INTRODUCTION

Special issue: Intersectional methodological approaches: Research movidas to center Latina/Latino/Latinx voices

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The very act of writing then, conjuring/coming to “see,” what has yet to be recorded in history is to bring into consciousness what only the body knows to be true. The body—that site which houses the intuitive, the unspoken, the viscera of our being—this is the revolutionary promise of “theory in the flesh.”

the stories others have miswritten about me, about you.
—Cherrie Moraga, This Bridge Called My Back, 2015.

This special issue developed out of the need to understand the methodologies the humanities and social sciences use to examine the often-obscured experiences and histories of Latina/Latino/Latinx communities in the United States.1 We present an assortment of methodological approaches across disciplines. While the special issue showcases how the authors of varying disciplines employ their methodologies, the contributing articles converge through the shared influence of the feminist theoretical framework of intersectionality. The authors in this special issue use intersectionality to develop research questions, examine sources, create partnerships with participants, and develop research tools. As such, we understand intersectionality not only as a framework but also as a methodology. We refer to this method, which is a common thread among the papers in this issue, as intersectional methodological approaches.

The purpose of intersectional methodological approaches is to center the voices of historically underrepresented people in academia and its institutional records. The

1 We use the term Latina/Latino/Latinx, and its abbreviated forms Latina/o/x and Latinx, in order to engage with linguistic signifiers that are more inclusive than the reductive male-gendered Latino or the gender binary Latina/o. We include the “a/o/x” to underline that identity is not fixed and highlight the fluidity of language. The “x” provides gender neutrality and has also been used to highlight a person’s Indigenous identity when used in the term, Xicana (instead of Chicana). However, contributing authors provide their own variation and specific terminology in their essays.

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contributing authors take on this approach in their studies, which focus mainly on people of Mexican origin. An intersectional methodological approach, however, can be used to understand the experiences of broader Latina/o/x communities and other historically underrepresented groups. The seeds for this multidisciplinary project grew out of a 2019 roundtable discussion titled “Methodologies for Indigenous and Latinx Research,” in which five newly hired Indigenous, Latina, and Xicana assistant professors at the University of Wisconsin–Madison (UWM) participated in a roundtable discussion that spanned departments, disciplines, and colleges. The discussion brought attention to the overlapping challenges we faced as scholars researching communities of color in divergent fields. In this special issue, we describe the complexities of our intersectional research approaches and movidas (actions) that we apply across our respective disciplinary trainings. This concerted effort to actualize a more public academic conversation about intersectional methodological approaches was joined by three of the original panelists, Edna Ely-Ledesma, Almita Miranda, and Marla A. Ramírez; the panel organizer, Sarah M. Rios; and a guest contributor not affiliated with UWM, Janett Barragán Miranda.

Our research movidas allow us to center the voices of people and communities that have historically faced silences and erasures in and outside the academy. They enable us to connect the experiences of interlocutors in our studies to the broader historical, health, labor, migratory, and social events that transcend the boundaries of our disciplines. At the same time, our approaches show how we respond to challenges in our respective fields, guided by various generations of feminist thinkers.

**Theorizing intersectionality as a methodology**

Feminists theories are key to our intersectional methodological approaches. Intersectionality, a theoretical framework developed by legal scholar Crenshaw (1989), highlights the interlocking linkages among an individual’s multiple identities and broader structures of inequality. For instance, a Mexican woman’s identities might locate her at the intersection of gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, and legal status, which defines that person’s social location and shapes her relationship to unequal power dynamics in ways that inform her social realities. As such, intersectional feminism refers to social processes “in which identity encompasses multiple dimensions so that one is not merely gendered or raced or classed or abled, but all of these factors combine and refract upon each other in a mezcla (mixture) of self and society” (Kleinberg et al. 2008, p. 4). In 1990, Ellen C. DuBois and Vicki L. Ruiz used the term “multicultural” to refer to the model of intersectionality in their feminist reading of American history. They invited scholars to conceptualize American women’s history “as a series of dialectical relations among and across races and

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2 We use “multidisciplinary” to refer to the various academic disciplines represented in the roundtable and by the contributors in this special issue.

3 Intersectional methodological approaches are informed by the concept of “movidas” developed by Gloria Anzaldúa (1990), María Cotera et al. (2018), and Chela Sandoval (2000).
classes of women, representing diverse cultures and unequal power” (DuBois and Ruiz 1990, p. 4). We build on the work of intersectional feminist thinkers to theorize individual experiences of Latinxs that intersect with broader historical and social issues by switching between the micro and macro (Chávez-García 2018; Marquez et al. 2007). As illustrated in the articles in this issue, as researchers we examine the complex identities of participants, while also examining our own intricate, complex identities and experiences in relationship to the communities we study.

Our intersectional methodological approaches reflect the theorization of *movidas* developed by feminist Chicana scholars (Anzaldúa 1990; Cotera et al. 2018; Sandoval 2000). In the conventional sense, *movidas* refers to diverse types of movements, ranging from acceptable moves in games and dance floors to rebellious forms. It includes “forbidden social encounters, underground economies, and political maneuvers” and the destabilizing of practices and ideologies that create “subordination, inequality, [and] invisibilization” (Cotera et al. 2018, pp. 2–3). Gloria Anzaldúa defines *movidas* in reference to social movements as “individual and small group movidas, unpublicized movimientos—movements not of media stars or popular authors but of small groups or single mujeres, many of whom have not written books or spoken at national conferences” (1990, p. xxvii). Intersectional methodological approaches allow us to document these types of *movidas*. The authors in this issue are invested in recording the contributions of unsung history makers. Their stories allow us to understand the nuances of well-established academic topics that can be reconsidered from different perspectives when an intersectional methodological approach is employed. Chela Sandoval refers to *movidas* as a range of “revolutionary maneuvers,” and “a political site for the third meaning, that oblique shimmering of signification that glances through every binary opposition” (2000, p. 182). As such, a *movida* often refers to that which is not part of approved and publicly acknowledged histories, political strategies, and economic as well as social relations (Cotera et al. 2018). Intersectional methodological approaches rely on research *movidas*, which is a dance between the researcher and the participants to uncover hidden narratives, create more equitable partnerships, and rethink established accounts.

The authors in this special issue outline the strategic intersectional methodological approaches they use to identify gaps in the literature, develop reinvigorating research questions, listen to the silences, and recognize culturally specific codes of meaning in various disciplines. Following in the footsteps of feminist thinkers, the contributors draw from different ways of knowing and telling (Blackwell 2011; Taylor 2007). The essays included here use living memories, embodied knowledges of everyday lived experiences, and theories in the flesh, all of which have created a Latina/o/x methodological repertoire (Blackwell 2011; Leyva 1998; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015; Rojas 1991; Roque Ramírez 2005). The articles by Edna Ely-Ledesma, Almita Miranda, Marla A. Ramírez, and Sarah M. Rios discuss how to build partnerships with research interlocutors to document their lived experiences and embodied knowledge. Janett Barragán Miranda and Marla Ramírez’s essays provide creative strategies to read against the grain and listen to the silences in institutional archives (Gonzalez 1999; Leyva 1998). All contributing authors create partnerships with the communities they study, even if they do not conduct interviews and they depend solely on archival materials. As Barragán Miranda argues, using
interdisciplinary methodological approaches allow the researcher to make historically marginalized communities legible when relying on archival materials. The authors’ intersectional approaches enable a rethinking of how Latina/o/x experiences and histories of health, immigration, labor, and economic development are narrated and interpreted by current modes of knowledge production. As such, the articles in this issue will be helpful to scholars and students who either use interviews or examine printed documents as primary sources to understand the experiences of marginalized communities. The contributed essays provide roadmaps and concrete strategies for interested scholars to employ methodologies that allow for research partnerships with participants and to recognize the relevance of their own positionality to the research results and analysis; these are the commitments of intersectional methodological approaches.

For Latinxs and other scholars of color entering graduate programs in the social sciences and humanities, one of the most alienating experiences is learning about methods, ethics, and epistemologies that speak of and for others. Such processes often require researchers of color to occlude themselves and bury the contradictions of speaking for others as they write (Calderon et al. 2012, p. 514; Fine and Weis 1996, p. 253). Intersectional methodological approaches insist on listening to and centering the voices of Latina/o/x communities recorded aurally in interviews or in written archival documents. What is written is important, but how and why it is written is also significant. In their own research, the authors piece together methodologies that capture the wholeness of interlocutors and see them as research partners rather than subjects of study. Similar to many feminist scholars before them, the authors here honor their intersectional experiences, such that their own knowledges of racial geographies, personal stories of immigration, and intersectional lenses allow for more equitable research processes. The scholars in this issue are compelled to draw from intersectionality as they write in an effort to better contextualize the experiences and histories of Latina/o/x communities.

The contributing authors offer examples of the procedures they have undertaken to construct new knowledge with rather than on Latina/o/x communities. This collaborative knowledge production can provide comprehensive answers to complex practical problems. It also allows scholars to build on existing knowledge systems by, for instance, creating new archives or policy recommendations together with interlocutors. The researchers establish distinct intersectional methodological processes that engage Latinx communities in ways that prioritize collaboration rather than passive participation. This special issue invites scholars to see intersectionality as a methodology that can enable and further honor distinct ways of knowing. By doing so, we hope to start a discussion about the common threads that amplify the voices of Latina/o/xs across scholarly disciplines so that their experiences, contributions, and histories can live beyond the margins and footnotes of academic writing.
Interventions of intersectional methodological approaches

This special issue goes beyond the examination of effective methodological tools in a specific discipline to a discussion about the potential of intersectional methodological approaches across academic fields. The authors follow strategies employed by feminist scholars who have worked to reinvigorate methodological questions of voice, agency, and silences to examine diverse Latina/o/x topics. These approaches not only allow for an interrogation of how knowledge is produced, but also map new alternative bodies of knowledge (Blackwell 2011, pp. 34–35). This multidisciplinary special issue centers the voices of Latina/o/xs through carefully developed intersectional methodological questions in anthropology, Chicana/o and Latina/o studies, history, sociology, and planning and architecture. The methods employed in the individual essays include archival research, oral history, focus groups, in-depth interviews, and ethnography.

Feminist scholars of color who developed scholarship at the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality inform the critical frameworks of the contributing authors (Anzaldúa 1990; Blackwell 2011; Cotera et al. 2018; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015; DuBois and Ruiz 1990; Sandoval 2000). This nuanced body of scholarship emerged as the civil rights and feminist movements and the Chicano Movement made college and graduate school more accessible for historically underrepresented groups. New cohorts of historically underrepresented students and scholars with an interest in studying racial discrimination, class exploitation, sexism, and homophobia developed new studies about Chicanas and Chicanos specifically, and Latinas and Latinos in general. Particularly, Chicana and Latina feminisms emerged from the multiple and intersecting forms of identity and oppression that women of color face (Anzaldúa 1990; Delgado Bernal and Elenes 2010; DuBois and Ruiz 1990; Moraga and Anzaldúa 2015). Chicana and Latina feminisms offer, in part, a collection of epistemological and methodological tools and processes that seek to disrupt the “prescriptive, manageable, and linear world views that make our black/brown and gendered voices/bodies invisible” (Saavedra and Pérez 2014, p. 78). Intersectional feminist frameworks address the violent colonial legacies inherited and embodied in language and in culture, in English and Spanish, and the oppressive politics of aquí y allá (here and there) (Boehm 2012; Saavedra and Pérez 2017; Zavella 2011).

The concept of the Chicana and Latina decolonial imaginary (Pérez 1999) is a way of knowing and way of doing research that creates safer spaces in which to theorize (Anzaldúa 1990; Blackwell 2011), reconnects the academic self with the participant other (Blackwell et al. 2017; Rodríguez 2008), and heals the split between the mind and spirit (Saavedra and Pérez 2017). Chicana and Latina feminisms enabled us to develop intersectional methodological approaches in ways that embolden our understanding of social issues in the past and in the present.

The contributors in this issue aim to suture the separation that violent processes of colonization forced between our academic selves and personal identities. We accept bell hooks’s invitation and write with our communities, using our position as experts in our academic fields but also our wholeness and the oppositional worldviews developed through our own lives (1989, p. 22). The contributors
validate the experiences and embodied knowledge of their interlocutors through a lens of “theory in the flesh” (Moraga 2015, p. xxiv; Saavedra and Pérez 2017, p. 452). As Moraga explains, the body is a site of knowledge and stored memories. As such, research participants are experts—even if dominant knowledge systems may tell us that they are ordinary people with limited formal education—because they have invaluable knowledge about their lived experiences. They are living, moving, breathing archives with “oppositional narratives” crucial to understanding broader social and historical moments that are sometimes not found in institutional repositories (Roque Ramírez 2005, p. 120). The authors employ Moraga’s call to write in a way that brings “into consciousness what only the body knows to be true” (2015, p. xxiv). Doing so has allowed the essays in this special issue to move the voices and experiences of Latina/o/xs from the margins to the center of our academic knowledge production.

At the most fundamental level, feminist methodologies have heightened our awareness of how positions and politics affect the scientific knowledge that we produce (Rouse 2004, p. 359). Feminist standpoint theory, for instance, has raised important concerns across disciplinary boundaries since the 1970s about the logic of inquiry, including challenging what counts as knowledge, interrogating notions of objectivity, and defining “good” scientific methods (Harding 2004, pp. 3, 193). In this way, feminist research is committed to producing the wisdom “women want and need in their struggles to survive and to flourish—information about our bodies and our children’s bodies; our environments; economic, governmental, and legal institutions and practices; international relations; and so forth” (Harding 2009, p. 193).

Intersectional methodological approaches are grounded in the knowledges embodied by Latina/o/x communities across different geographic places and time periods. Our decolonial imaginaries are situated and embodied in an epistemology that is performed in ways that “speak to the localized particularity and diversity of experiences in oppressive systems” (Saavedra and Pérez 2017, p. 453). We move between personal and intellectual spaces, along the lines of daily life that transcends the university classroom to the descendants of people in this continent who left “phenomenal records demonstrating artistic and scientific brilliance” (Castillo 1994, p. 6).

Our research reveals that everyday people are history makers and knowledge producers, but as academics we had to learn to listen to the silences in order to fully capture their stories. As such, we are taking part in a significant and growing body of scholarship that captures efforts to “move beyond simply listening to surface words” and instead listen “in stereo or to listen deeply to the refrains as well as gestures, silences, and other non-verbal clues that can help to unlock the personal scripts, cultural myths, and other codes by which people live” (Iacovetta et al. 2018, p. 9). Attentiveness to seemingly insignificant factors, such as facial gestures and written or spoken code words, are key to allowing the unknown to surface. As Blackwell argues, “It is indeed within the gaps, interstices, silences and crevices” of dominant narratives that possibilities exist for new historical actors to emerge (2011, pp. 2, 117–118). The contributors in this special issue pay close attention to everyday acts of resistance, voices of historically marginalized people, obscured primary sources, and newspaper articles in national and local archives written in both Spanish and English. They listen to the silences, read against the grain, and...
closely examine the social as well as environmental realities of communities where research participants live. Then, they draw from established scholarship and more accessible sources to make sense of the newly revealed and unexplored experiences of Latina/o/x communities.

The kind of constructed knowledge we seek originates beyond the boundaries of formal schooling and institutional systems; it is grounded in the traditions, worldviews, and struggles of historically marginalized communities and cultures, narrated through their own voices (Brockenbrough 2013, p. 427; hooks 1989, p. 21). In short, Gayatri Spivak’s provocative question, “Can the Subaltern Speak?,” can be rephrased to, “Can the subaltern be heard within the current circuits of power?” (Blackwell 2011, p. 41; Spivak 1988, pp. 300, 314). An intersectional methodological approach allows researchers to understand that historically marginalized and subaltern peoples can and do speak, and they do so “in multiple, sometimes contradictory registers” (Blackwell 2011, p. 41). We are conscious about the slippery slope of representing Latinx communities as “victims and damaged” or as “resilient and strong” (Fine and Weis 1996, p. 270). Instead, we opt to present their full humanity as neither a story of sorrow nor one only of joy. Our individual work reaffirms interlocutors’ human dignity, while casting light on the collective indignities that Latina/o/xs endure and highlighting their everyday acts of resistance.

We constantly think about what it means to “write from within” or to form part of a dominant-knowledge-production institution as we write about the lives of those who are found at the margins of society (Saavedra and Pérez 2017, p. 451). Our work in some way, shape, or form has grappled with the kinds of questions we have raised in our own lives. Our writing is guided by our professional experiences, the silences in existing literature on a topic, and the analytical research process—as well as the dynamic and complex knowledge forged in our multigenerational relationships; varying socioeconomic, race, gender, and sexual identities and experiences; citizenship status; corridos, curanderismo, and other forms of storytelling; and our overall unique identities that we bring to the research process (Calderon et al. 2012, p. 514; Delgado Bernal 1998, p. 564). Intersectional methodological approaches allow us to expand established accounts of social and historical issues across various disciplines in the humanities and social sciences.

Putting intersectional methodology theory into practice

At the heart of our work, we seek tools that enable a rethinking of the epistemological challenge of centering Latinxs in our studies with dignity. An intersectional methodological approach recognizes that “those who have experienced historic oppression hold deep knowledge about their lives and experiences,” and they should be invited to assist in our molding of questions and framing of research interpretations (Torre and Fine, 2006, p. 458). Latinxs have a deep-seated knowledge about the vast social relationships and social structures shaping their everyday lives. As such, some of our work partakes in the long tradition of finding the way to write “counter-stories” (Fuentes 2011, p. 397; hooks 1989). We provide new perspectives on established narratives by rethinking the way we read and analyze primary
sources, as is the case for the articles in this collection by Janett Barragán Miranda and Marla A. Ramírez. The essay by Barragán Miranda further explains how to remain accountable to the communities we study even when relying on printed materials and not directly working with living community members. Contributions by Edna Ely-Ledesma, Almita Miranda, Marla Ramírez, and Sarah M. Ríos demonstrate the research process of engaging and building partnerships with interlocutors. In this way, the participants’ knowledge does not oppose expert knowledge (Epstein 1995), rather it contributes to our understanding of public health, urban planning, and immigration policy through a ground-up approach of knowledge production.

The first contributor, Marla A. Ramírez, collaborated with narrators to unearth the experiences of Mexican American women and children who were unconstitutionally banished during the Great Depression. Collectively, they created a gendered banishment archive consisting of participating families’ personal collections and their transgenerational oral histories, records largely absent in institutional repositories. Using an intersectional methodological approach grounded in the established historical methods of archival research and oral history, Ramírez conceptualizes interviews into focus groups that capture transgenerational family histories to document the history of banishment. Janett Barragán Miranda, the second contributing author, examines news articles about health geared toward Spanish-speaking communities in the United States from 1968 to 1974 through the Spanish-language newspaper La Opinión. The intersectional methodological approach Barragán Miranda employs unveils the creative and invigorating aspects of reading the silences within the archive to make people of Mexican origin legible and audible. Acknowledging how the Mexican-origin population appears sporadically in archives throughout the twentieth century, Barragán Miranda engages with the tools necessary to reconstruct the past when institutional archives have limited documentation of Mexican American communities.

The third contributor, Almita Miranda, employs critical ethnography to study the lived experiences of mixed-status families, which shepositions within larger political-economic contexts of draconian immigration policies as well as neoliberal globalization. Miranda’s intersectional methodological approach assists in her interrogation of larger aspects of agency, positionality, and social justice scholarship. The fourth essay, by Edna Ely-Ledesma, utilizes pláticas (conversations), a ground-up intersectional approach to community-engagement methodology that planners can adopt to address Latina/o/x issues while redressing equity and inclusion for local economic development. Pláticas follow a focus-group format but emphasize a feedback loop to connect the local knowledge of the community to co-construct planning narratives with people in power. The pláticas were a collaboration between universities and city governments near Brownsville, Texas, that resulted in an initiative to address strategies for local economic development in that region. The special issue concludes with Sarah M. Ríos’s journey to finding equity-oriented, collaborative, community-based research to study a painful disease that disproportionately affects
Latinx farmworkers and incarcerated women and men of color in California’s Central Valley. Rios describes her appreciation of movement as an intersectional methodological approach. Movement refers to research conducted by traversing places and exploring a plethora of research sites, but also applies to conducting research as part of a movement organized through social and political contestations for power.

Two *vivencias* that examine the challenges of research and teaching particularly during the global Covid-19 pandemic complement the five articles in our special issue. First, Karina Santellano examines how the pandemic has disproportionately affected working-class Latinx communities in California, with detrimental effects on both research participants and researchers. Santellano reflects on her own experience as a PhD candidate who was in the midst of data collection at the height of the pandemic. Santellano calls on scholars to engage a flexible and humane approach toward participants, and toward ourselves as researchers, during data-collection processes. Second, Alejandra Reyes examines her teaching experiences and the added roadblocks encountered as a minoritized junior faculty, including the unexpected challenges during the pandemic. Reyes reflects on the trials and opportunities that result from teaching a diverse student body with inadequate support systems during a time of racial tensions and inequalities. Reyes urges academic institutions into action to recruit, retain, and support historically underrepresented students and faculty.

The five essays in this special issue employ intersectional approaches while using existing methods in their fields to shed light on the unique knowledge systems of Latina/o/xs. By doing so, the contributors uncover the experiences of the communities they study by paying close attention to their ongoing dispossession and displacement, their absence in dominant narratives, and their contributions to academic knowledge production. The two *vivencias* in this special issue call our attention to the challenges that the Covid-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected communities of color, posed for researchers and educators. This collection of essays will be of interest to scholars in disciplines across the humanities and social sciences. Additionally, this issue can be used as a pedagogical tool in methodology graduate seminars as well as graduate and undergraduate courses in Latina/o and Chicana/o studies, history, anthropology, geography, sociology, and planning and architecture.

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4 Santellanos’s vivencia was recommended for inclusion in this special issue by the journal. The second vivencia, by Reyes, was provided through an invitation by Ely-Ledesma, one of contributing authors in this issue.
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