

Intersectionality

Why read this text ...

You may read this text because you are interested in how far discrimination is experienced in a context-dependent way. We try to explain the complex interrelation of suppression structures and explore the function of multiple inequalities. This includes discrimination because of race, gender, class, sexuality, age, etc. and especially their interrelation and intersection.

Historical Context

Looking for the historical roots of the debate on intersectionality, we will encounter the experiences of black women and lesbians who could not identify with the feminism of the Western white middle class. The focus on the generally experienced gender-specific oppression was not sufficient to depict the complex context of racist and sexist exclusion. The much quoted text "Ain't I a Woman?" (1851) by the women's rights activist and former slave Sojourner Truth (1798-1883) referred to this central problem of the women's movement, which was recalled in the 1970s by black feminists in the USA in response to one-dimensional lip service to "global sisterhood". It is fundamental to argue that women are oppressed not only because of their gender, but also because of their skin colour and their class affiliation. The term intersectionality itself was first brought into play in the late 1980s by American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), who used the overlapping and intersecting regimes of power to illustrate the interweaving of social inequalities.

a) Discussion

Intersectionality describes the interaction and overlapping of categories of inequality, which creates new forms and patterns of discrimination. These categories of inequality include gender, "race" / ethnicity, class, nationality, sexuality, age, disability, etc. The category selection is made according to the relevance of the topic in a particular case/context. According to American lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw, gender, race and class are among the main categories with the later addition of sexuality. Intersectionality is used across disciplines. This theory and analysis system "intersectionality" can illustrate socially constructed dimensions of power and domination and various positions of social inequality. The categories should not be understood in an additive way, but have to be considered in their interconnectedness and interrelation (intersection). There can be no ultimate form of discrimination as a result.

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b) Practical Example

An additive notion of discrimination would imply that there was an ultimate discrimination, for example, a black lesbian woman in a wheelchair would be more disadvantaged than a Muslim immigrant woman. On the contrary, the intersectional combination of social categories creates a new form of disadvantage that is more context-dependent. The same form of discrimination does not have the same impact on different lives. How the discrimination is experienced is always context-dependent and can be different and felt differently depending on the situation. On the one hand, this means that specific needs can vary and be different. On the other hands, It also implies that a person can be both a victim and a perpetrator which means a lesbian woman can be discriminated because of her sexual identity but she can have racist prejudices at the same time.

Crenshaw describes as an example a crossroad where traffic comes from all four directions. Like this traffic, discrimination can also be multi-directional. If there is an accident at an intersection, it may have been caused by traffic from one but also the other direction - sometimes even traffic from all directions at the same time. The same applies to a black woman who is injured at a "crossroads"; the cause could be both sexist and racial discrimination." (Crenshaw 1989: 149).

Thinking further

- Which aspects of your identity are of particular importance to you?
- Do categories (e.g. gender, class) have the same meaning for you in every context?
- Which parts of your identity do you find hard to think of (e.g. sexuality) or talk (class) about?
- In terms of which parts of your identity (gender, race, class, age, religion, psychological and physical challenges, etc.) are you privileged or not privileged?
- Are there situations, contexts or groups in which the circumstances shift, in which a privilege becomes discrimination or vice versa?
- Do aspects of your identity all mean the same to you, are you always aware of them?
- Do aspects of your identity all have the same weight in society?

KEY-WORDS/ CROSS-REFERENCES

Reflexivity, Doing School, Multiculturalism, Internalised Racism / Double Consciousness



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Sources

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