



## Intersectionality

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### What is it?

Since its emergence in US Black feminist thought several decades ago, intersectionality has become an important interdisciplinary concept for understanding social and cultural identity in an increasingly complex global world. More specifically, it refers to how race, class, gender, sexuality, the body, and nation, among other markers of social and cultural difference, come together simultaneously to produce identities and experiences, ranging from privilege to oppression, in a particular society. As such, it posits that people's identities are greater than the sum of individual attributes such as race, class, gender, and so on.

### Who uses the concept?

Originally conceived as a tool for understanding and analyzing the complexities of oppression in the lives of marginalized groups in the United States (e.g., poor women of color), intersectionality is now widely used in the social sciences and humanities. It has been adopted in US legal studies to explore the material realities of discrimination against the abovementioned groups. In communication, intersectionality has become an important concept in culture and communication, feminist studies, and performance studies, among other areas.

### Fit with intercultural dialogue?

By highlighting the centrality of power, history, ideology and politics, intersectionality has become an important concept for intercultural dialogue. Intersectionality suggests that for dialogue between cultural groups to take place, and perhaps be successful, such groups need to recognize how

their identities have historical legacies, power differentials, and political consequences that could aid or impede relations between them. Paying attention to privilege and oppression associated with intersectional identities makes the work of creating intercultural dialogue more demanding but potentially more fulfilling to the parties involved.

### What work remains?

As intersectionality work in communication continues to grow, there is a need to examine the connections between microscopic (e.g., interpersonal relations) and macroscopic forces (e.g., social institutions) in the constitution of identity in cultural, historical, and spatial contexts. In addition, relations of power (i.e., the ways in which race, class, gender, and so on, relate to and constitute each other to produce particular cultural identities) and methodological issues (i.e., how to study intersectionality) remain to be addressed.

### Resources

- Crenshaw, K. (1991). Mapping the margins: Intersectionality, identity politics, and violence against women of color. *Stanford Law Review*, 43, 1241-1299.
- McCall, L. (2005). The complexity of intersectionality. *Signs*, 30(3), 1771-1800.
- Yep, G. A. (2015). Toward thick(er) intersectionalities: Theorizing, researching, and activating the complexities of communication and identities. In K. Sorrells & S. Sekimoto (Eds.), *Globalizing intercultural communication: A reader* (pp. 86-94). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.