The Intersectionality Framework and Its Importance in DEIA Work

Elizabeth R. Cole
Professor, Psychology, Women's and Gender Studies, and Afroamerican and African Studies
University of Michigan
Overview

Background

Why use an intersectionality framework?

Practical recommendations
Background
“Systems of oppression—namely, racism, classism, sexism, and heterosexism—worked together to create a set of social conditions under which [B]lack women and other women of color lived and labored, always in a kind of invisible but ever-present social jeopardy” (Cooper, 2016)
Kimberle Crenshaw

When a Theory Goes Viral
Intersectionality is now everywhere. Is that a good thing?

By Tom Bartlett | MAY 21, 2017

Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw prefers to steer clear of the rancor surrounding the word she coined.

For such an unwieldy word, “intersectionality” sure does get around. You might run into it in a review of Dave Chappelle’s latest comedy special (which was deemed insufficiently intersectional); or in an interview with the singer-songwriter Solange Knowles (who doesn’t just want to hear about intersectionality “but actually feel it”); or in a college-newspaper column about veganism (which informs herbivores that “our struggles are intersectional”). The word has migrated from women’s-studies journals and conference keynotes into everyday conversation, turning what was once highbrow discourse into hashtag chatter.
Intersectionality as a field of study, analytical strategy, and critical praxis centralizes the key ideas that

- race, class, gender, sexualities, and other axes are systems of power
- these systems of power are interconnected and function together to result in inequalities...that shape people’s lives
- activism for social justice must move beyond ... single identity politics to dismantle interconnected structures and systems of oppression and privilege.

Moradi et al., 2020, p. 152
Intersectionality
As an analytic framework

Describes the complexity of social life for all actors.

A way of linking scholarship to social change.

An approach for understanding how multiple identities function in contextualized systems of inequality.

Adapted from Grzanka, 2020, p. 249
Why use an intersectionality framework?
Why use an intersectionality framework?

(Hankivsky, 2016)

Without it, we default to talking about the most privileged groups.

Offers a more complete understanding of social issues, including their causes.

To generate policies that don’t allow the most marginalized to “fall through the cracks.”

To understand similarities and differences, and how they are related to power and inequality. (Cole, 2009)
Broadening the Science of Broadening Participation in STEM Through Critical Mixed Methodologies and Intersectionality Frameworks (Metcalf et al., 2018, p. 588)

Figure 3. Primary reason why women with STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) degrees take jobs outside field by race. Original analysis.

A content analysis of articles published in two major journals in counseling psychology (Shin et al, 2017) found that only 40 articles out of over 6700 published since 1979 met minimal criteria defining intersectionality (<1%). What’s more, the majority of these papers (70%) used intersectionality in ways the researchers coded as “weak,” that is, they investigated experiences of populations representing multiple identities without considering how these locations represented systems of inequality that mutually define and support each other.
Research using an intersectionality framework

(1) attends to the experience and meaning of belonging to multiple social categories simultaneously

(2) includes an examination of power and inequality

(3) attends to social categories as properties of the individual as well as the social context and considers those categories and their significance or salience as potentially fluid and dynamic

(Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016, p. 320).
Practical Recommendations
Pay attention to processes

Systems, context, power

Ask the right questions

May need qualitative data (mixed methods)

Reflexivity

Think about similarities (Cole, 2009)
Analyses

(Del Río.González et al., 2020)

Not multiple main effects
Not only interaction effects
Can be within group or between group (Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016)
Consider alternatives
Which intersections? (Warner, 2008)

Clear rationale

The problem of invisibility

● Marginalized groups: intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008)

● Privileged groups: identities taken for granted

Interdisciplinarity
When the n is small

(Metcalf, et al., 2018)

Use an intersectional approach even when the n is small.

“For far too long in our quantitative work, researchers have prioritized statistical significance over meaning.” (p. 594)
Consider intersectionality at every point in the process (Cole, 2009; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016)
Take aways

- Intersectionality framework is uniquely suited to DEIA work.
- Draws attention to erasures and silences.
- Not one intersectional method
  - Methodological papers are proliferating
- “What makes an analysis intersectional is its adoption of an intersectional way of thinking about the problem of sameness and difference and its relation to power.”
  (Cho et al., 2013, p. 795)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research stage</th>
<th>Who is included within this category?</th>
<th>What role does inequality play?</th>
<th>Where are the similarities?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generation of hypotheses</td>
<td>Is attuned to diversity within categories</td>
<td>Literature review attends to social and historical contexts of inequality</td>
<td>May be exploratory rather than hypothesis testing to discover similarities</td>
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<td>Sampling</td>
<td>Focuses on neglected groups</td>
<td>Category memberships mark groups with unequal access to power and resources</td>
<td>Includes diverse groups connected by common relationships to social and institutional power</td>
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<td>Operationalization</td>
<td>Develops measures from the perspective of the group being studied</td>
<td>If comparative, differences are conceptualized as stemming from structural inequality (upstream) rather than as primarily individual-level differences</td>
<td>Views social categories in terms of individual and institutional practices rather than primarily as characteristics of individuals</td>
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<td>Analysis</td>
<td>Attends to diversity within a group and may be conducted separately for each group studied</td>
<td>Tests for both similarities and differences</td>
<td>Interest is not limited to differences</td>
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<td>Interpretation of findings</td>
<td>No group’s findings are interpreted to represent a universal or normative experience</td>
<td>Differences are interpreted in light of groups’ structural positions</td>
<td>Sensitivity to nuanced variations across groups is maintained even when similarities are identified</td>
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<td>Component 1: Theory</td>
<td>Method A. Categories are framed as person variables</td>
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<td>Method B. Categories are framed as stimulus variables</td>
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<td>Method B. Between-group comparisons</td>
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<td>Method C. Intersectional measurement</td>
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<td>Component 5: Data analytic strategies</td>
<td>Method A. Multiple main effects</td>
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<td>Method F. Person-centered methods</td>
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<td>Component 6: Interpretation and framing</td>
<td>Method A. Attention to power and inequality</td>
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Practical recommendations

Pay attention to processes: systems, contexts, power

Not multiple main effects; not only interaction effects

What are the most meaningful intersections?

Use an intersectional approach even when the n is small.

Considerations at every point in the research process