

BOOK REVIEW

Intersectional Advocacy: Redrawing Policy Boundaries Around Gender, Race, and Class

By Margaret Perez Brower. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024. 302 pp., \$29.99 Paper.

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Margaret Perez Brower's *Intersectional Advocacy: Redrawing Policy Boundaries Around Gender, Race, and Class* offers a practical guide for advocacy organizations and policymakers to design policies that serve people marginalized across policy spaces in the pursuit of a more equitable and just democracy. Sometimes policies designed to help marginalized people unintentionally exacerbate inequity when issues such as economic inequality, mass incarceration, healthcare, gender-based violence, immigration, and housing insecurity are treated as separate policy domains. This is because the people these policies are meant to support may need support across these issue domains, particularly people who are marginalized along multiple axes, including class, gender, and ethnoracial identity. Perez Brower applies the framework of intersectionality to the practice of “intersectional advocacy,” defined as “advocating for linkages between policies and issues that reflect the experiences of intersectionally marginalized groups positioned between more than one problem area” (pg. 17). She traces the harmful consequences single-issue public policies can have on the people who are multiply marginalized through an historical study of the Violence Against Women Act (VAWA). Using multiple methodological approaches, Perez Brower shows how intersectional advocacy can advance public policies to more fully support the millions of people in the U.S. whose needs are left unmet.

In Chapter 2, Perez Brower discusses how advocacy groups can sometimes participate in the policymaking process in ways that exacerbate inequities. She uses textual analysis of Congressional hearings and newspaper articles covering the VAWA in the 1990s. She shows how advocacy groups involved in the hearings strengthen policy boundaries that ultimately harm the most vulnerable groups experiencing gender-based violence: people marginalized by class, gender, and ethnoracial identity. She illustrates the stakes of the traditional policymaking process that mainstream advocacy groups maintained during the VAWA hearings.

Chapter 3 details how the VAWA improved over 25 years largely due to advocacy organizations adopting an intersectional advocacy approach. Specifically, she provides evidence that select organizations were successful in advocating for policy linkages between the VAWA and policies on welfare, immigration, and tribal rights. Perez Brower provides rich descriptive evidence to show how advocacy groups used the framework of intersectional advocacy to change the VAWA in ways that better represent and serve the intersectionally marginalized survivors of gender-based violence.

While Chapter 3 presents the transformational potential that intersectional advocacy can achieve, Chapter 4 focuses on the processes, strategies, and motivations of advocacy groups to make those transformations at various levels of government. Drawing from a qualitative analysis of 43 interviews with organizational leaders, she shows how intersectional advocacy was applied at the municipal, state, and federal levels. She finds organizational leaders thoughtfully and strategically established policy connections between gender-based violence and unaffordable housing, inaccessible healthcare, and mass incarceration to fully serve those in need.

Yet not every advocacy organization adopts an intersectional advocacy framework. What explains why these groups take on the practice of intersectional advocacy? Chapter 5 details the interworking of these leaders and provides an analysis of their organizational features to identify which organizations practice intersectional advocacy, which ones do not, and the characteristics that distinguish them. The chapter ends with a practical account of how different organizations can adjust their organizations' characteristics to incorporate an intersectional advocacy approach. It is written in a manner accessible to both scholars and practitioners, offering clear guidelines for how organizations can better represent intersectionally marginalized groups.

Advocacy organizations increasingly rely on supporters outside of their organization to help advance their agendas. Chapter 6 details how intersectional advocates mobilize these supporters through two original survey experiments fielded among supporters of advocacy organizations. Each experiment contained information about the organizations' authentic policy platforms but randomized the presentation of the platforms with an intersectional advocacy approach or a traditional, single-issue policy approach. The experimental findings show that people across all identity groups are more mobilized to sign petitions when linked issues are presented together. Organizations may worry that taking an intersectional advocacy approach might limit their support, but these important findings reveal the contrary.

Perez Brower intently marks the book's aim: to aid policymakers and practitioners in designing public policy to serve those most vulnerable to the gaps in single-issue policies. One aspect that lingers, however, is an examination of people who are affected by these policies. Future scholarship engaging with this important book may seek to explore the experiences of the individuals affected and supported by intersectional advocacy.

Intersectional Advocacy focuses on the policymaking landscape around gendered violence, but the conclusion analyzes how this framework can be used in other contexts in the U.S. and beyond. Perez Brower not only offers a compelling theory

for why it is imperative to care about intersectional advocacy but also provides suggestions for how organizations can implement these practices. In addition to its contributions to scholars of inequality, public policy, and political organizations, it is accessible to undergraduate and graduate students, policymakers, and practitioners in advocacy organizations. This book is an important portrayal of the state of American public policy and its potential to be transformed toward justice.

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