

Special Issue Intersectionality

FUORI LUOGO

Journal of Sociology of Territory,
Tourism, Technology

Guest Editors

Mariella Nocenzi

Università degli Studi di Roma "Sapienza"

Silvia Fornari

Università degli Studi di Perugia



Editor in chief: Fabio Corbisiero
Editorial manager: Carmine Urcioli

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Intersectionality as Militant Concept

While it would be far-fetched to suggest that everyone, in social sciences communities, is talking about intersectionality, it is certainly an idea in the process of burgeoning. Indeed, the idea of focusing a *Fuori Luogo* special issue on intersectionality emerged from the AIS-Italian Sociological Association end of term conference recently held in Naples.

Why are so many social scientists both attracted to, and repelled by intersectional analyses? In various ways, the articles in this special issue provide insights into this question. Together, they make clear that the concept is popular because it provides a concise shorthand for describing ideas that have, through both scientific and political struggle, come to be accepted in feminist thinking, gender and women's studies scholarship. Long before the term 'intersectionality' was coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, the concept it denotes had been employed in feminist work on how women are simultaneously positioned as women and, for example, as black, working-class, lesbian, or colonial subjects (Brah, Phoenix, 2004). To understand what intersectionality is, and what it has become, one needs to look at Crenshaw's body of work over the past 30 years on race and civil rights. A graduate of Cornell University, Harvard University, and the University of Wisconsin, Crenshaw has focused in much of her research on the concept of critical race theory. As she detailed in an article written for the Baffler in 2017 (<https://thebaffler.com>), critical race theory emerged in the 1980s and '90s among a group of legal scholars in response to what seemed to Crenshaw and her colleagues like a false consensus: that discrimination and racism in the law were irrational, and that once the irrational distortions of bias were removed, the underlying legal and socioeconomic order would revert to a neutral, benign state of impersonally apportioned justice.

The importance of intersectionality for modern society lies in its ability to unveil the complexities of human experiences. Rather than treating identities and forms of discrimination as isolated and one-dimensional, intersectionality invites us to consider individuals in their entirety, recognizing that various identity categories influence each other mutually. This approach challenges us to think critically about how systems of power operate and interact, making it an essential tool for social justice work. The current debate over intersectionality is really three debates: one based on what academics like Crenshaw actually mean by the term, one based on how activists seeking to eliminate disparities between groups have interpreted the term, and a third on how some conservatives are responding to its use by activists.

By acknowledging the multifaceted nature of oppression, intersectionality ensures inclusivity and that no one is marginalized in the fight for equality. It is an analytical tool that we use for the purpose of equality and human rights monitoring to show the distinct forms of harm, abuse, discrimination, and disadvantage experienced by people when multiple categories of social identity interact with each other.

It compels policymakers, activists, and communities to consider the diverse needs and challenges of individuals, fostering a more nuanced understanding of social issues. This, in turn, leads to more effective and inclusive solutions that address the root causes of inequality rather than just its symptoms.

Certain subpopulations under the LGBTQIA+ umbrella are frequently confused while talking about lesbian, gay, transgender (women and men), non-binary, intersex, and queer realities. As a result, by combining all the groups together, certain unique experiences become invisible.

An intersectional lens, on the other hand, can highlight the distinctions between these groups. Social research about that (Hennekam, Dumazert, 2023) showed that the type and intensity of violence faced by bisexual men can differ from that of lesbian, bisexual, and queer women. It also reveals that transgender women can experience far more severe male gender-motivated violence than transgender men do, as is the case in most global contexts.

The application of an intersectional lens in LGBTQIA+ advocacy ensures that no one is left behind. It compels us to examine how societal structures of power—such as patriarchy, white supremacy, and heteronormativity—converge to create overlapping systems of oppression. This understanding is crucial in crafting policies and interventions that address the specific needs of the most vulnerable among us. For example, addressing the epidemic of violence against transgender people, particularly transgender of color, requires not only a condemnation of transphobia but also an active dismantling of racial and gender-based prejudices.

Furthermore, intersectionality fosters solidarity across diverse social movements. By recognizing the shared roots of oppression, individuals and groups can unite in their efforts to achieve justice and equality for all. This solidarity is potent, offering a foundation for collective action that transcends individual identities. When the LGBTQIA+ community stands in alliance with other marginalized groups, they amplify their voices and extend the reach of their advocacy, making a more profound impact on society.

Embracing intersectionality also enriches the narrative of the LGBTQIA+ experience. It allows for a more authentic representation that honors the complexity of people's lives. In media, literature, and public discourse, acknowledging intersecting identities provides a deeper, more comprehensive understanding of the challenges and triumphs within the community. This visibility is vital in combating stereotypes and fostering a culture of empathy and respect.

In summary, the concept of intersectionality is not just an academic theory; it's a vital framework for social change. Its emphasis on the interconnectedness of various forms of oppression and identity categories enriches our understanding of the human condition, paving the way for a more just and compassionate society. As we move forward, embracing intersectionality in our policies, practices, and personal lives will be critical in creating a world where everyone, regardless of their intersecting identities, can thrive. Together, the articles of this special issue make a productive contribution to feminist, gender and LGBTQIA+ studies understandings of intersectionality. However, as militant sociologists, we need ongoing organized political and scientific articulation, revolt, debate, and deliberation - particularly since both no concept and no method is perfect and none can ever accomplish the understanding and explanation of all that needs to be understood and explained within the field of women's studies. We hope this special issue will stimulate further debate.

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