



# Applying an Intersectionality Approach to Multiple Dimensions of Social Life

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## ABSTRACT

This study aims to identify various research studies on multiple dimensions of social life that employ an intersectionality approach. The approach is a framework that recognizes the multiple dimensions of social identity and how they intersect and influence experiences of discrimination, privilege, and marginalization. Using literature studies from various research databases and employing specific keywords, four dimensions of social life have been identified as dominant themes in research applying the intersectionality approach, namely education, healthcare, politics, and workplace. In the domain of education, the article discusses how an intersectionality approach can help to understand how multiple identities, such as race, gender, and class, intersect to influence educational experiences and outcomes. The article also examines the impact of intersectionality on access to healthcare, highlighting how multiple identities can affect access to care, treatment outcomes, and experiences of discrimination. In politics, the article discusses how an intersectionality approach can

help understand marginalized groups' experiences in political processes and systems. The article also examines how intersectionality can influence workplace experiences and opportunities for advancement. The article argues that an intersectionality approach can help to identify and address systemic inequalities and promote greater equality and diversity in multiple dimensions of social life. The article highlights the importance of applying an intersectionality approach in understanding the complex ways social identities intersect and shape experiences of discrimination, privilege, and marginalization.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, there has been increasing recognition of the importance of intersectionality as a framework for understanding and addressing issues related to social justice (Garcia & Zajicek, 2022). Intersectionality is a concept that was first introduced by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 and has since become an influential theoretical framework in fields such as sociology, feminist studies, critical race theory, and law. Intersectionality refers to the interconnected nature of social categories such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). These categories are not distinct and isolated but rather intersect with one another to produce unique experiences of oppression and privilege. Intersectionality highlights how different forms of oppression and discrimination intersect and overlap with one another to create unique experiences of marginalization and privilege for individuals who occupy more than one social category simultaneously (Crenshaw, 1989). For instance, an individual who is both a woman and a person of color may face unique forms of discrimination that are not experienced by someone who only occupies one of those social categories.

By acknowledging and examining the intersections of various identities, we can better understand how systemic inequalities operate in society and work towards creating more inclusive and equitable environments that value and respect the diversity of all individuals, regardless of their intersectional identities (Cardenas, 2023; Crenshaw, 1989; Symington, 2004). In other words, intersectionality recognizes that our identities are multifaceted and interconnected, and it encourages us to approach issues from a more holistic perspective, which takes into account the complex ways in which our social identities intersect and influence one another. This understanding is crucial for creating a more just and equitable society that acknowledges the unique experiences of individuals with intersecting identities, and addresses the

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structural barriers that they face in their daily lives. As a result, intersectionality has become an important framework for understanding and addressing social inequality in society.

It is imperative that intersectionality continues to be integrated into various aspects of society and serve as a guiding principle for social justice movements in order to create a more just and equitable world that accounts for the experiences of all individuals regardless of their identities. Intersectionality represents a crucial step towards creating a society that is more equitable and just, and its continued integration into social policies, educational curricula, and public discourse is essential for promoting a more intersectional approach to understanding and addressing social inequality. It is also important to recognize that intersectionality is not a panacea for social inequality, and that there are limitations to its application (Collins, 2015; Warner et al., 2020). Researchers often struggle with determining how to operationalize intersectionality and apply it effectively in their research questions and methodologies. Another limitation is the lack of consensus on definitions and central terminology within intersectionality. However, despite its limitations, intersectionality represents an important starting point for creating a more inclusive and equitable society that considers the unique experiences of individuals who face multiple forms of oppression and discrimination. Incorporating intersectionality into policy and practice can help to create more equitable outcomes for marginalized individuals who face multiple forms of oppression.

Intersectionality also represents a crucial tool for creating an inclusive society by illuminating the complex nature of social inequality and highlighting the importance of addressing the interconnected systems of oppression that perpetuate it (Clark & Vissandjée, 2019; Grzanka, 2020). It is crucial that individuals and institutions alike recognize the importance of intersectionality in addressing social inequality, as failing to do so can result in incomplete understandings of the experiences and needs of marginalized individuals, and can perpetuate further discrimination and inequality. In order to fully address social inequality, it is essential that intersectionality be integrated into various aspects of society including education, politics, law, and public policy. This integration can take various forms, such as incorporating intersectional perspectives into curricula in schools and universities, implementing policies that account for the unique experiences of marginalized individuals who face multiple forms of discrimination, and diversifying decision-making spaces in order to ensure that intersectional perspectives are represented.

Based on the importance of intersectionality, this article aims to explore the use of the intersectionality approach applies in multiple dimensions of social life. By using literature study, several dimensions of social life have been identified particularly in relation to education, healthcare, politics, and the workplace. The more specific objective of this article is to examine the benefits of using this approach and what expectations can be obtained from it.

## 2. METHOD

This article aims to explore the application of the intersectionality approach, which is important to highlight the unique experiences of marginalized groups within society. The article was developed using a literature study, with various reference sources sorted based on their relevance and critical aspects. In order to gain a deeper understanding of a particular topic or issue, conducting literature study, specifically traditional review, is an essential step (Hart, 2018). By reviewing and analyzing existing literature on the subject, researchers can identify gaps in knowledge or areas that require further investigation. Additionally, literature study allows researchers to identify common themes and patterns in existing studies and explore different perspectives on the topic.

Furthermore, literature study used in this article involves several stages, including identifying relevant sources, critically evaluating the quality and relevance of those sources, and synthesizing the information gathered from the sources to identify key themes and patterns in existing research. The journal search was specifically chosen through Google Scholar, PubMed and JSTOR, starting from 2019, using the keyword 'intersectionality', 'social life', 'marginalization' and 'identities'. Based on the search, various studies have been identified, especially in four dimensions of social life, that extensively apply an intersectionality approach, namely education, healthcare, politics, and workplace issues. All these topics are based on relevant references and are able to explain how oppression experienced by marginalized people works, especially when analyzed using the intersectionality approach.

## 3. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

### Intersectionality in Education

Intersectionality is a concept that has been increasingly recognized as essential to address the complexity of social identities in different contexts, including education. For instance, intersectionality can be observed in the ways that race and gender interact in educational contexts (Carter Andrews et al., 2019;

Leath et al., 2019). Black girls are more likely to experience both racism and sexism in schools, which can result in negative outcomes such as lower academic achievement and higher rates of disciplinary action or even school dropout. Similarly, students who identify as both LGBTQ and disabled can face unique challenges in accessing educational resources and support systems (Earnshaw et al., 2020). Furthermore, immigrant students who also identify as English language learners may face additional barriers to educational success due to linguistic and cultural differences (Qin & Li, 2020; Yang et al., 2021). These students may experience discrimination or xenophobia, which can lead to feelings of isolation and marginalization.

Based on the various issues of immigrant students above, it is important to adopt an intersectional approach in education that considers the multiple and intersecting identities of students and how they influence their experiences in educational settings and outcomes. This approach requires educators to recognize the complexities of identity and privilege, address systemic inequalities, and create inclusive learning environments that validate students' diverse backgrounds and experiences (Annamma & Winn, 2019; Pham & Philip, 2021).

Furthermore, an intersectional approach to education can involve curriculum and pedagogy that reflect the diversity of students' experiences and histories (Goriss-Hunter et al., 2023; Pennell, 2020). For example, incorporating literature written by authors from diverse backgrounds or teaching history that acknowledges the experiences and contributions of marginalized groups. In addition, an intersectional approach to education can also involve providing targeted support and resources for students who may face multiple challenges due to their intersecting identities.

An intersectional approach will lead to improved academic outcomes and overall well-being for all students, especially those who have historically been marginalized or underserved in educational settings, such as students of color, LGBTQ students, low-income students, and students with disabilities. By embracing intersectionality in education, educational institutions can work towards creating a more equitable and inclusive society by providing students with the tools they need to succeed and thrive in a diverse and ever-changing world.

Overall, intersectionality in education is an essential framework for understanding and addressing the diverse experiences of students. This framework promotes equity and social justice in education by recognizing the unique needs and experiences of students from diverse backgrounds. It is crucial for educational institutions to actively work towards creating an environment that values and respects diversity, acknowledges the experiences of marginalized groups, and fosters inclusive and equitable learning opportunities for all students.

### **Intersectionality in Healthcare**

Intersectionality is a concept that has been increasingly recognized in the field of health as it highlights the interconnections among various social identities and their impact on access to healthcare, health outcomes, and overall well-being. For example, studies have shown that women of color and those from low socioeconomic backgrounds face disparities in breast cancer care due to factors such as lack of access to healthcare services, financial constraints, and language barriers (Dean et al., 2021; Poteat et al., 2021).

Breast cancer is a complex disease that affects millions of women worldwide, and its treatment often involves multiple aspects of healthcare delivery. As such, intersectionality plays a significant role in breast cancer care. This is because breast cancer care involves understanding how different social identities such as race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation and socioeconomic status intersect with each other, and how these intersections can impact the quality of care that patients receive. Therefore, addressing the issue of intersectionality is crucial in ensuring that breast cancer patients receive equitable and patient-centered care, regardless of their social identities. This can be achieved through the development of policies and guidelines that are sensitive to the needs of diverse patient populations, as well as training healthcare providers on cultural competency, communication skills, and the importance of recognizing and addressing implicit biases that may affect patient care. Furthermore, intersectionality can also inform breast cancer research by identifying and addressing gaps in knowledge related to the experiences of marginalized patient populations.

Similarly, a study on HIV/AIDS showed that people of color and members of the LGBTQ community are disproportionately affected by this disease due to multiple forms of discrimination and marginalization, including racism, homophobia, transphobia, and poverty (Algarin et al., 2019; Quinn et al., 2023). Moreover, research on mental health has revealed that individuals who experience discrimination based on their race or ethnicity and sexual orientation are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders compared to those who do not face such forms of discrimination (Huang et al., 2020; Schmitz et al., 2020). These examples demonstrate the importance of considering intersectionality in health,

as it sheds light on the unique experiences and challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities and emphasizes the need for healthcare providers to take into account these factors when designing interventions and providing care.

Furthermore, intersectionality also underscores the importance of addressing social determinants of health, such as poverty and discrimination, which are known to contribute to health inequities and disparities among various groups (Bambra, 2022). Intersectionality is also a crucial lens through which to examine health issues and understand how various social identities intersect to shape experiences of healthcare access and overall health outcomes. It is also important for healthcare providers to be aware of and understand the concept of intersectionality in order to provide equitable care that considers the unique experiences and challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities (Wilson et al., 2019). This can be achieved by implementing culturally sensitive and inclusive practices, promoting diversity in the healthcare workforce, and advocating for policies that address social determinants of health.

In addition, healthcare providers can also collaborate with community organizations and advocacy groups that represent marginalized populations to ensure that their needs are being met and their voices are being heard in healthcare settings. By taking these steps, healthcare providers can work towards reducing health disparities and promoting health equity for all individuals regardless of their race/ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, or any other aspect of their identity. The incorporation of intersectionality in healthcare is essential to ensure that all individuals have access to equitable and quality care regardless of their multiple marginalized identities. It is incumbent upon healthcare providers to prioritize intersectionality in their practice and consider the unique experiences and challenges of individuals with multiple marginalized identities when providing care, as failure to do so can perpetuate health disparities and inequities.

### **Intersectionality in Politics**

Intersectionality has gained significant attention in the field of politics, where policymakers and activists are beginning to recognize the importance of considering intersectionality when designing policies and advocating for social justice (Collins, 2019; Hankivsky & Jordan-Zachery, 2019b; Pullen et al., 2021). In recent years, intersectionality has influenced political discourse and policymaking around the world. For example, in the United States, the Black Lives Matter movement has highlighted how racism intersects with other forms of oppression such as sexism and homophobia to shape the experiences of Black individuals who identify as women or LGBTQ (Özbilgin & Erbil, 2021; Perry, 2020).

Similarly, in Canada, the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls inquiry was launched in 2015 to address the disproportionate rates of violence against Indigenous women and girls, recognizing that their experiences are shaped by a complex web of factors including colonization, racism, sexism, poverty, and marginalization (Conty, 2019; Hansen & Dim, 2019). The inquiry also recognized the importance of considering intersectionality, as Indigenous women, and girls with disabilities or who identify as LGBTQ are even more vulnerable to violence and discrimination. Furthermore, the use of intersectionality in policymaking has been adopted in countries outside North America as well. For instance, in Sweden, the government has adopted an intersectional approach to policymaking since 1994 (Borchorst et al., 2012). This approach recognizes that social identities such as gender, ethnicity, age, and socioeconomic status intersect to shape individuals' experiences of discrimination and disadvantage. As a result, Sweden has implemented policies that address the needs of marginalized communities through an intersectional lens.

Moving forward, it is crucial that intersectionality continues to be integrated into political discourse and policymaking around the world in order to ensure that policies are inclusive and effective in addressing the needs of all members of society, particularly those who are most marginalized and vulnerable. Intersectionality has the potential to create a more equitable and just society, where policies are informed by an understanding of how individuals with multiple marginalized identities experience discrimination and oppression (Hankivsky & Jordan-Zachery, 2019a, 2019b).

Overall, intersectionality has become an important framework in political discourse and policymaking around the world. This trend towards intersectionality in politics reflects a growing understanding that social identities are not siloed, but rather intersect and shape individuals' experiences in complex and interconnected ways. As such, intersectionality has become an essential tool for policymakers and activists to address the complex and interconnected forms of discrimination and oppression that individuals face. This recognition has allowed for more inclusive policies and advocacy efforts that recognize the unique experiences of individuals who occupy multiple marginalized identities. This has led to a more nuanced and inclusive understanding of discrimination and oppression, which recognizes that different individuals experience forms of marginalization in unique ways.

### **Intersectionality in Workplace**

In today's globalized world, it is becoming increasingly important for organizations to recognize and embrace diversity in their workplaces. Intersectionality can play a crucial role in promoting diversity and inclusivity within the workplace by recognizing that employees have multiple identities that interact with one another to shape their experiences and perspectives. For example, a female employee may face different challenges in the workplace than a male employee due to their gender identity (Di Stasio & Larsen, 2020; Nag et al., 2022; Netto et al., 2020). However, if the female employee also belongs to a racial or ethnic minority group, she may face additional barriers and discrimination that can compound with gender-based discrimination to create a unique and complex experience of oppression. To address this issue, an intersectional approach in the workplace can involve implementing policies and practices that acknowledge and accommodate diverse identities. For instance, an organization may offer flexible work hours to accommodate employees who have caregiving responsibilities at home. Additionally, an intersectional approach can involve promoting diversity in recruitment and hiring practices by actively seeking out candidates from underrepresented groups, such as women or ethnic minorities.

Another example of an intersectional approach in the workplace is to provide diversity and inclusion training for all employees. This training can help employees to become aware of their own biases and assumptions, as well as to understand the experiences and perspectives of colleagues who come from different backgrounds and identities (Carter et al., 2020; Onyeador et al., 2021). Implementing an intersectional approach in the workplace can lead to a more diverse and inclusive environment where employees feel valued, respected, and supported to bring their whole selves to work and contribute to the organization's success. Intersectionality can also help organizations to promote a culture of diversity and inclusivity where employees from different backgrounds feel valued and supported. This approach can lead to improved employee morale, productivity, and creativity as individuals from diverse backgrounds bring unique skills and perspectives that can enhance problem-solving and decision-making within the organization.

Taking an intersectional approach in the workplace is crucial for promoting diversity and inclusivity, accommodating diverse identities, and creating a supportive environment that values the contributions of all employees regardless of their gender identity, race, ethnicity, or any other aspect of their identity. It is important for organizations to recognize that individuals may face multiple forms of discrimination and oppression based on their intersecting identities, and an intersectional approach can help to address these complex issues and create a more equitable workplace for all employees. Overall, promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace can have numerous benefits for both employees and organizations. Organizations that prioritize intersectionality can create a more positive work environment, which in turn can lead to improved employee well-being and mental health.

### **Intersectionality Approaches to Equality and Diversity**

Intersectionality has been applied in various fields, including education, healthcare, politics and workplace. Intersectionality has been used in education to understand how students' identities and experiences intersect to shape their academic outcomes. Similarly in healthcare, intersectionality has been used to understand how various forms of oppression can impact access to care and health outcomes. In politics, intersectionality has been applied to understand how different systems of oppression interact to impact political participation and representation. In the workplace, diversity training programs have increasingly incorporated an intersectional approach to address issues related to discrimination and inequality. Based on the findings across multiple dimensions of social life, there are several aspects that can be discussed regarding the intersectionality approach to equality and diversity.

*First*, intersectionality offers a broad scope of analysis to understand the multiple interlocking systems of privilege and oppression from a socio-structural level down to that of individual experience. For example, in education, an intersectional approach can help identify how various social categories, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, and disability status interact to impact a student's academic outcomes. By recognizing these intersections of identity and experience, educators can create more inclusive learning environments that meet the diverse needs of students from different backgrounds.

*Second*, intersectionality can help identify and challenge dominant discourses that perpetuate systemic discrimination and marginalization. There is an opportunity to understand complex systems of oppression that impact individuals and groups in unique ways. By implementing intersectionality into policies and practices in various fields such as healthcare and education systems we can create more inclusive societies where all individuals have equal opportunities to thrive and reach their full potential.

*Third*, intersectionality promotes the idea of acknowledging and valuing all identities, not just a select few. Attending to intersectionality in policy-making and political processes can ensure that all voices

are heard, particularly those of historically oppressed groups such as women and persons who identify as Indigenous or persons of color. However, it is important to note that the use of intersectionality in promoting equity and inclusion must be approached with care to avoid reducing individuals to fixed categories, which can ultimately render other identities invisible.

*Fourth*, an intersectional approach is crucial in promoting social justice. By recognizing how interdependent forms of privilege and oppression shape power relations in society, intersectionality allows for a more comprehensive understanding of social justice issues. For instance, an intersectional approach can provide a more nuanced understanding of how racism intersects with other forms of oppression such as sexism and ableism.

Overall, intersectionality has been a valuable tool for researchers and practitioners in understanding the complex ways that social categories intersect to shape individuals' experiences. Intersectionality has also been criticized for being too complex and difficult to operationalize in practice, as well as potentially reinforcing the idea of fixed social categories and essentialist identities, rather than recognizing the fluidity and complexity of individuals' experiences. Despite these critiques, intersectionality remains a valuable framework for understanding the complex and multifaceted experiences of marginalized individuals, as well as identifying ways to address the systemic inequalities and injustices that they face. Promoting greater equity and inclusion can be achieved through the use of intersectionality.

#### 4. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

In conclusion, intersectionality offers an approach for understanding and addressing the complex nature of oppression and marginalization experienced by individuals with multiple intersecting identities in different contexts. This understanding can inform research, policy, and practice aimed at promoting equality, diversity and inclusion. However, it is important to recognize the limitations and challenges associated with incorporating intersectionality into practical application. One limitation of incorporating intersectionality into practical application is the potential for oversimplification and essentialism. Essentialism refers to the belief that there are inherent and fixed qualities or characteristics that define a person's identity. In the context of intersectionality, essentialism can arise when individuals' experiences and identities are reduced to a static set of characteristics associated with their intersecting identities. Despite its complexity, intersectionality should not be dismissed or disregarded. Rather, efforts should be made to develop and refine methodologies for operationalizing intersectionality in research and practice. One recommendation is that researchers and practitioners should prioritize interdisciplinary collaborations and engage in ongoing dialogue to develop a shared understanding of intersectionality and its implications for addressing social inequalities. Another recommendation is to prioritize the voices and experiences of marginalized individuals in research and policy-making processes. This can be achieved through inclusive and participatory research methods that center the perspectives of those experiencing intersecting forms of marginalization. Finally, it is crucial to continually educate and raise awareness about intersectionality among policymakers, professionals, and the general public. By promoting education and awareness about intersectionality, individuals can develop a more nuanced understanding of the experiences of those with multiple intersecting identities.

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