

Understanding Intersectionality

IPHU – Gender Stream
9 November 2018

The Concept

- Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s, in the context of the absence of ‘the black woman’ in legal categories in the US (racism: black man; sexism: white woman) – important to take into account the different axes of identities for all individuals.
- Other black feminists such as Patricia Hill Collins (also brought in class)
- Identities as ‘intersecting’; the analogy of “crossroads”
- Sexism disproportionately affects women when other intersecting identities are accounted for.

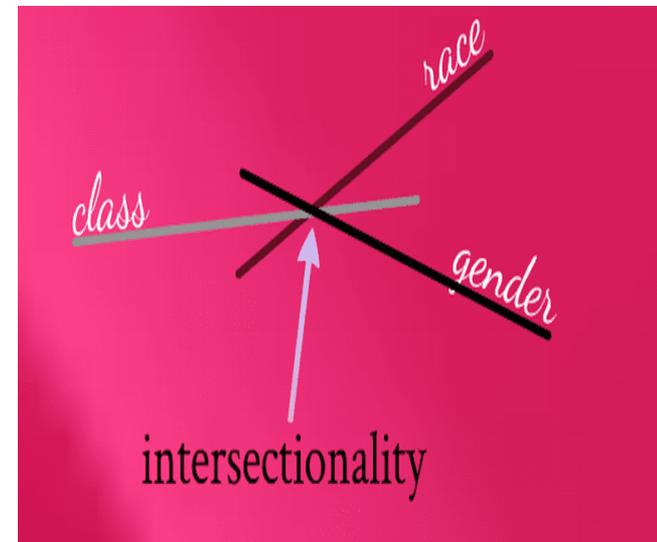
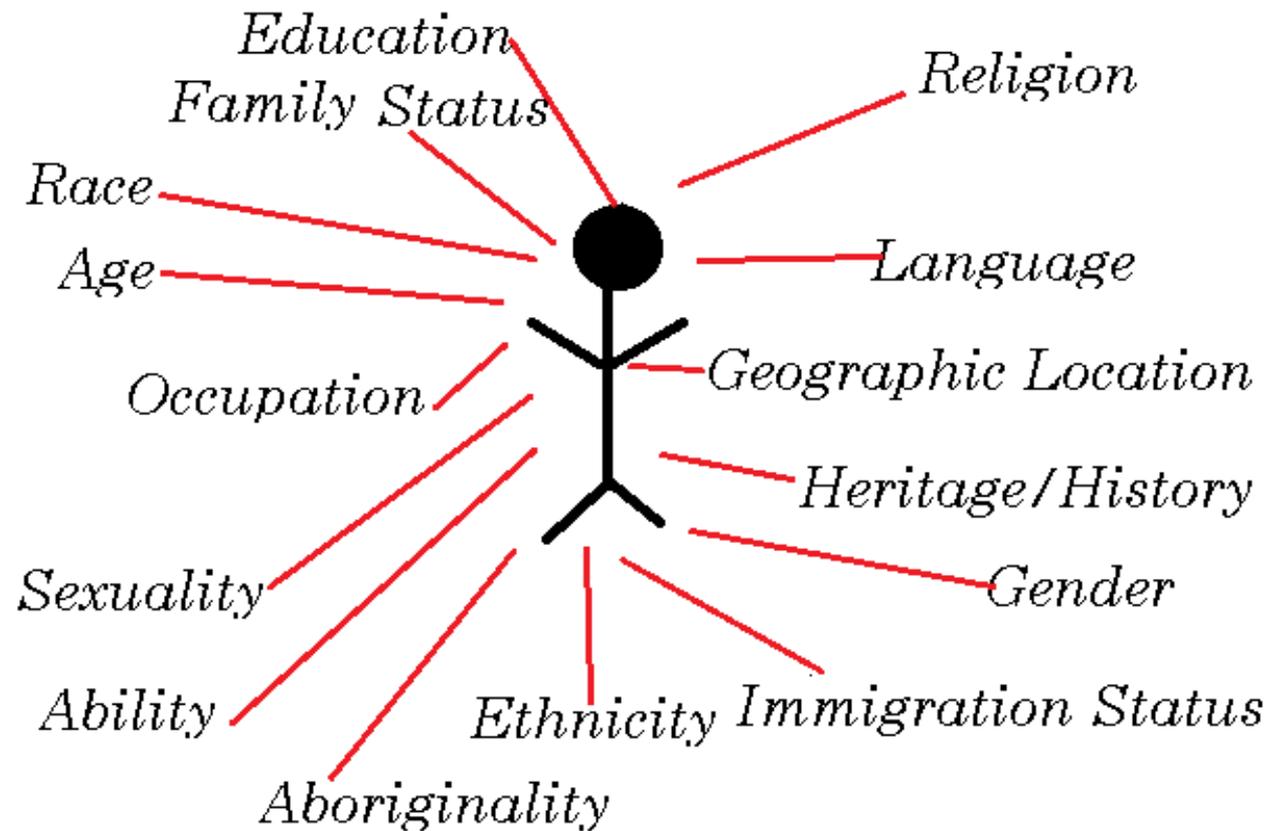


Image Source:

<https://www.thoughtco.com/intersectionality-definition-3026353>



Focus on identity (identities) – highlights not just oppression but privileges as well

Key Components

“Although there are multiple conceptions of intersectionality, there are also a number of identifiable central theoretical tenets including the idea that

- human lives cannot be reduced to single characteristics; human experiences cannot be accurately understood by prioritizing any one single factor or constellation of factors;
- social categories such as race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, and ability are socially constructed, fluid, and flexible;
- and social locations are inseparable and shaped by the interacting and mutually constituting social processes and structures that are influenced by both time and place.

These tenets are intended to provide the basis for a new avenue of enquiry where no category of oppression is automatically considered as the most damaging and where some differences are not continuously highlighted to the exclusion of others.”

“intersectionality seeks to be a **multi-level analysis** that incorporates attention to **power** and social processes at both micro and macro levels through which subject formation occurs... It also leaves open the possibility of simultaneously experiencing the effects of **privilege** and penalty, thus challenging binary thinking which tends to place certain groups in opposition to one another (e.g. women/men; black/white; Aboriginal/non-Aboriginal).”

Hankivsky, Olena (2012), “Women’s health, men’s health, and gender and health: Implications of intersectionality”, *Social Science and Medicine* 74: 1712-1720

Relevance

- “First, it brings attention to important differences within population groups that are often portrayed as relatively homogenous such as women, men, migrants, Indigenous peoples, and visible minorities.⁶ For example, it gives rise to an understanding that a white woman from a lower socioeconomic group might be penalised for her gender and class when accessing health and social care but has the relative advantage of race over a black woman. These different aspects inform each other and are not experienced separately.
- Second, it sheds light on the fact that individual and group inequities are shaped by interactions between multiple sites and levels of power: institutions such as families, governments, laws, and policies; structures of discrimination such as sexism, ableism, and racism; and broader processes of globalisation and neoliberalism. The goal of an intersectionality informed analysis is to map health inequities with more precision and then to chart more effective directions in policy and programme development.”

Kapilashrami, Anuj and Olena Hankivsky (2018), “Intersectionality and why it matters to global health”, *The Lancet*, June 30, 391: 2589-2591.

Some concerns....

- In movements – forging solidarities; potential ruptures
- Does it freeze categories of identity?
‘Intersection’ vs. Co-constitution (Nivedita Menon, Jaya Sharma)
- Using a concept – ‘naming’ a problem vs. mode of ‘solution’ (Mary E. John)