Identity and Intersectionality – Changing the Conversation

Stream Proposal for:

10th International Critical Management Conference,

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Organizers:

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Chair

Stefanie Ruel, Athabasca University, Canada

Abstract

The intersectionality literature is based, in part, on the necessity of using identity categories, perpetuating further division and segregation of individuals within the literature. In line with CMS’ goal to question hegemonic discourses that present only one way of doing things, this stream will convene papers that question the necessity of using identity categories within intersectionality scholarship.

Stream Description

When intersectionality was first coined by Crenshaw (1989, 1991) within critical race theory and legislative structures, she intimated that it was simply a term to capture what she had found within the legislative world. She argued, supported by empirical evidence, on the question of how individuals were multiply marginalized and how this marginalization could not be
accounted for in a rational, logico-mathematical fashion. That is, the additive identity constructions - Black + woman + low-income = poor Black woman (Bowleg, 2008) – did not work according to her findings. Since that time, numerous paths have led to challenging and interesting interdisciplinary intersectional studies in areas beyond legislative contexts such as nursing (Van Herk, Smith, & Andrew, 2011), education (Ladson-Billings, 1998; Naples, 2009), LGBT (Bowleg, 2008; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 2015), feminist and postfeminist (Acker, 2006; Davis, 2008), and postcolonial studies (Calás, Ou, & Smircich, 2013). As a result of the work within the generalized theory of identity (Nash, 2008), the intersectionality heuristic is now defined as encompassing various, complex, and shifting interactions of social-identity formations where multiple identities co-exist (Davis, 2008; Zack, 2005). The lens also included power-relations flowing through and among discourses in an individual’s personal and professional life (Davis, 2008; Knudsen, 2006). Varying historical discursive fragments, capturing the intersecting self- and social- identity creations and recreations, are similarly now part of this lens (Ruel, Mills, & Thomas, 2015). Intersectionality scholarship, within this generalized theory of identity, then can assist in revealing key concerns; namely, the existence of a multiplicity of power-relations, of the interlacing of social dynamic categorizations based on gender, race, and ethnicity, and of the exclusionary order that results (Lykke et al., 2014).

There are a number of challenges when writing about and framing an empirical enquiry within intersectionality. Focusing in on one challenge, Lutz (2002) defined fourteen identity categories: race or skin color, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, class, culture, religion, age, able-bodiness, migration or sedentariness, national belonging, geographical location, property ownership, and status in terms of tradition and development. The existence of these identity categories, as an underlying assumption within the intersectionality heuristic, positions the researcher/writer to avoid reification of that which she/he is trying to deconstruct. For example, the characterization of an identity category can be captured via the capitalization of identity categories, such as ‘White’ and ‘Black’, to reflect a notion of “cultural allegiances” (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). Similarly, tables summarizing identity categories are used to bring forward an individual or a group of individuals. Are these approaches the most effective way to capture and identify cultural allegiances? Does this practice allow the participants in empirical research to reveal who they are or who they are becoming?
We argue that the meanings associated with identity categories and the imposed structures attributed via the use of these categories can easily be hijacked within the ever expanding and multi-disciplinary area of gender, postcolonial and diversity studies. Notably, these identity categories can provide a further structural hierarchy that results in further limits and boundaries that must be challenged. The problem remains, however, on how to meld these multiple and at times conflicting intersecting identity categories such that ‘intersectionality thinking’ does not itself hide prejudiced and biased ‘truths’. We understand and acknowledge the difficulty in capturing the lived experiences of people within empirical research (Staunæs, 2003, p. 101). Their very complexity and *hybridity* is in contrast to the “assumptions of determination, clear demarcations, and fixed substance” (Staunæs, 2003, p. 103) offered by using an identity category. We are advocating in this stream for more emphasis on the interaction-seeking process of intersectionality, which gives primary attention to constructionist understandings, and treats the formation of political subjects as contested formations that are continuously changing across contexts and structures (Choo & Ferree, 2010; McCall, 2005; Yuval-Davis, 2006). The emancipatory potential of intersectionality lies in the realization of the continuous process of forming that creates and re-creates identities. As such, intersectionality scholarship and its application should highlight how subjects are in constant oscillation and becoming (Choo & Ferree, 2010).

In line with CMS’ goal to question hegemonic discourses that present only one way of doing things, this stream calls for papers that problematize the presentation and the use of identity categories. This problematization can be in line with, for example but not limited to, Lykke’s (2014) passionate disidentification efforts with respect to intersectionality, or with Bhabha’s (1994, 2000) notion of hybridity. As such, we seek submissions that take a critical stance and that focus on empirical experiences to support the development of the intersectionality lens. These empirical experiences can include business organizations and/or within everyday life and/or within immigration and cultural realities. Particularly, we are looking for papers that advance intersectional inquiry by exposing and exploring the necessity of identity categories. We invite papers that explore, but are not limited to, the following questions:

1. Why does the construction of intersectionality require identity categories?
2. How can cultural identities be brought to the forefront without perpetuating division?
(3) How can we eliminate narrative boundaries imposed via identity categories? What narrative vehicles are available to us, as writers?

(4) Does this identity categorization practice allow protagonists an avenue to reveal their own cultural characterizations and their own acts of becoming?

(5) What other theoretical constructions allow intersectionality to move beyond boundary conditions of identity categories?

(6) Stories of doubt and regret when attempting to apply intersectionality scholarship within an empirical study, and being restricted by discourses of categorization.

(7) How can we shift the direction of intersectionality research to allow us to engage in critical reflexivity with respect to identity categories?

(8) Can we escape the discursiveness of the categorization of identities and the accompanying socio-political and economic marginalization(s)?

Format

Chair Stream Introduction: 5 minutes

Presenters: 10 minutes for each paper, 5 minutes of questions

Concluding Discussion: 10 minutes

Outline of Interest for CMS Conference

While it could be argued that this stream would address the long standing organizational dynamics regarding power, gender, resistance, race, sexuality, identity, space, emotions, etc., this stream actually proposes to address a specific challenge within the contemporary application of the burgeoning intersectionality scholarship. Instead of relying on ‘usual’ or ‘normal’ discourses of identity categories, we are challenging the community to come forth with strategies that can be applied to empirical studies framed within intersectionality. The CMS conference provides an avenue to explore the use and application of identity categories and the removal of boundaries to further improve society and scholarship. We are then contributing directly to CMS’ goal to question hegemonic discourses that present only one way of doing things.

Organizers Biographies

Stefanie Ruel
Stefanie Ruel is a doctoral candidate at Athabasca University, Canada, and is a Senior Mission Manager at the Canadian Space Agency (CSA). Most recently she was the Canadian Increment Payload Manager for Canadian Commander Chris Hadfield’s mission aboard the International Space Station. As a doctoral candidate, her research focus has included a critical examination of intersectionality and diversity in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) context. She has studied and presented the historical discursive practices and power-relations involved in the career progression of women in the STEM organizational context of the U.S. space industry at a number of academic conferences, including Academy of Management and Administrative Sciences Association of Canada. She is currently working on her critical postfeminist dissertation, an intersectionality study focused on the exclusion of STEM-trained women from Canadian space industry’s management positions.

Liela Jamjoom

Liela A. Jamjoom is a doctoral student in Management at the Sobey School of Business, Saint Mary’s University, Canada. Her research interests are in organizational diversity, leadership and gender issues. She is particularly concerned with the advancement of Arab women in the workplace exploring the intersections of religion, gender, and class and how they are interlaced with one another. In August 2013, she joined the faculty of Human Resources at the University of Business and Technology, Saudi Arabia.

Isabella Krysa

Isabella Krysa is Assistant Professor of Management at the Vancouver campus of Fairleigh Dickinson University. Isabella teaches organizational behavior, international management, strategic management and business ethics. She graduated from Saint Mary’s University, Halifax, Canada in December 2015. During her Ph.D., she taught at universities in Canada, Vietnam and China. Her research interests are in organizational history, cross-cultural comparisons on leadership effectiveness, and organizational diversity. In her research on diversity in the workplace, Isabella focuses on identifying systemic barriers of minority populations in the workplace and finding solutions to create inclusive organizations.
References


