

# “First of all, Gender is Power”: Intersectionality as Praxis in Gender Training

Athena-Maria Enderstein

*Associazione Orlando, Via del Piombo 5, Bologna, 40125, Italia*  
*Phone: +39 051 429 9411, E-mail: anederstein@women.it*

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**ABSTRACT** This paper explores the application of intersectionality in gender+ training. I present findings from research on the translation and transfer of feminist and gender knowledges, drawing from in-depth interviews with gender trainers working in Europe and internationally across private, public and civil society contexts. I outline the use of intersectionality by trainers as a theoretical, analytical and methodological paradigm. These equality actors call for historicization, a recouping of the genealogy of intersectionality and increased attention to the interrelation of systems of power and oppression over time. I apply an emic approach to intersectionality in training scenarios. This is grounded in responsiveness to workshop participants and is supported through affective connection and participatory learning. Dialogue between intersectional subject positions, including that of the trainer, is key to processes of knowledge exchange, reflexivity and social change. Finally, I consider the implications of these insights for engaged pedagogy and transformation oriented praxis.

## INTRODUCTION

Decades of feminist and women’s movement activism, scholarship and mobilization, have catalysed significant macro structural responses in the form of gender equality policies and strategies across the world (Walby 2002). The European Union (EU) is formally committed to non-discrimination and gender equality (European Commission 2007), however widespread inequalities persist in a political and cultural landscape increasingly characterized by right-wing populist movements and anti-immigration sentiment (Bornschiefer 2010). In this nexus of power, what dynamics and factors, both structural and interpersonal, shape the translation and transfer of feminist knowledge and the socio-cultural production of “equality”? In this research I pursue this question through the case of gender+<sup>1</sup> training. Gender+Training refers to a process of knowledge development and awareness raising around gender and gender related issues. Typically this is an educational tool or event, such as a workshop or a series of workshops. Gender training can include face-to-face training events and seminars; online courses; and the development of resource materials and networks for sharing expertise. Generally the process is facilitated by a trainer and attended by participants, who take part voluntarily or because the training

event has been commissioned by their organisation. The objectives of training can range from simple knowledge transfer or informational skills building to community mobilization and social transformation (Thompson and Prügl 2015; Bustelo et al. 2016; Wong et al. 2016). The content of the training is structured according to these established objectives. For example, a capacity building training on gender budgeting, mobilization directed training for youth on gender and HIV/AIDS in their community or an awareness raising training for service providers on LGBTQ+ client service access. The gender trainer is responsible for analysis, planning, design, development and implementation of the sessions. The underlying logic is that of transformation, where the trainer seeks to convey “theoretical and analytical concepts about power and societal change in ways that are intelligible to people who are not necessarily accustomed or inclined to think in these ways” (Mukhopadhyay and Wong 2007: 13).

This study fills an expressed need to extend research on feminist knowledge transfer and translation in gender training (Bustelo et al. 2016), and it is positioned to contribute to the scarce research on gender trainers and “the methodological implications of working across epistemological contexts” (Mukhopadhyay and Wong 2007: 13). In this paper I draw on findings from

ongoing research to provide a more in-depth focus on a specific element of this research -that they explore the use of intersectionality, by gender trainers who are working in Europe. First I briefly present some background on link intersectionality and links this to a political economy of gender and equalities knowledge and work, prior to outlining the research context and methodology. From the complex picture of intersectionality in practice that arises from the narratives of the participants I propose a typology of moving and interconnected elements. This begins with an intellectual and representational engagement with intersectionality and then takes form in practice with responsiveness to, and affective connection with, workshop participants in an emic approach to intersectionality, at each point interfacing with the self-reflexivity of the trainer. These interacting elements are unifying themes across the stories of the research participants and together these recall Freire's (1970: 51) conceptualization of praxis as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it", I conclude with a reflection on what these practices of intersectionality might elucidate about the transfer and translation of gender and feminist knowledges.

### Thinking about Intersectionality

Intersectionality has long been a concern and focus in feminist theory and practice (Verloo 2006; Verloo and Walby 2012). Over time this concept has followed many trajectories, it has been applied as a form of activism, an epistemological perspective, a theoretical framework, an analytical approach and a methodological tool (Pedwell 2010; Hancock 2016). The study of intersectionality is characterized by theoretically and empirically oriented debates around the relationships, hierarchies and shifts between categories of difference and inequalities (Walby et al. 2012). Although certainly not the first to apply intersectional thinking (see Hancock 2016), Crenshaw (1989: 139) is credited with introducing the term as a means to "denote the various ways in which race and gender intersect to shape the multiple dimensions of Black women's employment experiences". Key texts such as Davis's (1981) *Women, race and class*; Hooks (1982) *Ain't I a woman*; Moraga and Anzaldúa's (1981) *This bridge called my back* and Lorde's (1984) *Sister outsider* represent intersectionality as a central

feature of Black female intellectual and sociopolitical tradition. Later, Hill Collins (1990) worked with intersectionality through an analysis of Black feminist thought as critical social theory. She writes, "intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice" (Hill Collins 1990: 18). These works accomplished a powerful move, in establishing intersectionality as an essential part of feminist theory by "a fundamental 'decentering' of mainstream feminism's 'normative subject', these authors underscored the need for analyses of women's particularities to address interlocking systems of oppression" (Pedwell 2010: 34).

In essence, intersectionality is a way to talk about the interaction of categories of identity and "difference", an understanding of the interrelated nature of inequalities. Davis (2008: 68) offers this useful description: "'intersectionality' refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power". Brewer (1999: 32) argues that this articulation of multiple oppressions and the understanding of "race, class and gender as simultaneous forces" counter additive analyses that fail to acknowledge the interrelations between categories.

Given the multiple uses of intersectionality the debate about the nature and the application of the concept continues (Davis 2008: 67). Meta-analytical reviews provide several typologies. For example, Hancock (2007: 63) argues that intersectionality is "both a normative theoretical argument and an approach to conducting empirical research". In a review of empirical studies which apply intersectionality as a research paradigm Hancock (2007) developed a typology of approaches: "unitary" (where one category is examined), "multiple" (where multiple categories matter equally), and "intersectional" (where categories are fluid and mutually constitutive). In another review of studies using intersectionality McCall (2005) outlines another triad: intra-categorical, anti-categorical, and inter-categorical. Cho et al. (2013: 785) describe the field of intersectionality studies as composed of three sets of practices: "applications of an intersectional framework or investigations of intersectional dynamics; debates about the scope and

content of intersectionality as a theoretical and methodological paradigm; and political interventions employing an intersectional lens". Collectively this taxonomical research illustrates the multiplicity of ways that intersectionality can be applied, and points to the complexities that might arise in practical application. As Verloo and Walby (2012: 433) concisely articulate "while the criticism of conceptions of discrimination that think about subordination as disadvantage occurring along a single categorical axis (Crenshaw 1989) is clear, the implication for new legal and policy practices are altogether less obvious". In the context of the EU the last decade has seen an increased prominence of integrated approaches to multiple inequalities and a return to anti-discrimination legislative policy instruments, giving rise to debate around the potential that these initiatives may, or may not, hold for intersectional practice (Kriszan et al. 2012; Verloo and Walby 2012; Walby et al. 2012).

### **Diversity and Intersectionality: The European Union Policy Context**

Over six decades gender equality policies in the EU have come to constitute the densest aspect of European social policy (Jacquot 2010). As Bacchi (1999: 66) observes "whatever is proposed creates in its formation the shape of the problem addressed". Gender equality policies are proposals that both legitimize and constrain the application of feminist and gender knowledges. They also delineate the fields of action of equality advocates and act as points of contestation and resistance, as is evident in research on processes of Europeanization and accession (Ghodsee 2004; Radaelli 2004; Sindbjerg Martinsen 2007; Chiva 2009; Avdeyeva 2010; Lombardo and Forest 2011). Research on gender equality policy in Europe spans many fields<sup>2</sup>, but a common element between these different areas of study is the reference to the structures and actors that influenced equality actions over time (Walby 2004; Verloo and Lombardo 2007; Woodward 2008; Beveridge and Velluti 2008; Squires 2008; Jacquot 2010; Abels and Mushaben 2012). These equality strategies are a response to international gender studies scholarship, global and local activism of feminist and women's movements, the actions of feminist bureaucrats and critical acts by individuals which have played catalytic roles in the establishing

the equality strategies based on sameness (inclusion-equal opportunities), difference (reversal-positive action), and transformation (displacement - systemic change). Together these different kinds of "equality work" have been part of building the political economy of gender knowledge over time.

The EU case is relevant because it offers an example of how supranational and national governance and policy might mediate the practice of equality work. Gender mainstreaming, the most internationally predominant strategy since the 1995 Beijing UN Conference on Women, is a quintessential example of a transformation strategy which aims to change the systems underlying oppression. In the last decade mainstreaming has been increasingly used as a best practices model for addressing inequalities (Squires 2008). This is evident, for example in the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights (2000) where Article 21 (1) contains a list of seventeen grounds as the new legal basis for multiple forms of equality and non-discrimination (Kriszan et al. 2012: 13). Initiatives such as the 2001-2006 *For Diversity, Against Discrimination* campaign represent a new institutional approach that seeks to address multiple inequalities in integrated ways (Fredman 1992; European Commission 2007). For example, the European Commission (2007) text *Tackling Multiple Discrimination — Practices, policies and laws* reads: "it is vitally important for a cohesive European society that everyone enjoys equal opportunities and levels of protection [...] whether experienced or perceived, multiple discrimination denies individuals their human dignity and right to equal treatment and opportunities". Country case studies investigating the theoretical debates on intersectionality as these interact with multiple inequalities and equality architecture<sup>3</sup> in the EU illustrate how different institutional and civil society configurations are more or less facilitative of intersectional practice (see Walby et al. 2012; Kriszan et al. 2012).

In a wider global perspective these studies provide evidence of the impact of policy frameworks in the application of intersectionality and constrains and opportunities that these present (Lombardo and Forest 2011; Kriszan et al. 2012; Bego 2015). It remains unclear how equality workers might operate without becoming complicit in a system that not only objectifies "difference" but also monetizes the social realities of discrimination and prejudice (Squires 2005:

278). This is apposite given that diversity mainstreaming is part of a worldwide trend in public management towards new modes of governance, linked in to broader processes of neoliberal globalization (Koenig-Archibugi and Zürn 2006; Robertson et al. 2012). Said approaches are based on “soft” policy instruments which are transversal, cooperative, characteristically non-binding and flexible (Squires 2008; Beveridge and Velluti 2008; Abels and Mushaben 2012), they privilege market logics and use the language of competition, customers and outcomes. These methods set normative agendas which channel funding exclusively to aligned initiatives meaning that gender experts are expected to deploy these discourses of economic efficiency (Rossili 2000; Ghodsee 2004; Kantola and Nousiainen 2009; Kantola and Squires 2012). Gender trainers work within the domain of the cognitive dimension of these methods, that of knowledge diffusion, and operate within this political economy of gender knowledge (Bustelo et al. 2016). The findings presented here illustrate some of the ways in which gender trainers use intersectionality in this epistemological space.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research Context

In this paper I present preliminary findings from ongoing research on gender training in the European context which investigates the translation and transfer of gender knowledge across different epistemological contexts. This research is part of the larger GRACE Project funded by the European Commission through a Horizon 2020 grant. GRACE investigates the production, performance and transformation of cultures of equality in Europe across different sites and how said cultures are contested and developed by differently situated social agents. I apply a feminist methodology as a set of guiding principles about the interpretation of power, knowledge and positionality in the research process (Hesse-Biber and Leavy 2006; Leckenby and Hesse-Biber 2007). In order to capture the macro-level composition of gender training as a professional field and the micro-level dynamics of the practice of gender trainers I have applied a mixed methods approach which consists of both a qualitative and a quantitative component. The findings that I present here come from the initial qualitative phase of in-depth semi-structured interviews

with 17 participants working as gender trainers in the EU. They work from Austria, Italy, Spain, Germany, Poland, Cyprus, and the Netherlands across public, private and civil society sectors. In this research trainers are defined as individuals who design and facilitate “a process of developing awareness and capacity on gender issues, to bring about personal or organisational change for gender equality” (Reeves and Baden 2000: 2). The interviews have been analysed and coded thematically, applying an understanding of gender as an analytical concept (see Cavanagh 2010).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Intersectionality in Practice

Each of the participants interviewed for this study stated the importance of intersectionality in their work, both as an analytical paradigm and as a practical tool. Malak stated “I don’t think that you can talk about gender if you don’t apply intersectionality”. From their narratives it might be said that intersectionality is unanimously considered an integral part of their work and of their understandings of systems of power and inequalities. Interestingly, this reflects the sentiment from feminist scholars across disciplines that intersectionality is essential to feminist theory (Davis 2008: 68). However, the application of intersectionality in the work of translating and transferring feminist and gender knowledges takes different forms. In the following section I present interrelating themes with one reinforcing and forming the other. This is an iterative movement that draws together the macro-level intellectual and representational use of intersectionality as a tool for thinking, with the micro-level response by trainers to participants which underlies emic approaches to intersectionality. This iterative process facilitates the affective connections between workshop participants and between participants and trainers which are indispensable to the “transfer” of knowledge. These different elements then converge through the reflexivity and subjectivity of the trainers themselves.

### Working in the Historical Present

The ubiquity of intersectionality and the significant space that this term holds in feminist

activism and theory mean that this is a “critical moment to engage with its contradictions, absences, and murkiness” (Nash 2008: 2). For all of the participants in this study intersectionality is about the intersection of identities and difference, but Marie, Julia, Tomas and Meike also explicitly spoke about intersectionality in societal terms, interlocking systems of power and oppression, and personal aspects of identity. Tomas, who works predominantly with boys and young men, describes this interrelation of systems of power and dominance as a central feature of his work: “intersectionality means everything to me actually. Like when I speak about women’s rights and I speak about anti-capitalism, I speak about animal’s rights, I speak about LGBTQ+ rights. Everything is connected to me you know”.

Along the same lines, Sam began the interview with the statement “for me, gender *is* power”. This understanding of intersectionality, similar to Hill Collins’ (1990) description of the “matrix of domination”, focuses on how different power systems interconnect and interrelate as forces of oppression. However, one of the key challenges faced by scholars, activists and practitioners employing intersectionality is the tendency to view the concept as a descriptor of the current state of marginalized people without the context of the historical interrelation of these systems (May 2015). Hooks (1994: 31) describes this perspective as a colonizing fantasy present in some visions of cultural diversity, by citing an interview with McLaren:

*“when we try to make culture an undisturbed space of harmony and agreement where social relations exist within cultural forms of uninterrupted accords we subscribe to a form of social amnesia in which we forget that all knowledge is forged in histories”* (Steinberg et al. 2006: 79).

Eleni explained that often intersectionality is inadequate because it is applied in ways that do not incorporate a historical embeddedness: *“These words like intersectionality gain currency in international circles but then when you try to connect it to experiences of slavery or colonialism there is a resistance. Most people just want it like a fancy word [...] also to tick the box of feeling good about ourselves and our organisations.”*

The words of Eleni illustrate that the political potentiality of intersectionality can be lost if

it is applied in a tokenistic way. Both Eleni and Marie spoke about the challenge of a lack of support from commissioners of trainings regarding the explicit application of intersectionality. Throughout the interview Eleni spoke about the importance of working in the “historical present”, referencing the socio-political history of her native country Cyprus. I argue that the importance of the historicization of intersectionality takes two critical forms. One is the acknowledgement of the historical trajectory of interrelating systems of power and oppression and the other is the historicization of the concept of intersectionality itself. It is necessary to actively work against the possibility of furthering coloniality in the application of intersectionality. This can be achieved by analysing how the concept is applied and resisting understandings of diversity which flatten oppression and privilege into simple neutral “types of difference” (May 2015: 153). This entails scrutiny of the “business case” for equality which sees diversity as a tool for increased productivity and critical appraisal of utility-based “diversity management” approaches which are not oriented to social justice (Squires 2008). Historicization is essential to understanding the interactions between categories of difference, and how these interactions have evolved over time in relation to systems of power and cultural ideologies (Davis 2008). If intersectionality is used as some kind of organisational abacus there is the danger that “power can be *redone* at the moment that it is imagined as *undone*” (Ahmed 2012: 13). Ahmed (2012) describes this dynamic as a recession in the institutionalization of diversity, where the very institutional acknowledgement and use of “diversity” as a descriptive term begins to stand in place of the actual work of inclusivity and transformation of the institution.

A checkbox application of intersectionality is antithetical to the history of the concept itself, in order to preserve the political and transformative capacity of intersectionality it is necessary to take into account the genealogy and origins of the concept. Intersectionality has its roots in the political movement of the Black lesbian feminist Combahee River Collective (Pedwell 2010). In *Black feminist statement* this collective states “we find our origins in the historical reality of Afro-American women’s continuous life-and-death struggle for survival and liberation” (Smith 1986: 10). The very development

of intersectional thinking has grown from histories of oppression and subjugation, and this history is a reminder to continue to challenge applications of intersectionality as “a decontextualized present condition of marginalized people” (Hancock 2016: 29). Julia described how learning about intersectionality, and the history thereof, allowed her to practically apply the concept in a more conscious way. She said: *“I wrote about Latin American domestic workers in Vienna [...] and intersecting sexist and racist stereotypes in the domestic work sector so I really took the time to take the intersectionality theory apart and apply it [...] this is a concept in which I believe very strongly and I think it needs to be present all the time.”*

The international appeal of intersectionality should be understood in the context of the trajectory of the development of the concept and the figures of its intellectual history. The acknowledgement of this genealogy also involves work against narratives of intersectionality as a concept developed later or only in reaction to “white feminism” (May 2015: 146). Nash (2008: 8) warns that the tendency to position Black women as the prototypical intersectional subject is problematic, because it reduces women of colour to a monolithic category set in opposition to “Black men” and “whites”. This author points to a key paradox emerging from debates around intersectionality, namely whether intersectionality is a theory of marginalized subjectivity, with the objective of centering traditionally marginalized voices, or a generalized theory of identity, where all subject positions including those of the most privileged are considered intersectional (Nash 2008: 10).

The gender trainers in this research apply the generalized identity theory interpretation of intersectionality, treating their participants and themselves as intersectional subjects. In many cases they explained this as a necessary perspective because training scenarios occur in public and private sectors where there is a saturation of privilege and power. As outlined in the preceding section, gender training is envisaged as a means to equip policy actors with the necessary knowledge and skills to integrate a gender perspective into policymaking (EIGE 2017). However, the application of equality principles by technocrats raises two issues. Firstly, this approach relies on technical procedures rather than transformatory political goals with the po-

tential of “depoliticization” (Squires 1999). Secondly, these experts often embody social locations of power and privilege and as such perhaps do not adequately represent the concerns of marginalized and oppressed individuals in their communities (Verloo and Lombardo 2007: 26). Cornwall (2016) suggests a “pedagogy of the powerful” which includes rendering visible patriarchal practices of power, working consciously and reflexively with identities, privileges, power and the interactions thereof. The application of intersectionality as a generalized theory of identity by the gender trainers in this research takes form through responsiveness to workshop participants.

### **Emic Intersectionality and Responsiveness to Workshop Participants**

The trainers in this research integrate intersectional thinking by responding to the contexts and needs of participant, and this is a common thread in the narratives of the gender trainers. Overall there is a strong commitment to respond to what the participant group brings into the training scenario as opposed to relying on identity categories as straightforward indications of how the session will unfold. Tomas, Olivia and Julia spoke about the fact that they approach every training with the awareness that they cannot know how the interactions in the training will be, which allows them to respond to the composition of the group. Meike explained how her application of intersectionality is responsive to the workshop participants and the context in which she is working: “I don’t speak about gender without the other categories, and it depends on the group who is there and where they suddenly start to discuss on, how much room we get. That is why I can’t say it generally”. Julia describes her experience of doing training where she used the applications of the workshop participants as a tool to facilitate this responsiveness: “so responsiveness to that, where they are, what they are thinking about. I think that is the most important thing to develop the program”.

As Julia explains, there is a close attention to the composition and interaction to the group itself and the understanding that it is necessary to respond to emergent categories of difference specific to the time and space of the training scenario. Here I see a resonance with what Tatli

and Özbilgin (2012) describe as an emic approach to intersectionality. These authors define emic approaches as those which “start with the specific context of investigation and identify a number of salient categories of difference (ex post), which lead to privilege and disadvantage, by focusing on relations of power in those settings”. For these authors this approach overcomes the failings of the etic approach of focusing on pre-existing categories. They argue that the etic approach overlooks the interrelation of categories, lacks temporal and geographic specificity and institutional, socio-economic and historical contextualization. This leads to “static accounts of diversity at work, which ignore the dynamic nature of power and inequality relations” (Tatli and Özbilgin 2012: 181). Through a cross country comparative analysis of institutionalization of multiple inequality approaches in the EU Kriszan et al. (2012: 238) conclude that “there is scope for the implementation of new intersectional practices, but that this will require a more embedded intersectional thinking among equality professions than is apparent to date”. The emic approach as applied by these trainers may be one way of developing embedded intersectional thinking. Julia explained that the meaning of identity categories needs to remain open and that trainers need to be reflexive and attentive to their own stereotypes: “especially if an intersectional approach is applied to groups that you are not a part of yourself or you cannot relate to [...] like now with migration the stereotypes that all Arab men are sexist”.

Thus, it would seem that intersectionality is being applied in two ways by the gender trainers in this research. The thinking and designing part of gender training work relies on an understanding of pre-determined categories of difference, usually along the lines of the traditional triad of gender, race and class (Brewer 1999). However, in practical interaction with the people attending their workshops these trainers apply a more emic approach to intersectionality that relies on emergent and situated identity categories which are linked to a specific time and place. Malak works at an international organisation which is based in Europe but offers training on gender to people from many different backgrounds. She spoke at length about how the design of the programmes that her organisation offers respond to the composition of the group attending the trainings, and how the trainers

themselves respond to the dynamic of the group. Malak said: “*Of course we have more targeted approach, where we focus on the context of the country or the background of the participants [...] during the programme there is always time to discuss issues that are not on the program [...] depending on who the group is and what the purpose is and what the setting is we apply different methods.*”

This responsiveness also takes the form of allowing for negotiation and interaction between the workshop participants from their individual positionalities. Julia, Olivia, Agata, and Malak recounted stories of how participants of different backgrounds experienced the workshop interaction as a moment where traditional identity categories were brought into question and interrelating power systems were rendered visible through this process. Julia shared the following example: “*Two years ago I did a training in Austria on the border to Italy and it was a group of six teenagers from Italy and six people from Austria and all the boys from Italy had shaved legs, completely shaved legs and then in Austria men don't do it. So the Austrian girls were sure that the guys were gay.*”

In this example the training scenario is a social space of interrelation where identity performances and subject positions are multiple in meaning, and change through context. The apparently fixed and permanent configuration of the category of male gendered heterosexual is temporarily disrupted in a way that, at least in Julia's example, gave rise to a different intersectionality “moment”. Anthias (2008) provides a useful kind of intersectional framing to understand this relativity to context and time. Working with examples of ethnicity, migration and transnational population movements Anthias (2008: 5) suggests the concept of “translocational positionality” to tackle categories, intersections and temporality in terms of identity and belonging. She defines translocational positionality as “structured by the interplay of different locations relating to gender, ethnicity, race and class (amongst others), and their at times contradictory effects” (Anthias 2008: 15). This author challenges the notion of identity categories as consistent in composition and permanent in time, emphasizing instead processes and practices as central to the experience and outcomes of social location. The words of Julia provide a real life example of this perspective, explaining that it is

necessary to identify which categories are relevant “to one person and one situation, but to make sure that you always research them and that you don’t come directly to a conclusion because this person is from, I don’t know, from Nigeria”. These emic approaches to intersectionality are facilitated by an affective connection between the workshop participants themselves and between the workshop participants and trainers which fosters communication and exchange.

### **Affective Connection, Experiential Knowledge and Participatory Learning**

Together with responsiveness to participants each of the trainers emphasized the importance of affective connection as the basis for their work, which includes an awareness of the personal experiential knowledge of the participants. This echoes what Phoenix (2011) describes as the “bottom-up” nature of intersectionality - a concept that arose as an observation and analysis of lived experiences of social positioning. The trainers spoke about the affective connection as a kind of essential bridge without which it is not possible to engage with the significance of intersectionality in the workshop space. This affective connection takes two forms: first allowing participants the space to express themselves and cultivating a respect for the positionality of each individual; and second, to allow the interaction between workshop participants to unfold in a process of participatory learning.

For many of the trainers a key principle of their work is the respect for their workshop participants. They articulated in various ways, often through examples, how their objective is not to “change people’s minds” and that listening to participants, treating them respectfully, and acknowledging their positionality is essential to the affective connection that is the basis of incremental processes of change. Meike explains: *“esteem for people who are participating I consider very, very important. It is not always easy but it is necessary, really necessary, to keep up when they express misogynistic, racist or other comments. Stay in that relationship and take it seriously what they say, and to enter into a discussion...because a core mistake to make is to want to missionary them...it is necessary to exchange.”*

This quote illustrates how gender training often involves the challenging work of engaging with people who have different worldviews and “truth commitments” from the trainer or equality worker (Mukhopadhyay and Wong 2007; Bustelo et al. 2016). As Yuval-Davis (Yuval-Davis 2006: 198) reminds us, social divisions involve “specific power and affective relationships between actual people”. The affective, lived component of intersectionality is part of the political potential of this concept because it involves confronting power and privilege (Cornwall 2016). The lived subjective experience of “inclusion and exclusion, discrimination and disadvantage, specific aspirations and specific identities” (Yuval-Davis 2006: 198) of different workshop participants comes together in the training scenario to inform participatory learning. The trainers in this study emphasize this learning through difference. Meike explains this as an essential training skill: “that is the main competence I would say, to enter into relationship with the participants, you can be an expert in gender issues as much as you want but if you don’t enter into relationship you can’t transfer”. Julia explained that she prefers to talk as little as possible in her sessions in order to facilitate the interaction between participants and their collective learning. She said that this is why she prefers to use non-formal education methods “they make people experience something, they make people realise something without an explanation sometimes, or they give their own explanation to each other”. Olivia and Sam also recounted many stories where workshop participants learned through interaction with one another. For Tomas discussion between workshop participants is indispensable because it provides a unique opportunity for exchange, he says “no matter what tool I use for the workshop, at the end guys want to talk you know, have a discussion”. Thus, it is the objective of the trainer to create a space which fosters dialogue and exchange among participants. This role of facilitation is an achieved through a conscious practice of reflexivity whereby the trainers situate themselves within the training process as intersectional subjects.

### **The Trainer as an Intersectional Subject**

Thus far, I have discussed intersectionality from the perspective of the training designs and



workshop participants but there is another intersectional subjectivity at play within gender training scenarios which is often unacknowledged. The fact that gender trainers are called to work across a variety of epistemological contexts is one of the key challenges of their work (Mukhopadhyay and Wong 2007; Bustelo et al. 2016), but there is also the question of the intersectional subject position of the gender trainer themselves. As Yuval-Davis (2006: 198) writes social divisions are about power systems but they also involve individuals “acting informally and/or in their roles as agents of specific social institutions and organizations”. In this case gender trainers are agents of their organisations or of their own self-employed practices but they are also themselves, and this can play out in different ways. Malak spoke about how her own history and identity help her to work with the resistances that she encounters in her training work. She used an example of a training with international workshop participants: “So it becomes like *you with your western point of view you can't tell us how to organise our societies* basically, this is challenging [...] what helps is that I have an Iranian background and I grew up in Iran with the sharia law so I am quite aware of what the Koran says on these issues so I can use a lot of my own experiences and knowledge about it.”

In contrast to Malak who uses shared reference points to support her in engaging with workshop participants, Olivia talks about how her self-awareness of her own subjectivity pushes her to create opportunities for dialogue between the workshop participants when she is working across cultural contexts. Olivia's awareness of the hierarchy that her “difference” imposes seeks to facilitate interaction between workshop participants: “because I come in with an accent, I come in with a way of looking, I come in from a different world [...] but when you have someone who you consider a peer open your mind to things it hits home and it ends up challenging your perspective”. While Olivia talks about working in cultural contexts different from her own, Tomas recounted how his way of being is a strong challenge to cultural norms within his own country. Tomas spoke about how his identity influences the work that he does “I am aware of my privilege being white, you know white, cis, hetero man and for me personally it is really difficult to just forget about this you know”. For Tomas his identity and social loca-

tion are carried into his work where he uses them as an entry point to talk about systemic power relations. He explained “because you know there are a lot of people, excluded groups...you know the distribution of privileges in capitalism and in the patriarchal system it is so unequal. It can't be like this, it is unjust.”

This focus on the identity and practices of the trainers' points to the importance of equality workers themselves as involved in the application of intersectionality. Across the board, research has focused more on institutional, legislative and policy frameworks and little on equality workers themselves (Hoard 2015). However, as the interviews with these participants illustrate, these actors play a significant role in developing an intersectional perspective which holds the relationship between categories as an open empirical question (Hancock 2007: 64). The reality of gender trainers as gendered, racialized and classed beings is part of the messy business of gender equality work (Ferguson 2015). Common to the narratives above and those of the rest of the trainers is the importance of self-reflection in understanding and applying intersectionality. I see this as a shared pedagogical principle between these trainers that shows some parallel with feminist pedagogy. Research on feminist pedagogy emerges mainly from the educational field, and although this literature is diverse, there are some key unifying features (Hoffmann and Stake 1998; Manicom 1992; Crabtree and Sapp 2003; Stake and Hoffmann 2000). Manicom (1992: 365) describes feminist pedagogy as a specific orientation to knowledge: “the standpoint of a feminist teacher is political: to develop feminist analyses that inform/reform teachers' and students' ways of acting in and on the world. Central here is a feminist movement toward social justice”. Using Women's Studies in North American universities as a case, Stake and Hoffman (1998) describe participatory learning, situated knowledge, empowerment, development of political and social understanding and development of critical thinking and open mindedness as part of the feminist pedagogical repertoire. Although gender training and teaching are different, some of the objectives are similar, and the research presented in this paper illustrates the significance of the intersectional subject position of the trainer, and the processes of self-reflection and self-awareness that are part of the application of intersectionali-

ty in training scenarios. Hooks (1994) talks about cultivating an engaged pedagogy, which involves action, reflection, and the empowerment of both the student and the teacher. Sam, Julia, Paola, Eleni, Malak, and Emily all spoke about the importance of being vulnerable, open, and reflexive and seeking to learn from their participants. Eleni told a poignant story about this process, describing how things have changed for her over the years. She says, *“It used to be “you don’t know, I know and I’m telling you” and that became very embarrassing for me as I realised that people already possess some knowledge and it is a lot more complicated than that [...] with time it really turned around and I look forward to learn from them instead of trying to teach.”*

### CONCLUSION

I began this paper with a theoretical departure point by introducing intersectionality as part of Black feminist thought. I emphasized the complexity and multiplicity of applications of intersectionality as a theoretical, analytical and methodological paradigm and as a political tool for the decentering of normativized subjects. The ubiquity of intersectionality, its significance in feminist theory coupled with the importance of gender training as a mainstreaming tool render this concept an important area of research focus. Through this paper I argued that intersectionality is, without exception, a key feature of the work of the gender trainers who have participated in this research, and their applications thereof provide several insights into how feminist concepts come to be translated in practice.

The historicization of intersectionality is essential to the application of the concept because this renders visible the interrelation of categories of difference over time and the cultivation of the awareness of the “historical present” serves to destabilize power and privilege and defend against the depoliticization of reformatory tools. The researcher understands historicization as a possible tool in resisting some of the “disappointments” which have occurred with gender mainstreaming, such as discursive commitments without concomitant material action. The participants in this research employ an emic approach to intersectionality that focuses on power relations within training scenarios to interpret the interrelation of privilege, disadvan-

tage and identity as these emerge. This emic approach arises from a responsiveness to workshop participants and sheds light on the inadequacies of strictly etic approaches, which can lead to stereotyping, and a lack of contextual specificity. The basis of this approach is an affective connection between trainer and participants. This affective connection supports the discussion and sharing of personal experiences from different social locations, which then, as observed by the trainers, contribute to incremental change. In this sense, the intersectional subject positions of the workshop participants are integral to the transfer and translation of gender and feminist knowledges. I introduced Anthias’ (2008) intersectional frame of translocational positionality as a way to describe the interplay of space, time, and social processes which influence identity in training scenarios. Lastly, I discussed the trainer as an intersectional subject and how the participants’ perceptions of their own privileges and identities shape their work as gender trainers. The emphasis on self-reflection and the learning journeys of the gender trainers reflects principles of engaged pedagogy. This kind of approach to knowledge generation and transfer illustrates a reciprocal and temporally progressive evolution over time, both for gender trainers and workshop participants. This speaks to the role that gender trainers, and equality advocates more broadly, have in the development of intersectionality. Furthermore, this finding highlights the reality of gender experts as gendered, raced and classed being themselves who bring their intersectional subjectivity to their work. Drawing together the themes of historicization, emic approaches, affective connection, and participatory learning sheds light on the social processes that impact intersectional subject positions at both societal and individual levels.

This paper offers a constellation of practical applications and conceptual framings of intersectionality. This is reflective of the debates that characterize intersectionality theory and practice because it echoes the multiplicity of ways in which the concept is applied. Collectively, the insights from gender trainers presented in this paper indicate that working with intersectionality involves drawing together the macro-level systems of power relations and micro-level lived experience. In the words of Sara, this is motivated by a desire to facilitate transforma-

tion through a “developing knowledge, developing analytical capacity, and developing a way of being that is different”. The applications of intersectionality outlined here indicate that the translation and transfer of feminist and gender knowledges involves a personalization of structural inequalities and violence, which requires contextual specificity and a patience for incremental change. Furthermore, this research illustrates possible trajectories of equality concepts between theory, policy and practice. Policy-making and the commissioned trainings for gender equality should be designed to strengthen bridges between these elements. Future avenues of research may include the development of richer understandings of these trajectories, more complete mapping of the field of gender training, and a continued focus on the dynamics of the translation and transfer of feminist and gender knowledges within evolving political economies of equality work.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Throughout this paper I use the term gender training to designate a gender+ understanding of gender training, this is based on the requests of the participants of the research themselves, who see their training work as inclusive of gender and intersecting issues such as diversity, sexuality, human rights, anti-racism, violence. Additionally, the use of gender+ training is consistent with existing research in the field of gender training practice (see TARGET: Transatlantic Applied Research in Gender Equity Training 2011).
- 2 These fields include comparative literature on state feminism and institutionalism (McBride and Mazur 2010; Sauer 2010; Kantola and Squires 2012); policy text research on the discursive construction of gender equality meanings (Bacchi, 1999; Verloo and Lombardo 2007; Lombardo and Meier 2008; Lombardo et al. 2009); cross national comparisons of equality policies (Van der Vleuten 2007; Chiva 2009; Bego 2015); dynamics of Europeanization (Radaelli 2004; Roth 2008; Gerhards et al. 2009; Lombardo and Forest 2011); and the roles of different ac-

tors such as femocrats, academics and activists (Mazey 1995; Woodward 2003; Holli 2008).

- 3 The term equality architecture here refers to the set of institutional arrangements instituted to achieve equality (Walby and Verloo 2012).

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