
Intersectionality: An Example Of Shahid Buttar, The Democratic Candidate For Congress

Intersectionality is a word that some people might already be familiar with; although, it is actually much more complex than what is on the surface. Kimberlé Crenshaw defines intersectionality as a “methodology that ultimately will disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable” (Introduction Box 6, pg. 164). While there are many critiques of the word, it doesn’t dismiss that we should use an intersectional analysis to look closely at women of color, marginalized groups, social justice movements and more. In this essay, I will focus on how we can look at the upcoming 2020 elections, specifically Congressional Elections, through an intersectional lens and why it is important to do so. My analysis will specifically focus on Shahid Buttar, the Democratic candidate for Congress in California’s 12th District. He is challenging House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, who is also in the Democratic primary. It is often that Buttar identifies as an intersectional feminist in the press. Capitol Weekly, which covers California’s government and politics, describes Buttar as an “encyclopedia of intersectionality” in the recent article, “An ‘Intersectional Feminist’ Challenges Nancy Pelosi.” Throughout this essay, I will explain how Buttar uses an intersectional analysis and why an intersectional analysis is important. I will also analyze Buttar’s use of intersectionality and if it is appropriate to identify as intersectional, or if it is simply a buzzword to use in a campaign.

To begin it is important to take a closer look at the current issue that I have chosen. Who is Shahid Buttar and why is he identifying as an intersectional feminist? He has ran for Congress in 2018 where he was wiped away by Pelosi. According to his website, shahidforchange.us, he believes that the county of San Francisco deserves, “a representative in Congress who will champion climate justice, human rights, and racial justice.” What really stood out to me about Buttar is his background. His parents, who belong to the Ahmadi sect of Islam, left their home country to escape religious persecution and landed in Britain before he was born. Around two years old, they then left because of the “postcolonial racism” that they faced, which was stated in Mother Jones article, “The Impractical, Unsophisticated, Very Necessary Long-Shot Campaign to Unseat Nancy Pelosi.” He grew up in Missouri and eventually found himself working in Washington, DC. In the article he “characterizes himself as a ‘postcolonial, intersectional liberation agent.’” He defines ‘Intersectional,’ as the understanding that “people are oppressed across lines of race, gender, class, and nation of origin.” The term ‘Liberation agent’ is defined by him as the act of fighting to “eliminate that oppression, however it occurs.” Buttar is even known for defending the mayor of New Paltz at the time, Jason West, after his decision to marry same-sex couples.

Using an intersectional analysis during elections would reveal different dimensions of a variety of topics, that a non-intersectional analysis would simply fail to capture. When using an intersectional framework, there is more room to focus on the oppressions that those from marginalized groups face. I am using “intersectionality” in the way that Dill and Zambrana define it — as a strategy that is used to understand human behaviors that are rooted in the struggles of marginalized people (Critical Thinking About Inequality: An Emerging Lens, pg. 184). When seen as an analytic strategy, intersectionality can be used in your everyday life on an individual level. At the same time, their reading explains how it can operate on a social and structural level as well. I believe that Buttar is doing both at the same time. He is ready to take

an intersectional framework to the institutional and structural level in an attempt to make a change there through an intersectional method. One way in which he is doing that is through his belief of the right to autonomy. His website states, "Having long embraced intersectional feminism, Shahid will be a stalwart defender of both reproductive freedom and justice." The reproductive rights movement is most successful through an intersectional method, which Shahid claims he will be using. If we can make a change in policy, then it will be a step in the right direction.

The first sentence of Dill and Zambrana's piece states "Inequality and oppression are deeply woven into the tapestry of American life," a sentence I believe Buttar would agree with right off the bat (Critical Thinking About Inequality: An Emerging Lens, pg. 182). This chapter describes that through intersectionality we must center the experiences of people of color, explore complex identities, understand the power in interconnected structures of inequality and promote social justice and change. When looking at the election process as a whole, it seems as if all of these things should be at the forefront of anyone's campaign to fully understand human nature. However, with intersectionality being a newer term and maybe even a buzzword term, the idea of an intersectional framework for Congress can fall short. If we were able to bring an intersectional analysis here, there would be the possibility of change on an institutional level, rather than putting all of the weight on the individual to make the change.

Jennifer C. Nash's point of view looks closer at what intersectionality is and the critiques that can be made. Despite critiques, it still allows us to talk about intersectionality and still reinforces why an intersectional methodology should be taken into consideration during elections; no matter what, these things need to be discussed whether they are through criticism or compliments. Nash discusses several questions and unresolved issues regarding intersectionality, which could be something that Buttar continues to bring up during his campaign, instead of just using it as a buzzword. The four unexplored paradoxes regarding intersectionality that Nash focuses on include: the lack of a clearly defined methodology, the use of black women as subjects, the ambiguity inherent to intersectionality and the coherence between intersectionality and multiple identities (Re-Thinking Intersectionality, pg. 195). Out of the four of these paradoxes, the last one stood out to me the most. It boils down to the question of "Who is intersectional?" Nash states, "This unresolved theoretical dispute makes it unclear whether intersectionality is a theory of marginalized subjectivity or a generalized theory of identity?" (Re-Thinking Intersectionality, pg. 199). Intersectionality began as a term for black women who were dealing with being black as well as being a women. So it seems as if it should be a theory of marginalized subjectivity, however it has grown so far and may have even lost its true definition. Some individuals do believe that it is a generalized theory of identity. We have to ask if intersectionality is a tool that allows us to look at all of our multiple identities since we might all be oppressed in different ways, or if it is a tool for marginalized groups to understand their oppressions better. One might even debate that we should leave identity to identity politics and not intersectionality. It is also important to remember that intersecting identities, which we all have, is not the same as intersectionality, which is a framework. Although complex, it is important for us to look deeper at all of the criticisms that Nash brings to the table to help us understand the term of intersectionality better. I believe that intersectionality is a theory of marginalized subjectivity. Either way, however, intersectionality is a theory and cannot be used as an adjective to describe one's self. Today, intersectionality is used as a type of buzzword, which can become problematic due to individuals not fully understanding what the word means. Through our readings, there is no evidence of it being appropriate for Buttar to identify as intersectional. Nash is one of the only people who has actually posed the question of who is

intersectional.

With that being said, intersectionality is used to understand people's positions. Buttar identifying as intersectional seems inappropriate, and might lead to someone believing he is just using it as a buzzword for a talking point during his election campaign. What would be acceptable is if he explained that he produces his knowledge through intersectionality. If this is the case, then that would be acceptable. We need to ask why it is important that we apply an intersectional method to elections anyway. The word came up in Hillary Clinton's campaign in 2016 as well and some questioned if it was a way to connect with the younger generations. Even if there might be implications among talking about intersectionality during the campaign trail, there are the benefits of new audiences learning about what an intersectional approach and method is, as long as it is explained right. What remains important is if the politician is truly doing work, through policies and beliefs, that is centering any marginalized groups.

When it comes to the 2020 congressional elections it is important that Buttar, and any other politicians referencing intersectionality, understand the paradoxes that come along with the term. Even Buttar himself should ask why he considers himself intersectional, especially when intersectionality cannot be used as an adjective. Though, if we do not use an intersectional approach during political campaigns, we will be leaving out a handful of important debates and topics that must be taken into consideration to ensure change in our world today.

To look at another reading, Patil states, "We need to recenter the notion that there are no local and globals, only locals in relation to various global processes" (From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment Of How Far We've Really Come, pg. 212). This statement is especially interesting regarding something like a congressional election, which is on a local level. Even regarding a presidential election, it is still somewhat local to only the United States. However, there are many other events that are happening across the entire world. Patil's methodology here can and should be directly taken into consideration when it comes to something like a local election. This theory proves to the case study that I have decided to discuss that we need to rethink our local actions to understand that they are only factors in global processes. Patil explains even further, "Wherever the analysis is located, there is far greater focus (about 75 percent) on domestic dynamics as opposed to cross-border dynamics" (From Patriarchy to Intersectionality: A Transnational Feminist Assessment Of How Far We've Really Come, pg. 207). It is important for us to think about the borders of the nation state because otherwise we leave them unexamined in our analysis, just as Buttar and other politicians might be doing as well. It would be detrimental if we only examine these issues at a local level. It would also mean that we are reifying borders, which is problematic as well. Buttar has strong beliefs in regards to immigration, directly tying into border policies. On his website, it states, "Shahid will also oppose border militarization and seek to reverse it, not only in the context of medieval border walls but also the high-tech surveillance nets ... that have spread across the country while being presented as immigration enforcement initiatives." Buttar having this stance on border policies help us view his understanding of the implications that come along with reifying borders. Some implications include not being socially aware of how we all have an impact on one another, individuals only focusing on what is in proximity to them, no understanding of a larger picture and more. It can be assumed that through an intersectional methodology, Buttar would agree with Patil's statement included earlier in understanding global processes.

Overall, Buttar may or may not be successful in regards to the upcoming election; however,

when we apply an intersectional methodology to the campaign process, we are uncovering more important topics that we would not have otherwise. Other politicians might not even touch on the same important aspects like focusing on marginalized groups who have become oppressed from their different identities. Through theories from Dill & Zambrana we understand why it is important that intersectionality happens not only on an individual level but on an institutional and organized one as well. It also helps us understand who we should focus on with the help of intersectionality, which are those who belong to a marginalized group. Although Nash and Patil both have more critical analyses of intersectionality, they still are applicable to the election Buttar is running in, and they help extend how we think of the term intersectionality. Nash focuses on questions that aren't normally asked about the contradictions of intersectionality and who is intersectional, despite intersectionality not being used as an adjective. Patil, on the other hand, focuses on the term in relation to the use of the term patriarchy, but also helps us ponder what it means to have locals working for globals. The case study that I have chosen allows us to understand why an intersectional analysis is important, because without it we would not be able to make changes past the individual level. Although Buttar might have identified as an intersectional feminist, when you take a closer look at his claim, it can be debunked. Through the theories mentioned, we understand Buttar's viewpoints; yet, through the same theories we can comprehend that claiming intersectionality as a characteristic is not appropriate. Intersectionality might be a buzzword floating around pop culture right now, but we must remain inherent to the scholars who have written and thought about it.