe those considered feminine/submissive/pasivo rather than simply essentialized categories of women and men?²⁷ In other words, why do we not see the faces of young gay men of color, Latino youth, “feminized” as “pasivo” and often ostracized from family, community and support networks? Are these youth represented in the high numbers of “children in poverty?” Does a theory that depends on the assumption that women face increased levels of poverty as compared to men not serve to erase those whose lived experience challenges the essentialist categories of “woman” and “man?” Will understanding the matrix of racism/classism/sexism explain the intersection of gender and sexual domination that marks the lives of gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, and queer people?

At heart, I am arguing that all of these examples suggest our understandings of poverty and its “feminization” are only partial knowledges. Importantly, the absence of knowledges about the “feminization” of poverty for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals indicates not only a silencing of certain knowledges, but also a constructing of dominant knowledges about sexuality and gender.

Clearly, a conceptualization of the “feminization of poverty” that assumes there has been a marked increase of women (of color) and children into poverty due to dissolution of heterosexual marriage does not recognize, let alone explain, the above-mentioned gendered/sexualized experiences. In other words, the construction of knowledges about “feminization of poverty” depends on dual and intersecting assumptions of heteronormativity and binary gender. I suggest that these constructions of knowledge are representative of situated standpoints of white feminists and feminists of color. As such, it seems logical to presume that we can create new knowledges that do not essentialize gender and presume heteronormativity. In the next section, I discuss whether a queer/transgender perspective of poverty (conceptualized in terms of the various forms of transgender activism) might expand the domain of this social problem, such that we might avoid erasing lives and creating discourses of dominance in the very project of constructing critical knowledges.

27. See generally Lionel Cantú, *Entre Hombres/Between Men: Latino Masculinities and Homosexualities*, in *GAY MASCULINITIES* 224 (Peter M. Nardi ed., 2000).

III. TRANSGENDERING A "FEMINIZATION OF POVERTY"?

The history of gender transgression and gender transition is one that has been silenced, erased, and co-opted, according to transgender activists.²⁸ As is often the case with a group whose lives have been defined and pathologized by others, the word "transgender" was first coined to name an experience that was not captured by available terms. Moving beyond a coded language of "speaking without saying,"²⁹ Virginia Prince coined the term "transgenderist" in 1987 to name the experience of people who had changed their gender, but not their sex.³⁰ Simply explained, Prince was naming the experience of being born a "biological male," dressing as a woman, living as a woman full time, but not opting for sex-reassignment surgery.³¹ In the 1990s the term transgender (or TG) emerged as a contested term among various groups within a broader gender-bending community: transvestites, transsexuals, cross-dressers, transgenderists, gender blenders, gender benders, drag queens, bigenders, feminine men, androgynes, drag kings, intersexuals, masculine women, cross-genders, butch lesbians, shape shifters, passing women, bearded women, passing men, gender dysphorics and others who might consider themselves "gender outlaws."³²

In general, the emerging transgender movement in the 1990s sought organized resistance to medical, legal, and social restrictions of a Western, binary gender system. As MacKenzie explains, "transsexualism is moving away from being considered a psychological "disorder" that is treatable with surgery and hormones to a grassroots civil rights movement."³³ Importantly, Feinberg explains that the process by which transgender individuals jettison medical labels to organize together for the right to live unrestrained by binary gender norms is complex and characterized by a variety of experiences.³⁴ The "movement" is characterized by hundreds of organizations nationwide, a complex system of support

28. See generally KATE BORNSTEIN, *GENDER OUTLAW: ON MEN, WOMEN, AND THE REST OF US* (1994); PAT CALIFIA, *SEX CHANGES: THE POLITICS OF TRANSGENDERISM* (1997); LESLIE FEINBERG, *TRANSGENDER WARRIORS: MAKING HISTORY FROM JOAN OF ARC TO RUPAUL* (1996); RIKI ANNE WILCHINS, *READ MY LIPS: SEXUAL SUBVERSION AND THE END OF GENDER* (1997).

29. See generally Jason Cromwell, *Talking About Without Talking About: The Use of Protective Language Among Transvestites and Transsexuals*, in *BEYOND THE LAVENDER LEXICON: AUTHENTICITY, IMAGINATION, AND APPROPRIATION IN LESBIAN AND GAY LANGUAGES* 267 (William L. Leap ed., 1995).

30. See generally FEINBERG, *supra* note 28.

31. Many in the transsexual community have heavily critiqued Virginia Prince's work and public statements about transsexual experience because Prince is not a transsexual and often dismisses the validity of transsexual experience.

32. See generally BLENDING GENDERS: *SOCIAL ASPECTS OF CROSS-DRESSING AND SEX-CHANGING* (Richard Ekins & Dave King eds., 1996); BORNSTEIN, *supra* note 28; FEINBERG, *supra* note 28.

33. See generally GORDENE OLGA MACKENZIE, *TRANSGENDER NATION* (1994).

34. See generally FEINBERG, *supra* note 28.

groups, local and national conferences, active internet newsgroups, publications, listserves, web sites,³⁵ and a range of grassroots efforts—from direct action to more “traditional” efforts to lobby legislators in Washington D.C.,³⁶ academics creating new knowledges,³⁷ activists challenging the knowledges currently being produced,³⁸ and a growing collective of people who resist the idea that gender is stable and unchangeable.

My ethnographic research on transgender activism focused on the means by which transgender activists employed processes of identity and differences as they struggled to act collectively despite a variety of experiences and identities.³⁹ My research illustrated that a key aspect of transgender activism in the U.S. during the 1990s was the process of constructing a collective “transgender” identity through the creation of transgender group boundaries, articulation of transgender consciousness, and negotiation of transgender identity in everyday life. The construction of a “transgender” collective identity suggests a “transgender” standpoint, whereby those with lived experience and the political achievement of a critical consciousness possess a particular knowledge of the binary gender system. In particular, the transgender standpoint centers on understanding “transgender oppression” and envisioning “transgender rights,” offering a very particular understanding of domination and subordination

Rather than understanding the “feminization of poverty” in terms of the interlocking axes of race/class/gender domination, a transgender standpoint might examine the dominant gender categorization system that assumes stable gender categories. Rather than examining the way that white supremacist, capitalist patriarchy has structured a society where women are child-rearers and labor markets are sex and race segregated such that poor women of color with children are disproportionately poor, a transgender standpoint might examine how the processes of binary gender constraints (in medicine, psychology, and law) serve to pathologize transgender expression (such that gender transgender indi-

35. CALIFIA, *supra* note 28, at 9.

36. *See generally* WILCHINS, *supra* note 28.

37. Robin Wilson, *Transgendered Scholars Defy Convention, Seeking To Be Heard and Seen in Academe*, THE CHRONICLE OF HIGHER EDUCATION, Feb. 6, 1998, at A10.

38. *See generally* FEINBERG, *supra* note 28; Sandy Stone, *The Empire Strikes Back: A Posttranssexual Manifest*, in BODY GUARDS: THE CULTURAL POLITICS OF GENDER AMBIGUITY 280 (Julia Epstein & Kristina Straub eds., 1991); WILCHINS, *supra* note 28.

39. My research sought to understand the emergence of “transgender” activism in the mid-1990s. The research took the form of a postmodern ethnography including a comparative case study of 45 TG organizations, unobtrusive observation of TG Internet Newsgroups and World Wide Web Pages, and field work in one TG community and four TG conferences. *See generally* K. L. Broad, *Fracturing “Transgender”: Intersectional Claims and Identization*, in ADVANCES IN GENDER RESEARCH 6 (Patricia Gagne and Richard Tewksbury eds. 2002); K.L. Broad, *Is it G,L,B and T? Gender/Sexuality Movements and Transgender Collective Identity (De)Constructions* 7 INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF SEXUALITY AND GENDER STUDIES (2002).

viduals disproportionately end up under medical supervision or in the criminal justice system) and marginalize transgender people from gendered social structures (e.g., sex-segregated jobs and marriage, etc.) and services (e.g., welfare and child support). A transgender standpoint might highlight how stepping outside the bounds of presumed stable gender categories can result in poverty (e.g., male-to-female transgender prostitutes who do sex work because access to “traditional” sex-segregated work is blocked). Ki Namaste reminds us of the potential of critical theory that takes lived transgender experience seriously.

[C]ritics in queer theory write page after page on the inherent liberation in the transgression of gender codes, but they have nothing to say about the precarious position of the transsexual woman who is battered, and who is unable to access a women’s shelter because she was not born a biological woman.⁴⁰

At heart, Namaste reminds us that a transgender standpoint offers a means by which to better understand how battering is experienced and, as I have explored here, poverty reproduced.

Yet, I am not suggesting that simply adding a transgender standpoint and stirring will give us more complete knowledge about the feminization of poverty. Important to the understanding of a transgender lived experience expressed by transgender activists is the way it has been complicated. In my research, throughout the process of constructing a collective identity in the TG movement, I observed “voices of difference” (TG of color, poor TG, and gay, lesbian, and bisexual TG) challenging a universal “transgender” experience. Like the voices of difference that complicated identity politics, TG voices of difference similarly contest a construction of a universal, politicized identity—a single transgender standpoint. In other words, by articulating the way in which transgender experience intersects with race, class and sexuality, these voices of difference complicate the construction of a collective identity. Namely, those on the periphery of the movement insist that transgender identity is not a universal experience but rather one characterized as multiple and fractured.⁴¹ According to scholarship, “the surfacing of voices of difference within movements [is] pivotal in facilitating the deconstruction of essentialized identities and advocating a radical cultural politics of difference.”⁴² In other words, the transgender voices of difference challenge a universal transgender standpoint, reminding us that, at best,

40. Ki Namaste, “*Tragic Misreadings*”: *Queer Theory’s Erasure of Transgender Subjectivity*, in *QUEER STUDIES: A LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL & TRANSGENDER ANTHOLOGY* 183, 198 (Brett Beemyn & Mickey Eliason eds., 1996).

41. See generally Broad, *supra* note 39.

42. *SOCIAL POSTMODERNISM: BEYOND IDENTITY POLITICS* 34 (Linda Nicholson & Steven Seidman eds., 1995).

we have standpoints situated in particular historical, socio-political moments and lived experiences.

Placing a transgender standpoint in the foreground might expand our understanding of poverty, but it must not be at the cost of also understanding race and class as parts of a situated standpoint. Transgendering a feminization of poverty is another means by which to construct partial truths but does not provide us with a more thorough (universal?) knowledge. If voices of difference are still in the borderlands of movements, are not these movements still providing situated standpoints that at times are critical and at times dominant social knowledges? I am suggesting that the distinction between identity politics and a politics of difference is the distinction between a movement based on one standpoint and movements emphasizing situated standpoints. As such, the challenge is to find a way to talk from situated standpoints and partial knowledges to address concrete manifestations of domination/subordination.

Like feminism, transgender politics can be seen as existing in tension between identity politics and a politics of difference, wherein voices of difference in feminism de-essentialized the category "woman," and voices of difference in transgender activism have de-essentialized the category, "transgender." But it is important to recognize that a politics of difference still produces only partial truths from situated standpoints, so the question becomes how social change is possible. Are we only able to produce our partial truths that leave us in an abyss of relativism, where no one's truth is more legitimate than another's? Do our situated standpoints erase the potential of collective action that essentializes a standpoint and creates more subjugated knowledges in the process? I am assuming that the pitfalls of relativism and essentializing are negotiable through coalitional efforts to talk across intersectional situated standpoints.

IV. CRITICAL INTERSECTIONAL COALITIONS AGAINST POVERTY

"There is no hiding place. There is nowhere you can go and only be with people who are like you. It's over. Give it up."⁴³

"The overarching matrix of domination houses multiple groups, each with varying experiences with penalty and privilege that produce corresponding partial perspectives, situated knowledges, and, for clearly identifiably subordinate groups, subjugated knowledges."⁴⁴

Thus, the problem for coalition politics is not 'What do we share?' but rather 'What might we share as we develop our identities through the

43. Bernice Johnson Reagon, *Coalition Politics: Turning the Century*, in RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER 540 (Margaret L. Andersen & Patricia Hill Collins eds., 1995).

44. COLLINS, *supra* note 19, at 234.

process of coalition?' Coalition cannot be simply the strategic alignment of diverse groups over a single issue, nor can coalition mean finding the real unity behind our apparently diverse struggles. Our politics must be informed by affinity rather than identity, not simply because we are not all alike, but because we each embody multiple, often conflicting, identities and locations.⁴⁵

So far, I have argued that feminist sociological knowledges about the feminization of poverty are partial and situated. Similarly, I have argued that transgender knowledges are partial and situated, such that a simple application of them to feminist sociological understandings of the feminization of poverty would not create a more complete knowledge. In making these arguments, I am implicitly illustrating the way in which the feminist movement has become multiple feminist movements; feminism has transitioned from a politics of identity to difference, as such not only producing knowledge from the standpoint of women but from Black feminist women, Latina lesbians, and other situated standpoints. I have also illustrated the way that the nascent transgender movement is engaging in a politics of difference, dependent on and productive of multiple and situated knowledges about what it means to be a white male-to-female (transwoman), a queer, a Latino female-to-male (transman), or a poor Black cross-dresser. At heart, I am asserting (as a sociologist is apt to do) that we are at an interesting sociological moment where we are participating in and producing politics of difference that depend on and create partial knowledges from situated standpoints, and I am asking whether they/we can work in affinity/coalition.

Much of my research is attempting to sort out social movement processes as we increasingly doubt simplistic identity politics. I recognize that one of the epistemological contributions of identity politics (especially feminist identity politics) is standpoint theory—"an approach that argues that knowledge is and should be situated in people's diverse social locations. As such, all knowledge is affected by the social conditions under which it is produced; it is grounded in both the social location and the social biography of the observer and the observed."⁴⁶ However, I also recognize "the decreasing effectiveness of an identity politics currently associated with standpoint theory raises question of its continued relevance."⁴⁷ As such, this paper is an examination of the way in which standpoints are situated in a politics of difference—highlighting the continued relevance of standpoint theory in political work and also raising the question of the viability of *situated* standpoints.

45. PHELAN, *supra* note 4, at 140.

46. Susan A. Mann & Lori R. Kelley, *Standing at the Crossroads of Modernist Thought: Collins, Smith, and the New Feminist Epistemologies*, 11(4) GENDER & SOC. 391, 392 (1997).

47. COLLINS, *supra* note 4, at 203.

This is an important question for LatCrit because it addresses the very concerns that this movement is built upon—concerns about intersectionality, partial and situated knowledges, construction of transformative knowledges and coalitional politics. Further, it is an important question for all movements (e.g., feminist and transgender), negotiating the tension between politics of identity and difference. I am not asserting that we must sort through these epistemological questions of how to combine situated standpoints in construction of postmodern knowledges in order to enact a better politics of difference. Following Seidman's assertion that "postmodern social ideas emerged, at least in part, out of the development of the new social movements,"⁴⁸ I feel that this epistemological question arises from the very type of political activity we are witnessing currently. In other words, I feel this is an important question epistemologically and politically, and offers us a means by which to see how our ways of knowing and our politics are related and interconnected—a seemingly vital question for academic activists.

Importantly, I also see this as an important question because I see epistemological and political value in standpoint theory and want to assert it is important to continue theorizing it.⁴⁹ The assumption that "one's everyday life has epistemological consequences and implications—the disadvantaged have the potential to be more knowledgeable, in a way, than the dominant group" is an important means by which we can create and legitimate knowledge—from the borderlands.⁵⁰ Furthermore, if both sociology and law are central in constructing, and complicit in upholding, matrixes of domination (as I have assumed in this paper), standpoint theory is a politically and epistemologically vital means by which to create oppositional knowledges. Taking Patricia Hill Collins' warning that standpoint theory (in her example of Black Feminist Thought) can be both dominant and critical social theory,⁵¹ I still feel that the links between experience and knowledge and the centrality of political struggle in order to achieve a standpoint offers important potential to create oppositional knowledges in the context of difference politics.

The question this paper has been entertaining is whether situated standpoints can address the same social problem, and if so how. In considering this question, it is important to mention some challenges facing standpoint theory in an era of difference. One criticism of standpoint theory has been the problem with relativism—if we assert that the knowledge is partial and situated, we lose all standards by which to determine which knowledge is legitimate. Patricia Hill Collins discusses

48. SEIDMAN, *supra* note 4, at 204.

49. See generally COLLINS, *supra* note 4.

50. See generally *id.*; ANZALDÚA, *supra* note 26.

51. See COLLINS, *supra* note 4.

this as the myth of equivalent oppressions.⁵² She discusses the necessity of understanding that assertions that standpoints are partial and situated are not assertions that all oppressions are equivalent. To do so, she begins to explore how standpoints are differently situated by comparing the social, structural components of race-class standpoints to gender standpoints:

Black women and White women do not live in class-stratified women's neighborhoods, separated from men and children by processes such as gender steering, bank redlining that results in refusal to lend money to women's neighborhoods, inferior schools in women's inner-city neighborhoods due to men moving to all-male suburban areas, and the like.⁵³

She notes that a key challenge for standpoint theory is to ensure that "neither group practices nor any ensuing standpoints replicate other hierarchies."⁵⁴ In this paper, I have explored the means by which some feminist standpoints and some transgender standpoints potentially replicate hierarchies. The key is that I read feminist and transgender movements and theories as self-reflective and cognizant of their partiality, such that through coalition they might be able to become more critical than dominant knowledges.

Another challenge of standpoint theory in a politics of difference is the very challenge of *difference* itself.⁵⁵ The concern is that by recognizing the way in which identities intersect and oppressions are interlocking, we will lose a means by which to form collective identities and therefore participate in collective action. In the worst case scenario, the idea is that a recognition of intersectionality will be reduced to individualism and, thus, leave us without political viability and theoretical cohesiveness. On the other hand, the concern is that in striving for any sort of group-derived standpoint, we risk essentializing group identities. Both of these challenges can be seen in concrete terms by considering the topic of this paper. If we recognize the multiple feminist standpoints that theorize different understandings of the "feminization of poverty" and also genuinely hear the "voices of difference" in transgender activism, is there any means by which to enact collective action? Further, if we speak of this problem as reducible to two situated standpoints (feminist and transgender) are we in some way essentializing groups? I would suggest that coalitional/alliance strategies are one means by which to *strategically* "essentialize" group formation and standpoints, such that political work is possible but the fluidity of intersectional, transgressive identities are kept present.

52. *Id.* at 208.

53. *Id.* at 219.

54. *Id.* at 219.

55. *Id.* at 205.

It seems, at this point in the paper, that my logical conclusion would be to suggest strategic alignment of diverse groups (feminist and transgender) over a single issue, feminization of poverty. However, this will not be my suggestion. Were I to recommend this strategy, I would be recommending implicit categorization of two distinct groups, thereby erasing the multiple and often conflicting identities within feminism and transgender activism. Furthermore, recommending coalition around one issue, in this case “feminization of poverty” would be recommending a privileging of that particular issue—establishing a hierarchy of oppressions reminiscent of previous battles in identity politics. Rather, I think it important to think of coalitional efforts as much more fluid and changeable. In other words, the means by which I recommend coalition is a means by which we can make a move from identity politics to a politics of difference. Another strategy that might seem a logical conclusion would be to recommend finding the commonalities between the situated standpoints of feminists who recognize the intersections of race, class, and gender in studying the feminization of poverty and of transgender activists who see the need to link understandings of race and class and sexuality to the malleability of gender. However, that is not going to be my strategy. Rather, I follow Collins by suggesting that the important tactic is to form coalition, to “do coalition,” in order to see what we “might” share. One of the more interesting things I have learned in studying new social movements is that people do not begin with an identity and then join collective action, but they come to have and construct that very identity through collective action. I think we can use a similar logic in terms of coalitional politics of difference, where as Shane Phelan explains, “identities will change as a result of our politics.”⁵⁶ To begin by naming the similarities between situated standpoints as the ground by which to build coalition would be to assume we must have similar “interests” in order to proceed. To do so would be to essentialize those standpoints in some sense—where would a transgender feminist of color stand? What would his or her standpoint be? To highlight the similarities in standpoints as the reason for coalition is to fall back on strategies of identity politics where we assume stability and naturalness of group identity. Instead, I want to suggest that we envision coalition in the way that Phelan does when she says we must strive for alliances beyond identity, for a “deessentialized identity politics,”⁵⁷ where we use strategies of “migration,” as Collins describes. “Embracing migration and movement can also spur some important coalitions among individuals of all sorts who move into and through outsider-within locations. . . . Outsider-within locations allow individuals from these diverse places to meet and compare notes.”⁵⁸ Collins’s vision of “outsider-within” locations is to “no

56. PHELAN, *supra* note 4, at 149.

57. *Id.*

58. COLLINS, *supra* note 4, at 234.

longer belong to any one group.”⁵⁹ She views migration and movement as a call to breach boundaries, consciously and purposely, in order to develop critical social theory.⁶⁰ I think what she is suggesting is that our situated standpoints, our differently-situated outsider-within locations, now (in a politics of difference) depend on intersectional coalitions. It is from the critical borderlands of outsider-within coalitions that we find what we share and locate allies.

Rather than identifying the things we hold in common as the means by which to form coalitions, postmodern political theorists Phelan and Collins suggest that we “migrate” into coalition to find what we “might share.”⁶¹ Collins summarizes the process: “Individuals who manage to migrate from these subordinated groups often find that they share common themes, interpretive paradigms, and epistemological orientations.”⁶²

As a hopeful note, I will close by briefly mentioning one potential common theme and epistemological orientation I think we might share between feminism and transgender activism. First, as this paper has illustrated, the situated standpoints of feminists of color hold the intersections of race, class, and gender as central to explaining the feminization of poverty. Similarly, transgender activists centralize difference and the fluidity of identity through activism centered on destabilizing gender. Yet, the fluidity implied by intersectionality and by deconstructive resistance to gender categories are distinct. Coalitional theorizing between intersectional and “queer” situated standpoints might show shared points of “difference” and also highlight the specificities of each.

In the end, I am assuming that “silencing anyone won’t make any of this go away.”⁶³ In other words, as we strive to define a politics of difference that puts the intersections of race/class/gender/sexuality at center, seeks to de-essentialize categories of identity/oppression, and (re)define the project as one of multiple truths and partial knowledges, I think it important to once again examine the way in which we construct knowledges, reproduce silences, and resist domination. In this paper, I have argued that (politically) intersectional coalitions, and (theoretically) critical borderlands, are strategies of a politics of difference, intersections, partial truths, and transformative knowledges.

59. *Id.* at 5. A concrete example might be the way that I transgress gender and also exist as a feminist. Given the contentious history between some forms of radical feminisms and some transgender activists, my “position” is an outsider within. I have all sorts of feminist credentials (e.g., a job in Women’s Studies), yet my involvement with transgender activism also marks me as an outsider. Similarly, I have all sorts of credentials to “fit” in transgender groups, but my position teaching both Women’s Studies and Lesbian/Gay Studies marks me as an outsider. And yet, I travel between and within these worlds.

60. *Id.* at 231.

61. See generally PHELAN, *supra* note 4; COLLINS, *supra* note 4.

62. COLLINS, *supra* note 4, at 234.

63. *Id.* at 94.

CONCLUSION

And so, I would like to end by answering my own questions. I began by asking, “why do we not speak of transgender people of color or queer Latina/os when we address the “feminization of poverty?” I answered it by asserting that even in a politics of difference, we still have silences because critical theory can also act as dominant theory. I also asked “How is it that the “feminization of poverty has become understood as an example of ‘female’ subordination curiously distinct from racialized *and* (not *or*) sexualized subordination?” My argument is that both sociology and law are complicit in constructing white supremacist, capitalist, patriarchal, gender binary, heteronormative knowledges—partially dominant standpoints about the “feminizations” of poverty. I began by asking “How might we attend to these subjugated knowledges from our own locations within a matrix of domination?” I also asked “how do we participate in anti-subordination efforts across our multiple intersections?” I answered these questions by suggesting that we can speak from a situated standpoint to produce oppositional knowledge(s), but it is not, and need not be, an essentialized position. Further, I suggested that coalition between situated standpoints is one means by which to construct knowledges and strategize politically, but it must not be coalition formed around a single issue or in terms of essentialized group interests. I close with the suggestion that (politically) intersectional coalitions and (epistemologically) critical borderlands are a means by which we can unearth silenced knowledges, create transformative ones, and continue a critical politics of difference.

