2015

"I Am Not Free While [Anyone] Is Unfree": A Proposal and Framework for Enmarginalized Feminist Policy Analysis

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A Proposal and Framework for Enmarginalized Feminist Policy Analysis

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Richmond, VA

2015

Abstract

This paper introduces a new feminist approach and framework to policy analysis. As an integration of intersectionality, Black feminist thought and endarkened feminist epistemology, *enmarginalized feminist policy analysis* (EFPA) offers an intersectional and flexible scope in a framework to assess policy for a diversity of populations, focusing on groups who are forced to live marginal and oppressed lives. Discussion is provided on existing approaches and frameworks in addition to an overview of the theoretical underpinnings of EFPA. A nine-component framework, which includes a section for analyst reflexivity, is provided to guide users in conducting EFPA. The author concludes with implications of EFPA in practice and education.

Introduction

Policy analysis frameworks provide a specialized scope to not only understand and assess policy, but to improve policy design and implementation (Kabeer, 2000). While feminist frameworks are useful as provisions for a gendered-lens to policy analysis, very few models offer clear methods for a feminist policy analysis on social policies (Marshall, 1997; Collins, 1999; Kabeer, 2000; McPhail, 2003; Fernandez, 2012). Alone, the gendered-focus component of most feminist frameworks renders them incomplete, as they may fail to see or adequately address intersectional issues. As such, the proposed framework, enmarginalized feminist policy analysis (EFPA), provides a more expansive conception by deemphasizing the focus on gender and instead, emphasizing the intersection of many systemic orientations (i.e. gender, race, sex, social class, sexual orientation, age, religious affiliation). The connection between these orientations is critical for feminist policy analysis. This framework fills a major gap in feminist policy literature through its integration of intersectionality, Black feminist thought and endarkened feminist epistemology. Similar to other feminist frameworks, the proposed framework addresses patriarchy and androcentrism; but unlike existing frameworks, EFPA also addresses enmarginalization as a social problem. Additionally, to my knowledge, this is the first feminist policy framework that provides analyst recommendations for reflexivity during the analysis process.

Existing policy analysis approaches

There is a multiplicity of approaches to social policy analysis and many are cited as being value-free and gender-neutral (McPhail, 2003; Kanenberg, 2013). Some mainstream policy analysis approaches, such as rational/behavioral, incremental and choice analyses, are argued to be ineffectual, due to their failure or minimal efforts in providing a holistic understanding of a

policy's impact on marginalized populations, such as women (Kanenberg, 2013). Therefore, feminist policy analysis is favored for its utility and suitability in evaluating the impacts of policies on social groups (McPhail, 2003; Kanenberg, 2013) and for its challenge to androcentrism and patriarchy (Marshall, 1999). Provided this way, a feminist lens is regarded as gendered-focused, which may be concealed or perceived as women-focused; however, such a scope for policy analysis is fractional and minimizes the complexities of groups who are forced to live or survive on the margins.

Diversity exists within feminist approaches to policy analysis, such as feminist (critical) analysis (Pascall, 1986; Miller, 1989; Hawkesworth, 1994; Marshall, 1997; Orenstein, 1999; Abrar, Lovenduski & Margetts, 2000; Bensimon & Marshall, 2003; McPhail, 2003; Shaw, 2004; Marshall, 2007; Kanenberg, 2013), feminist jurisprudence framework (Artz, 1999); pluralist feminist analysis (Fernandez, 2012); institutional feminist analysis (Kabeer, 2000); intersectional analysis (Ruttenberg, 1993; Collins, 2000; Bierema & Cseh, 2003; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Hankivsky, 2012); and Black feminist analysis (Crenshaw, 1989; Collins, 1999, 2000; Howard-Bostic, 2002; Nadasen, 2005). Feminist (critical) approaches, which appear to dominate the literature, understand gender to be the primary social construction that shapes and organizes our lives (Marshall, 1997). While it can incorporate critical examinations of how race, class, sexuality and other systemic orientations are impacted by policy, its main focus is on gender. Likewise, a feminist jurisprudence framework also concentrates on gender, but within the context of access to and equality within criminal justice (Artz, 1999). A pluralist feminist analysis examines the social conditions leading to policy production within a variety of contexts (i.e. historical and economic contexts), in addition to policy representations, political practices and outcomes (Fernandez, 2012). And institutional feminist analysis is purposed for exposing

relationships between biological sex and institutionally constructed gendered inequalities (Kabeer, 2000).

Analysts who use intersectional and Black feminist approaches critique gendered-centric frameworks by rejecting gender as the primary construct of concern. Both approaches suggest that the intersection of systemic orientations (i.e. gender, sex, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality etc) that shapes and organizes experiences, direct policy analyses (Crenshaw, 1989; Ruttenberg, 1993; Collins, 1999; Howard-Bostic, 2002; Bierema & Cseh, 2003; Nadasen, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006; Hankivsky, 2012). While intersectionality can address the intersection of various groups, Black feminist thought focuses on the specific and diverse experiences of Black women; hence the intersectional oppressions experiences of Black women take center. For example, in Crenshaw's classic Black feminist critique on antidiscrimination law, feminist theory and antiracist politics, she takes issue with treating race and gender as "mutually exclusive categories" (p.139) and insists that operating as if they are mutually exclusive will fail to effectively address Black women's oppressive experiences. Therefore, she recommends addressing the intersection of gender, race and class as it pertains to Black women's experiences.

All of these feminist approaches to policy analysis are relevant to our social landscape and they have at least one common thread: the critical focus on addressing the impacts of policy on marginalized or oppressed groups. However, given the sundry of experiences that people face based on systemic orientations, a more comprehensive policy analysis and framework is required. I propose a new policy analysis framework: *enmarginalized feminist policy analysis* (EFPA). Before revealing tenets of this approach and components of the framework, an in-depth discussion of the conceptualization of *enmarginalization* and its theoretical underpinnings is in order.

Origins of Enmarginalized Feminist Analysis

It is worthwhile to provide my definition of feminism to contextualize EFPA as a

feminist framework. Feminism, while historically rooted in exposing and freeing the varied and

commonly oppressive lives of women, is presented in this paper as activism that seeks to reduce,

prevent and/or eliminate *all* forms of oppression against *all* people through social consciousness,

empowerment, equality, social justice and emancipation. EFPA is a product of a theoretical

merging of three feminist approaches: intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Collins, 1999),

Black feminist thought (Collins, 1999) and endarkened feminist epistemology (Dillard &

Okpalaoka, 2011).

Intersectionality

Intersectionality emphasizes the specific ways systemic orientations are used to construct

experiences of domination, exploitation, marginalization and other forms of oppression, both

structurally and politically (CRC, 1985; Crenshaw, 1991; Collins, 1999; Jordan-Zachery, 2007).

This is in direct contrast to looking at systemic orientations individually or apart from one

another, as there are varied and relational forms of oppression. Moreover, these intersecting

oppressions serve to further marginalize oppressed social groups' experiences, voices, social

issues and lives (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality is a type of analysis, which is used to examine the mutual ways gender,

sex, race, class, religious affiliation, sexual orientation and other systemic orientations shape

(and are shaped by) individuals and groups (Collins, 1999). As a concept, intersectionality is

rooted in Black feminist politics. In fact, Jordan-Zachery (2007) understands intersectionality as

more than an analysis framework, but also a form of liberating-activism, as it "articulates a

politics of survival for [B]lack women" (pp.256). Crenshaw (1989), who is noted for coining the

term, first used intersectionality to describe the oppressive experiences common to Black women in the criminal justice system and feminist movements based on their race, gender and class. Others, before and after Crenshaw, have described and applied intersectionality in similar fashions, including Anna Julia Cooper and Sojourner Truth (Cooper, 1998; Davis, 1975; Collins, 1999; hooks, 1999; Sokoloff & Dupont, 2005; Truth, 1851). But, intersectionality has been expanded as a concept and framework in other areas, including, but not limited to: disability studies (Warner & Brown, 2011; Hirschmann, 2012), medical/health research (Kelly, 2009; Clark et al., 2010; Price, 2011; Viruell-Fuentes, Miranda, & Abdulrahim, 2012; Bauer, 2014), educational research (Maramba & Museus, 2011; Museus, 2011; Museus & Griffin, 2011; Tsouroufli, Rees, Monrouxe, & Sundaram, 2011; Verdonk & Abma, 2013; Núñez, 2014; Monrouxe, 2015), and psychology (L. Warner, 2008; Cole, 2009; Ecklund, 2012).

Black feminist thought

Some feminist scholars use Black feminist thought to contextualize intersectionality and the unique standpoints of Black women's experiences with oppression. A breadth of feminist writers have utilized, contextualized and contributed to Black feminist thought (Hurston, 1937; Jordan, 1983; Smith, 1983; Walker, 1983; Lorde, 1984; Combahee River Collective, 1985; Davis, 1989; hooks, 1989; Taylor, 1998; hooks, 1999; Howard-Bostic, 2002; Stephens & Phillips, 2005; Harris, 2007; Wane & Massaquoi, 2007; Grant, 2012; Persley, 2012; Phillips & Griffin, 2014); however, the approach explicated by Collins (1999) specifically informs EFPA due to her expansive attention to Black feminist thought (1999). In fact, many of the noted contributors refer to Collins' approach.

Collins recognizes Black women as historically and economically exploited for labor, withheld from rights and privileges, and controlled and oppressed via controlling images based

on racist and sexist stereotypes (Collins, 1999). Collins provides several distinguishing features of Black feminist thought such as recognizing Black women as an oppressed group and the common challenges we face. But, Black feminist thought also acknowledges the diversity of responses to common challenges in addition to connections between Black women's heterogeneity. Black feminist thought finds the contributions of Black women intellectuals as essential to social change for several reasons, including our "outsider within" status of academia and the larger community (Collins, 1986). Additionally, Black feminist thought operates dynamically, respecting the need to change knowledges and practices as social conditions change. And finally, Black feminist thought does not operate in isolation, as it establishes, respects and embraces relationships with other social justice projects. All of these components directly inform EFPA.

Endarkened feminist epistemology

The third foundational approach to inform EFPA is *endarkened feminist epistemology* (Dillard & Okpalaoka, 2011). While this concept is cased for research, the components of endarkened feminist epistemology can be readily applied to education, practice and policy. Dillard and Okpalaoka (2011) root this concept in Black feminist thought; it not only acknowledges intersectionality in (transnational) Black women's experiences, but "honors the wisdom, spirituality and critical interventions" (p.148) within endarkened peoples' understandings and histories. They declare an endarkened feminist epistemology's standpoint on research is that researchers are responsible and obligated to the communities they study. Therefore, policy researchers, analysts and other stakeholders should also be held accountable to assess and address the ways policy impacts oppressed groups and to be reflexive of their own standpoints in the work.

Enmarginalization

All together, the principles of these three approaches form the heart of enmarginalization, which is defined as the *forced* (from the prefix *en-*) relegation of certain social groups as inferior and restricting, removing and/or preventing their access to resources, power, equality and justice. Indeed, enmarginalized persons may be forcibly kept from certain privileges, benefits or rights based on their systemic orientations. For example, persons with one or multiple disabilities who are also working class may not have easy or established access to resources such as transportation, agencies, people who understand and can assist them, in addition to justice against policies and practices that restrict their access. Communities are enmarginalized based on intersecting oppressions, which have historical, cultural and systemic roots that construct and impact knowledges, experiences and spirits. Hence, while women are certifiably enmarginalized in varied ways, so are others; as such, any feminist paradigm is encouraged to consider acknowledging, challenging and seeking to eliminate and prevent their oppressions as well.

Enmarginalization has unique contributions to policy analysis and feminist activism. First, the use of term itself is a form of feminist linguistic activism (Pauwels, 2003). Cited as having origins in the second-wave feminist movement, feminist linguistic activism recognizes how language perpetuates knowledge, specifically sexist values in the English language, such as androcentristic pronouns and gender stereotypes (Pauwels, 2003). Using the term *enmarginalization* suggests the user acknowledges that marginalization is an imposed condition, forced by various groups, institutions, policies, and cultural norms and values. Additionally, it acknowledges all forms of oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, homophobia, violence against women, poverty) based on intersecting systemic orientations as relevant social problems in need of resolve and activism.

As Audre Lorde (1984) declares, "I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own" (p. 134-135), EFPA requires exhaustive critical evaluation to protect, empower and emancipate oppressed groups. Therefore, EFPA broadens the target in policy evaluations in a flexible way, to address policy impacts on multiple communities who are forced to live, exist or survive on the margins. At these margins, concerns of personal politics are easily ignored, silenced, forgotten, minimized, pacified and/or erased. Experiences of enmarginalization underscore EFPA's vitality to feminist scholarship and activism, as the hope of EFPA is to guide people to consistently question (and challenge, when needed) the effects of policy on enmarginalized peoples. EFPA has the potential to tackle multiple and different types of enmarginalized experiences collectively and concurrently, which is a needed course for social justice and equality.

Enmarginalized feminist policy analysis: The framework

Intersectionality, Black feminist thought, and endarkened feminist epistemologies are suitable as underlying theoretical pillars to EFPA based on their propositions provided above. For example, the EFPA's components allow for empowerment-values to drive analysis. While Black feminist thought and endarkened feminist epistemologies originally posit political standpoints of Black women, intersectionality is more readily applicable to various enmarginalized groups. Black feminist thought and endarkened feminist epistemologies serve as exemplars to guide analysis of groups forced to live at the margins. Therefore, EFPA is a mechanism to explore how policy development and implementation can impact and empower such groups.

As such, EFPA is designed to be a wider-encompassing framework, in contrast to gendered-focused frameworks, to assess policy within a more comprehensive feminist paradigm.

In the spirit of this feminism, power-analysis components are explicitly and implicitly imbedded within the framework. Because the framework is intended to analyze a policy for its impact and response to multiple enmarginalized communities, a comprehensive EFPA will require several rounds of analysis. A special component of this framework necessitates a reflexive assessment of the analyst, which will enable the analyst to explore, own and report recognized personal politics and how they may impact the policy analysis. Reflexive processes are expected to take place throughout the analysis process, not as a simple evaluative add-on. And finally, this framework is in no way exhaustive—it should be used as a starting point for analysis. As conditions and environments require, EFPA is adaptable and fashioned to be accommodating for modifications.

Nine intersectional components are provided below with a sampling of critical questions to consider using for EFPA. The questions are written with an underlying value, empowerment, to help draw attention to any enmarginalizing elements of policy. In this way, the assumptions of the questions suggest what a strong policy, with respect to an enmarginalizing lens, does for and with community. While it is understood that many policies fail to benefit enmarginalized communities, EFPA provides analysts a way to point out how policy may create or perpetuate enmarginalization.

Reflexivity

- What are your motivations and purposes for analyzing the policy?

- To what degree does this policy impact you or the lives of people you know?

- Where does your assessment fit or challenge others' assessments of the policy?

- What knowledges (tacit and/or academic) do you bring with you during your analysis of the policy? How do they shape your assessment?

- To what degree have you gauged the various perspectives of enmarginalized communities with regard to the policy and your assessment? How are their voices represented in your analysis?

- How does your analysis serve enmarginalized communities?

History

- How have the policy precursors addressed enmarginalized communities? How does the policy seek to address historical gaps of the precursors?

- What are the historical roots of the policy, including but not limited to underlying assumptions, frameworks, models, theories, paradigms and cultural values/norms?

Culture

- How are the values of empowerment, social justice, equality and/or emancipation explicitly and/or implicitly supporting the policy?

- How accessible is the language(s) used in the policy (and during policy development, promotion and implementation) to multiple enmarginalized communities? How inclusive is the language of the policy of diverse knowledges and cultures?

- How are various cultures equally valued, explicitly and implicitly, in the policy?

System

- What systems are responsible for developing, promoting and implementing the policy? What is the relationship between the involved systems and enmarginalized communities?

- What systemic impacts have resulted from the policy? Do these impacts further enmarginalize oppressed groups?

- How are systems and the policy designed to prevent (or protect enmarginalized communities from) pressure, constraint and/or coercion?

Power

- How does the policy manage/distribute power?

- How are power and other social resources, such as authority and prestige, distributed amongst various enmarginalized groups?

- What stakeholders benefit from the policy? What type of benefit is provided?

- In what ways are enmarginalized communities empowered to participate in the development, promotion and implementation of the policy?

Knowledges and Spirits

- What types of knowledge are given preference or priority in the policy?

- How does the policy incorporate knowledges of enmarginalized communities?

- What impact does the policy have on enmarginalized communities' knowledges and spirits?

- How does the policy affect the expression of knowledge among enmarginalized communities?

Representations and Voices

- How have enmarginalized communities worked as agents to define the social issues of the policy, in addition to developing recommendations?

- What enmarginalized communities are targeted in the policy? How does the policy serve those groups?

- To what degree are multiple enmarginalized communities participating and leading the development, promotion and implementation of the policy?

Equality and Justice

- To what degree does the policy embrace and promote equality and justice for all groups, especially those who have been historically and/or are presently enmarginalized?

Agency

- How are individual and community-based agency upheld in policy development, promotion and implementation?

- How are members of enmarginalized communities enabled by the policy to make their own decisions and choices in life?

Discussion

Enmarginalization and EFPA recognize the diversity of oppressions historically and presently at play without giving preference or dominion of one form of oppression over another. Empowerment, social justice, equality and emancipation are key values promoted within the critical framework. EFPA is one tool that may facilitate understandings of the diversity of oppressions and needed improvements regarding access to resources, opportunities and choice, promote respect for difference, in addition to working to prevent and eliminate oppressions (NASW, 2008).

Indeed, enmarginalization may have utility as a concept for educational disciplines with social justice orientations, such as racial studies, feminist studies and social work. Teaching and learning about enmarginalization encourages faculty and students to acknowledge the diversity of oppressions and the context of forced marginalization. Moreover, the EFPA framework can be used to evaluate educational policies. For example, how do policies regarding program admission, faculty tenure and promotion, and degree requirements/policies execute the values of EFPA? How might these requirements and policies need to be modified to ensure they reflect values and ethics of the discipline? Enmarginalization can also be incorporated as a key

component for cultural competency trainings and awareness programs and used to evaluate policies for staff and clients. For example, how do non-profit social service agency policies regarding board membership, executive director duties and front-line staff meet the values of EFPA? What are possible areas for improvement?

EFPA is not without limitations. While it presents an alternative and more open scope within feminist policy analysis, some groups may use EFPA as leverage to support conservative agendas; therefore it could generate unintended applications. For example, a group that contends it is disadvantaged by policy set to aid enmarginalized communities (i.e. affirmative action) may use EFPA as leverage to eliminate or prevent such aid. Situations like these undermine not only EFPA, but also feminism and should be avoided. Authentic reflexivity of EFPA users should help combat these sorts of issues.

In conclusion, enmarginalization and the EFPA framework were devised utilizing propositions from approaches developed by and for oppressed groups. The hope for EFPA is that it spawns critical reflection of micro and macro leveled policy, specifically for policy impacts on groups historically and/or presently forced to live marginally. Therefore, the other rooted component of EFPA is social change that empowers, liberates and otherwise improves the living and/or surviving experiences of enmarginalized lives.

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