# Metaphors of Intersectionality: Reframing the Debate with a New Proposal

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**Abstract.** Whereas intersectionality presents a fruitful framework for theoretical and empirical research, some of its fundamental features present great confusion. The term 'intersectionality' and its metaphor of the crossroads seem to reproduce what it aims to avoid: conceiving categories as separate. Despite the attempts for developing new metaphors that illustrate for the mutual constitution relation among categories, gender, race or class keep being imagined as discrete units that intersect, mix or combine. Here we identify two main problems in metaphors: the lack of differentiation between positions and effects and the problem of reification. We then present a new metaphor that overcomes these two problems: a basket of apples. We argue that considering social positions as the diverse properties of different apples avoids reification by considering categories as properties and not as objects themselves, and at the same time it allows us to think about the effects dimension from a plural and contextual approach. With this shift, we propose a reframing of the discussion in debates on intersectionality theory on the relation among categories, their in/separability and fragmentation.

**Keywords**: feminist theory, gender, intersectionality, metaphor, reification, social category

## Introduction

Intersectionality has arisen as a perspective, framework or research paradigm to deal with the complex interaction of different social categories such as gender, race, class, ethnicity, or age, among others. It has been regarded as one of the most important contributions to feminism (McCall 2005: 1771) and a number of issues have been raised regarding its conceptualization, methodological limitations and political implications. Cho, Crenshaw and McCall (2013: 787) identify the discussion between "the additive

and autonomous versus interactive and mutually constituting nature of the race/gender/class/sexuality/nation nexus" as one of the main questions that have been raised on intersectionality studies. In this sense, one of the central concerns of intersectionality theory in its conception was precisely to acknowledge the fact that a separate treatment of different systems of oppressions cannot account for the lived experiences of those who suffer them together.  Following this line, Crenshaw argued that "the intersection of racism and sexism factors into Black women's lives in ways that cannot be captured wholly by looking at the race or gender dimensions of those experiences separately" (Crenshaw, 1991: 1244)[1]. Brah and Phoenix (2004:76) also highlight the inseparability claim when they say that "the concept [intersectionality] emphasizes that different dimensions of social life cannot be separated out into discrete and pure strands". In the arena of political movements, it can be found in the Combahee River Collective statement of 1977, which states that "we also often find it difficult to separate race from class from sex oppression because in our lives they are most often experienced simultaneously" (Combahee River Collective, 1981: 213).

There is no doubt that Crenshaw's development of intersectionality aimed at presenting a conceptualization where categories were not seen as separable. However, the term 'intersectionality' and the metaphor Crenshaw herself used to illustrate it, the intersection of roads, has lead to an imaginary that seems to reproduce precisely what it aimed to avoid: conceiving categories as separate. In this sense, the image of the intersection has been the basis for many current debates on intersectionality theory that tend to focus on the 'roads' as identity categories that cross and therefore imply important discussions on the inseparability of social categories and the fragmentation of people and struggles. After reviewing the existing metaphors on intersectionality, we

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[1] It is important to note that ideas on intersectionality, or what Hancock (2016) calls 'intersectionality-like

firstly identify two main problems of several metaphors that have relevant implications for developing it theoretically: the *lack of differentiation between positions and effects* and the *reification of social categories*. Regarding the first problem, we show how existing metaphors, besides being useful in a number of different ways, are ambiguous regarding the dimension represented, which in some cases reinforces the separability among categories. With respect to the second problem, we argue that most metaphors contribute to the reification problem. Then we offer a new metaphor, a basket of apples, which overcomes reification by considering the positions in social categories as properties and not as objects themselves and allows for an open and contextualized understanding of the (discriminatory and privileging) effects dimension.

**Metaphors**

Metaphors are figures of speech that have been extensively studied in multiple ways. Metaphors are pervasive in our everyday communication and language and their role as poetic rhetorical devices and their potentiality in constructing new meanings has been widely acknowledged. Moreover, metaphors are central in our way of thinking and in the way scholarly theories are understood (see Ortony 1993 for an overview). In their cognitive theory of metaphors, Lakoff and Johnson (1980) present them as not just a matter of language but of thought and comprehension, as they can be the means by which we conceptualize reality. Metaphors, in their view, are mechanisms that allow us to use knowledge about a certain domain to provide understanding of many other subjects. In many cases, metaphors enable us to comprehend complex and abstract aspects of reality in terms that are more concrete, familiar and easily imaginable (Semino 2008). At the same time, using metaphors for theorization has limits set by the

features of the chosen metaphor and runs the risk of being taken literally as a characterization of the phenomenon itself.

The case of intersectionality is paradigmatically relevant for illustrating the use of metaphors in theorization. Its theorization started with Crenshaw's coinage of the term 'intersectionality' and her famous metaphor of an intersection or crossroad of streets. Since then, the use of metaphorical images has pervaded theorization on how different social categories relate to each other. While metaphorical images are evocative of some important features of the phenomenon at hand, they can also lead to some confusion, as we argue in sections 3 and 4.

Let us first present Crenshaw's initial metaphor of intersectionality: in an intersection of different streets, a crossroad where traffic flows in different directions, an accident can be caused by cars coming from any of those directions or all of them. A black woman can be situated in the intersection of racism and sexism such that it may not be clear where her injuries come from. In Crenshaw's (1989, 149) words:

"Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination".

A modification of this spatial image considers placing a roundabout in the middle, as a way to illustrate the idea that different axes can intermesh in various ways in the central space (Garry 2011, 831): "A roundabout works better to illustrate that one axis of oppression uses another to oppress a single person, or that axes can sometimes

blend together to produce a distinct mixture". While the metaphor of a crossroad nicely captures what "intersection" means, namely, the point at which different axes cross each other, it also gives rise to various problems. One of them is that the crossroad does not consider privilege (Garry 2011), which would be the absence of cars, or perhaps the absence of the road altogether[2]. In an attempt to include the privilege that can sometimes mitigate or modify another oppression, Garry considers the possibility of adding mountains into the picture in order to have verticality and proposes to change the vehicles in Crenshaw's metaphor for liquids to show how privileges and oppressions seem to fuse with others.

But perhaps the most important criticism has been the fact that this metaphor seems to convey an additive model of intersectionality (Yuval-Davis 2006) in the sense that it considers oppressions or power structures as separate and independent of each other in a way that it is only in the crossroad where different oppressions meet and relate. Additive models view oppressions as separated from each other without any interaction, and thereby cannot be adequate for accounting for black women's experiences and for any other (intersectional) experience. Moreover, the additive model advocates a view that ranks difference, producing primary and secondary struggles and precludes the analysis of privilege at the same level as oppression (Choo and Feree, 2010). However, as Dhamoon notes,

> "the metaphor of intersecting roads has come to falsely suggest that there are separable, pure, containable ways to analyze subject formation and power. As Crenshaw (2010) has recently noted, this is contrary to her conception, which was premised on a dynamic notion of intersectionality, whereby the roads emerged from various histories, became politically relevant because of historical

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[2] It should also be noted that Crenshaw developed the metaphor of the *basement* (Crenshaw, 1989) in order to specifically illustrate the dynamics of privilege in intersectionality (see Carastathis 2013).

repetition, and were constituted through movement that affected people and existing structures" (Dhamoon 2011: 232).

Some other authors have tried to overcome of separation by proposing metaphors that try to capture what has been called the 'mutual constitution' character of intersectional relations (Yuval-Davis 2006; Garry 2011). In this sense, Bowleg (2013) considers the metaphor of a final product (a cake) resulting from blending baking ingredients that, like the factors effecting lived experience, are blended together into batter. Similarly, Jordan-Zachery (2007: 261), in reflecting on her experience, talks about a "marble" cake, in which it is impossible to separate its components: "sometimes my identity is like a "marble" cake, in that my blackness is mixed intricately with my womaness and therefore cannot be separated or unlocked." Still within the domain of cooking, Ken (2008: 162) tries to avoid the additive conception by focusing on the "solubility" of sugar and its mixture with other ingredients when making a cookie:

"The ingredients affect each other. And when these ingredients come together, they transform each other. No ingredient in the resultant cookie has the same smell, the same texture, the same look or feel as it did before it went into the bowl. This illustrates very nicely the race-class-gender theory premise of "mutual constitution" (Ken 2008).

Another metaphor that tries to capture the mutual constitutive nature of social categories is Haslanger's (2012: 9) analogy of the gels on a stage light: "the light shines blue and a red gel is added, and the light shines purple; if a yellow gel is added instead of the red, the light shines green. Similarly, gender is lived differently depending on the racial (and other) positions in which one is situated". There are other metaphors in the literature such as Platero's (2012) "tangled mess" (our own English translation for the Spanish

word 'maraña') and Dhamoon (2011) image of the "matrix of meaning-making" that aim to overcome the rigidity and separability of categories going in the direction of making the crossroad metaphor more complex and messy. Also, Romero (2018) develops a metaphor based on the Rubik's Cube, arguing that it can be useful to conceptualize the rotating mix of identities and shifting systems of domination. With the aim of resisting the logic of purity, Lugones (1994) presents still another image, an egg, pointing out that one is unable to separate completely its two different parts, the egg white and the egg yolk.

Although metaphors can illuminate certain aspects of a phenomenon, they also may entail confusions that might even contradict the theory. This is the case of Crenshaw's metaphor of the crossroads. While she was clear in her theoretical argument, the metaphor (an intersection) and the concept (intersectionality) have led to confusions[3], in particular regarding the nature of what is crossed or intersecting, as it is argued in the next two sections.

**Two dimensions of categories: Positions and Effects**

In intersectionality studies, various proposals have been made that distinguish or define different levels of social reality. Some distinguish between power structures, constructions of identity and symbolic representations (Winker & Degele 2011), other between a macro-level in which connecting systems of oppressions are recognized and a micro-level, where individuals occupy a social position (Collins 1990), or even between social ontologies, discursive practices and concrete social relations (Anthias 2013). We see these differentiations as useful and helpful to identify different levels where intersectionality dynamics must be analyzed. However, regarding the question of the

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[3] The confusion has to be seen as different from other misinterpretations of intersectionality that have attempted to marginalize race-related discrimination and black women voices and experiences (Alexander-Floyd, 2012; Bilge 2013; Hancock, 2016; Carastathis, 2016).

relation among categories, we propose another way of differentiating that will be useful to disentangle debates such as the in/separability question in metaphors. Under the general term of 'categories' (gender, race, class, etc.), there are two main dimensions: those related to social *positions* in terms of identities (gendered positions such as woman) and those related to *effects*, which refer to the social values associated with such positions and which create discriminations, hierarchies and inequalities.

In this section it is argued that many of the metaphors are ambiguous regarding what is represented in the image. Looking at Crenshaw's (1989) explanation of the metaphor of the crossroads, she specifically refers to *discrimination* in relation to the intersection, and so to the *effects* and not the *positions* dimension of categories (see quote in page 3). What intersects (and thus is separated) is discrimination, not a position, an identity or 'gender' itself. Actually, *Black woman* is not *the* intersection to be considered but rather a black woman is *in* an intersection of gender and race discriminations. However, in some other metaphors (see Zachery 2007, quoted above) what is taken as intersecting are the positions (blackness and womaness) and not the effects or discriminations. The distinction between positions and effects is relevant when intersectionality scholars reflect on how categories relate to each other: womaness and blackness might not be related in the same way, ontologically, if the focus is on identity or on discrimination. In fact, interpreting intersectionality as mainly about identities (what we are calling 'positions') is a recurrent move in the literature. Gunnarsson (2015: 2, our emphasis), for instance, states that "when Kimberlé Crenshaw (1991) (…) argued that gender must be analysed as intersecting with for instance race, so that gendered *identities* be seen as intrinsically racialized, the very term 'intersectionality' at the same time implies that the entities intersecting are distinct from one another in some way – otherwise they could not intersect". The 'entities' that

Gunnarson refers to would be 'forms of discrimination' in Crenshaw's metaphor, not 'gendered identities' as the author states. Also, Nash (2008: 2, our emphasis) defends intersectionality as "the notion that *subjectivity* is constituted by mutually reinforcing vectors of race, gender, class and sexuality". This has already been analyzed as a misreading of intersectionality, given that the intersectional framework was thought not in terms of the configuration of subjectivity or identity but in order to render visible intersectional specific forms of discrimination (see Cooper, 2015). As Crenshaw (1989: 1297) states, "this project [intersectionality] most pressing problem, in many if not most cases, is not the existence of the categories, but rather the particular values attached to them and the way those values foster and create social hierarchies". It is in this sense that we would argue that although Crenshaw herself was explicit in saying that the crossroad metaphor was about discriminations (effects), many authors have taken it to be about identities (positions).

In contrast with these cases, other metaphors represent the *effects* dimension of categories, such as in Haslanger's metaphor of gels on a stage light, presented as a metaphor of how gender is lived differently when it intersects with other categories or how gender norms are different when they intersect with other categories (Haslanger 2012: 9). Experiences and norms associated with gender seem to belong to the dimension of effects within categories. But in other cases, such as Ken's metaphor of sugar,, it involves both the dimensions of positions and the effects of them together with many other associated factors. Similarly, Romero's Rubik's Cube represents both identities and systems of domination. Yet for other authors, what is being represented is less explicit, such as in Platero's 'maraña' or Dhamoon's matrix of meaning-making.

To summarize, the existing metaphors of intersectionality analyzed here do not refer to the same thing: some refer to positions/identities (Jordan-Zachery, Bowleg),

others to effects (Crenshaw, Haslanger) and still others refer to both of them as well as other related aspects (Ken, Romero). The problem is not that there is divergence in the dimensions represented but that they all pretend to be metaphors of intersectionality without making explicit *what* they are representing about intersectionality. Acknowledging this point is an important step towards clarifying the question of the relation among categories and, as it will be seen in section 5, it helps to understand why the question on the relations should not be situated in the positions dimensions but in the effects one (following Crenshaw's theorization). In the next section we move to a second problem for metaphors.

**The reification problem**

Besides the confusion between positions and effects and the move from Crenshaw's metaphor to other metaphors that mostly represent positions, it should be acknowledged that the crossroad metaphor in itself reifies social categories. Reification has been mentioned in the literature on intersectionality in two ways: (i) as giving priority to objects or things over relations and (ii) as rendering processes invisible (see Gunnarsson 2015: 6-9 for a development of both questions). In our view, the problem of reification of categories in the metaphors of intersectionality should be understood as a third kind of problem, that of (iii) *object versus property*, namely, the fact that categories, specifically for the positions dimension, are represented and thought of as objects and not as properties of objects.

The reification problem expresses the idea that social categories can be visualized as objects, as material things that can exist separately one from another— 'discrete' units' that subsequently join, or combine. Crenshaw's image of a crossroad inevitably evokes two things: the streets and the intersection where they cross. The

other proposed metaphors try to present social categories as "less reified" by making the boundaries of things porous, or relating things in complex ways: the ingredients in a blending cake mix with one another, a cookie integrates sugar, the gels produce one light or another, and so on. But still these metaphors lead us into thinking that the butter, the sugar, or the gel exist as separated units prior to the mixing. The things or elements involved in the metaphors were, are or could be physically separated even if in complex manners: sugar is separated from flour before making the cookie; the egg yolk and the egg white can be separated even if perhaps not very accurately, etc. However, can one even think about gender in this way? In relation to the positions dimension, can one, for instance, imagine a woman without an age? We see this as problematic because it creates an imaginary that moves away from visualizing the mutually constitutive character of intersectional dynamics and precisely reinforces what intersectionality wanted to overcome: conceiving race and gender as discrete strands. Gunnarsson (2015: 5) states that "some authors arguing against separability seem to apply the implicit criterion that for things to be separable their discreteness must be tangible". In our view, the existing metaphors contribute to this 'implicit criterion', given that in all metaphors the categories presented appear as separable, not in an abstract way but rather tangibly. We think there is an easier way to avoid the reification problem and the physical separability it implies: conceiving social positions as properties of an individual. Given that properties cannot be physically separated, neither from the whole they constitute nor from each other, our conception would be more in line with the aims of intersectionality. [4]

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[4] There is a poststructuralist move to be done with respect to the reification problem: reject the use of social categories altogether (see Lugones 2007, 2010 or Carastathis 2016 as examples) and try to visualize intersectionality in other ways, such as a horizon (Carastathis 2016). Even if an in-depth discussion of this issue goes beyond the scope of this paper, we are assuming here that categories operate in oppressive ways and it is still useful to refer to them and use them in theorizing.

In the next section, we consider a different metaphor that implies a turn in the way categories are conceived. We will argue that it helps to think about intersectional relations in a way that can avoid some of the difficulties described above. This is the metaphor of a basket of apples where the different properties of every apple are social positions that can be shared (or not) between them. The main difference is the change from images involving things or objects that cross, combine, mix, etc., to the properties of an object (an apple). It is an image that explicitly represents the positions dimension but that also illuminates some aspects of the effects dimension, as it will be seen in the next section.

**The metaphor of a basket of apples**

Consider the image of a basket of apples of different types: Granny Smith, Red Delicious, Pink Lady, Honeycrisp, Fuji, Gala, or Golden Delicious. Each apple has a certain color, taste, texture, etc. Granny Smith, for instance, has light green skin, an acid savor and it is crispy and juicy; Red Delicious has a bright red and sometimes striped skin, a crunchy savor and mildly sweet flavor; Golden Delicious has a golden skin and it's is sweet and mellow. All these and other properties are criteria according to which it is possible to broadly classify kinds of apples in everyday practice and knowledge. In general, focusing on a specific set of properties, in the basket there might be: with respect to color—yellow, green, red or pink apples (and all colors in between); regarding size—there are very small apples, medium-size ones and bigger ones; with respect to texture—some apples might be crispy or soft; regarding taste—some apples are sweet and some others tart or even bitter; apple's maturity can vary from very green ones to very mature ones.

Now consider the analogy with the subject's position and its different criteria of

classification with different social categories: the color of the apples could be gender, the size could be race, texture could be equated with age, taste with sexual orientation and maturity with class. Criteria for classifying the apples (color, size, taste) have to be seen as analogous to social categories (gender, race, sexual orientation) in the metaphor. Every specific apple property (red, big, sweet) is analogous to social positions in intersectionality (man, white, gay). The metaphor does not imply a specific conception of such positions, and it allows for degrees, for vague cases, and thus has space for breaking binary and rigid understandings of categories, thus avoiding the criticism of intersectionality as reinforcing rigid categories (see Garry 2011). This is the case for almost all the apples properties mentioned: color is more varied than just two colors, weight admits various degrees, taste considers also wide array of possible flavors, etc. The basket of apples metaphor has two main dimensions, positions and effects, which are crucial for illustrating intersectionality.

*Positions dimension*

Apples properties, by being criteria, are not considered things but *properties* of things, and thus criteria of social differentiation applying to people. If they are not discrete things, they do not afterwards have to necessarily be combined, mixed or interrelated—they are *already* simultaneously present and configuring the apple from the start. Thus, in the positions dimension the question about the relation among categories—and so the demand for mutual constitution—doesn't appear, as properties are not presented as separated. The redness of an apple is not constituted by its size, as being a woman is not constituted by being 32 years old. Positions are not mutually constituted; instead, they constitute the apple (or an individual). Indeed, if a relation of mutual constitution were to be found in this particular dimension, a change in one

category should imply a change in another one. For example, my age is the same if I am a woman or a man, just as my ethnicity doesn't change depending on my sexual orientation. What might change are the *effects* of those positions. So, the social consideration of my age may vary depending on my gender, as the effects of my ethnicity may change depending on my sexual orientation. In this sense, and as a central contribution of the use of apples properties as social positions, the question on the relation among categories does not apply to the positions dimension. Here, the central constitutive relation is between social positions and the individual.

Another useful aspect of the metaphor when it comes to the positions dimensions is that it can include many other categories that we have not mentioned, such as (dis)ability, religion, or language, for instance. This is because apples properties are not exhausted with the five aspects we have described, but there are other properties such as the density or the weight, which could be included. This aspect overcomes one limitation that some metaphors have in considering just two axes of oppression (Garry 2011).

Also, within criteria of social differentiation (apples properties in the metaphor) there are *indicators* that serve as the elements through which one can identify such categories. Color is measured by pigments, weight in grams or pounds, size in centimeters or feet, and so on. Similarly, categories can be understood as the criterion that presents certain indicators. For instance, gender can be related to "a mode of discourse that relates to groups of subjects whose social roles are defined by their sexual/biological difference" (Yuval-Davis 2006: 201), conceived as a set of reiterative acts within a rigid heterosexual regulatory frame (Butler 1990) or as the "socially imposed division of the sexes" (Rubin 1975: 179), among other proposals. It is thus crucial to note that the specific content of those indicators *is not predetermined* by the

model, but it is rather compatible with a variety of views on the content of social categories.

We have shown how most of the metaphors of intersectionality are motivated by the idea of visualizing categories as mutually constituted and not as additive so that the inseparability of categories was one primary concern. Now notice that our proposed metaphor moves away from the question of the relation among categories because categories are not separated, they are always present and constituting every apple. In contrast with the metaphors reviewed before (where one could at least imagine an egg white separate from the egg yolk, for instance), one cannot imagine a yellow apple without a size, any more that one can imagine a woman without an age. As there is no neutral apple, there is no neutral way of being a woman. Every woman is positioned in relation to sexual orientation or ethnicity, for instance, as heterosexuality or whiteness are also positions even if they are the norm and usually go unnoticed.

Following Gunnarsson (2015), it is crucial here to differentiate between 'separation' and 'distinction'. All that is needed for theorizing about different categories is that they are *distinguishable* and can be *named,* so that they can be individuated for certain theoretical and empirical purposes. However, being able to name and point to certain categories or properties does not imply any further metaphysical commitment to them being separate—contrary to what Walby et al. (2012: 234) seem to suggest when they say that "writers that appear to prioritize the 'mutual constitution' approach to intersectionality nevertheless often also argue for separate naming; which might appear somewhat inconsistent". The fact that properties can be individuated does not make this property (gender) become a separate (reified) entity that then intersects with other things (race, sexuality, etc.), any more than that the color property does not become a separate thing that then intersects with an apple's weight. The metaphor of a basket of apples,

thus, helps us to conceptualize intersectionality in a way that overcomes the in/separability discussion by visualizing social categories not as things but as properties of things that one can nevertheless distinguish, name and individuate for certain theoretical, empirical or political purposes.

Next to the in/separability debate, the proposed metaphor has another important implication for intersectionality. The metaphor of a basket of apples highlights that, for the positions dimension, the relevant relation is between social categories and the individuals. Each apple property (gender, race, sexuality, class, etc.) contributes to a certain kind of apple (individual) in general, making its overall appearance distinctive. Thus it is important that there is a *whole*, and this brings with it two main points. First, a person is a whole in which different properties can be distinguished, named and studied. In this sense, the proposed metaphor does justice to Zack's (2005, 2, our emphasis) idea that "it is only on a theoretical level that differences can be first distinguished and abstracted, and then recombined, because people exist as *integral totalities* that are raced, gendered, sexualized, aged, socially ranked and so forth". The failure to adequately visualize these 'integral totalities' as a point of departure and not as a result of an intersection was one problematic aspect of previous metaphors.

A second and related point—the other side of the coin—is the fragmentation problem in intersectionality (see Garry 2011 for discussion). It has been argued that intersectionality fragments feminist theory and solidarity because of the proliferation of genders that leads to political divisions and precludes the existence of common goals (Zack, 2005). Lugones (2003) also argues that oppressions that are interlocking lead to a logic that fragments people. In contrast, Garry (2011) develops the family resemblance proposal as a framework that can overcome gender proliferation or theory fragmentation. In our view, a person is not fragmented just because she is situated in

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several social positions. Rather, a person is a whole in which several properties we can distinguished and individuated. Moreover, the *non-exhaustive* character of categories must be recognized. The idea is that focusing in only one dimension (say, gender) can't account for the *whole* person, and so it is important to notice that when focusing on a specific property only *one* dimension of an individual is considered. As Butler states:

> "if one is a woman, *that is surely not all one is*; the term fails to be *exhaustive*, not because a pregendered person transcends the specific paraphernalia of gender, but because gender *intersects* with racial, class, ethnic, sexual, and regional modalities of discursively constitutive identities. As a result, it becomes impossible to separate out gender from the political and cultural intersection in which it is invariably produced and maintained" (Butler 1990: 3, our emphasis).

Even if Butler does not develop this statement in relation to intersectionality, her insight is of great importance for our present point. Our account can explain a confusion in some theories of intersectionality, namely, the idea that they take a position within the criterion (the color yellow for the apples in the basket) as pretending to account for the whole of what a woman (or a yellow apple) is or what a woman faces. Elizabeth Spelman, for example, argues against gender realism (and so against the reality of the category woman) by defending that (for a white woman) it is impossible to point to a particular [part of a woman that is not also a white part of herself] (1990: 134). This point focuses on the inseparability of social categories but the fact that they are inseparable doesn't imply the rejection of the category woman itself (see Mikkola 2006 for a discussion of Spelman 1990). Any way of being woman does not *exhaust* what a woman is (as 'woman' is not an exhaustive term) and its partiality can be recognized without having to reject the concept altogether. As Granny Smith apples in the basket

are not just green but also crispy and juicy, every woman is positioned in relation to class, age, sexuality, or ethnicity, among others. This has political implications, as it recognizes that there can be differences among women and power relations within oppressed groups (racism among women or sexism among Black people) but that there might also be some shared experiences from where to build common struggles.

The metaphor of a basket of apples can thus help to overcome the fragmentation problem by conceiving social positions as properties. This avoids treating the part as the whole, and so taking woman as an exhaustive category, for instance. Moreover, the metaphor allows us to understand the fact that women might share something in some contexts even though their overall experience in a given situation might differ significantly due to the effects of other categories functioning in the person.

*Effects dimension*

The main contribution of the basket of apples metaphor is the proposal of understanding social positions as properties, which in turn overcomes the reification problem. At the same time, it can also provide some clues on the relation among categories with regard to the effects dimension. In intersectionality studies, authors generally define the relation among categories as one of mutual constitution. However, 'mutual constitution' can have very different meanings: it is conceptualized as the fact that categories affect each other (Anthias 2013), change the nature of each other (Walby 2007; Garry 2011), fuse (Lugones 2007) or that one category is intensified or mitigated by another (Khader 2013; XX) among others  (see XX for a detailed analysis). If we set aside the question of what 'mutual constitution' exactly refers to here, we can still ask which are the relations among categories in the effects dimension.

Continuing with the basket of apples metaphor, we could focus on the different

*values* that are given to the different apples in the basket. Those values are socially constructed and culturally and historically defined. Apples' colors or sizes have different meanings in different contexts, so their properties do not determine their value in a fixed way but rather change depending on the social context. Sweetness, for instance, is defined in relation to other fruits in a specific region, and some types of apples are more valued than others in different countries. This has to do with social and cultural meanings attributed to apples' size, color, taste and texture and this would be analogous to the values attached to specific positions that produce social hierarchies (the effects dimension). Moreover, the metaphor allows the recognition of "historically formed processes of power" (Gunnarsson 2015: 9) in which a category (say color) can cease to be a relevant category in order to take into account which purposes may become salient and important in a particular context. In this sense, the effects dimension of the metaphor can encompass both stability and fluidity thereby allowing for empirical analysis as well as for the recognition of change (Walby et al 2012: 228).

The way these effects are configured is based on intersectional power relations. For every apple, all its features play a role in configuring these effects. The flavor, texture and color of Red Delicious, for instance, make this type of apple one of the most valued ones. It is not the sum of its specific red color and crispy texture what makes it valued, but a combination of all of them. This combination produces a whole (Red Delicious type of apple) that is socially valued. This can be related to intersectional power relations: a combination of some specific positions has (and receives) concrete effects in a society. The relation between these effects can be thought as mutually constitutive if we consider that the effects of being red are constituted by the size of an apple. So, even if an apple in the basket has a wonderful red color, if it is very small, its redness won't be appreciated in the same way as it would for a big one. So the

(privileging) effects of redness can be mitigated by a small size. In this sense, color and size are related through their effects.

Another central aspect to take into account is context and its role in intersectional dynamics. As many theorists have pointed out, experiences vary in relation to time and space (see Valentine, 2007; McDowell, 2005; Anthias, 2013 McCall, 2005; XX, 2014, 2018). In different historical or spatial contexts one's overall experience may differ altogether. Following with the basket of apples metaphor, if one wants an apple to make a pie, the Red Delicious one won't be the best choice in the basket. Instead, Granny Smith is excellent for making pies, sauces and for baking. These different uses of apples could be seen as different social contexts where properties have different effects (where apples are differently valued). The effects of the redness in relation to being small and crispy will be defined by the specific uses and contexts, and the overall effect will be a specific combination of all of them in a context. What we argue here in relation to the question of the relation among categories is that for the effects dimension, the relation is always an open empirical question where different sorts of relations can be found.

Before concluding this section, a disclaimer is in order. We admit that other objects with different properties and to which certain values are attributed could just as well have served as an metaphorical image here[5]. But we have chosen a basket of apples because apples are a widely-known and very popular fruit with a great range of varieties. This allows us to use it to refer to the multiplicity of axis of inequality and social diversity that can be found in social life. Our choice of apples also had to do with our desire to continue with the cooking metaphors that other authors have used to theorize on intersectionality, as seen above. In contrast with the marble cake or the

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[5] A box of buttons, for instance, could have served for the distinction between objects and properties.

cookie metaphor, a basket of apples is more adequate because it illustrates the diversity of social positions through apples' diverse properties (color, size, weight, etc.) and not through ingredients or parts of the object, thus avoiding the reification problem.

Regarding its limitations, a basket of apples doesn't say which and why some positions constitute privilege or oppression, so it does not clarify specific power dynamics. Also, the metaphor doesn't explain the effects of the agency in the intersectional functioning of power. It, therefore, risks ignoring the theoretical underpinnings of the concept and in this way may be subject to misinterpretation. However, this is a risk that every metaphor potentially faces. Despite having limitations, when it comes to complex phenomena like intersectionality, metaphors have the potential of evoking interesting features and thus are still helpful in theorizing.

**Resituating discussions on intersectional relations**

By presenting a new metaphor, a basket of apples, we contribute to debates on intersectionality theory by showing some of its conceptual implications. As a metaphor for intersectionality, a basket of apple accomplishes the following: a) the differentiation between positions and effects as a relevant way to avoid misunderstandings when referring to the general term of "social categories" in intersectionality, b) the identification of the reification problem as a central problematic of metaphors, c) the situation of the question of the relation among categories at the effects dimension rather than the positions dimension, d) the overcoming of in/separability and fragmentation problems through the properties framework, and e) the defense of a contextual approach to the question of the relation among categories. Taken together, these features of the metaphor leave space for a plural conception of intersectionality that goes beyond the mutual constitution view.

Finally, it is important to note that the basket of apples metaphor proposed here should be understood as a metaphor and not as a strict analogy of specific power relations. Nor is it a metaphor of *all* the aspects related to intersectionality (as if this would be possible!), but rather a conceptualization that provides a step forward in primarily visualizing and conceptualizing a fundamental aspect of intersectionality, namely, the ontological profile of social categories as properties and the related distinction between positions and effects. All in all, metaphors have proved to be a powerful tool for theorizing relevant aspects of intersectionality and for contributing to central debates in feminist theory in general. Providing adequate metaphors is not a secondary enterprise but a relevant ground on which shared imaginaries are built in the processes of knowledge production.

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