

Original Article

Freedom and Intersectionality in the Contemporary Age

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Received Date: 04 April 2025

Revised Date: 25 April 2025

Accepted Date: 29 April 2025

Published Date: 08 May 2025

Abstract: This article explores the far-reaching impact of intersectionality on contemporary social justice movements and its development from a theoretical tool to an operational method for campaigning and policymaking. The idea of intersectionality began with Kimberlé Crenshaw's call for a critique of single-axis frameworks for discrimination, and today, it has transformed the tactics and agendas of movements like Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and environmental justice alliances. By making visible the interconnections among race, gender, class, sexuality, and other social identities, intersectionality has allowed for more expansive coalition work and sophisticated advocacy on behalf of marginalized peoples. The essay examines the transformative possibilities as well as the challenges of putting intersectional praxis into action, including co-optation, internal conflict, and the danger of institutional water-down. Ultimately, the research maintains that intersectionality is a tool for more balanced and inclusive measures of social justice, challenging social movements and policymakers to reckon with the specificity of intersecting oppressions as they seek revolutionary change.

Keywords: Intersectionality, Freedom, Contemporary age, LGBTQ, Wavering Politics.

I. INTRODUCTION

In the fast-changing world of today, intersectionality and freedom are now at the top of discussions around identity, justice, and equality. Through the challenges of the 21st century, it is crucial to grasp how these intersect so that we can build inclusive, forward-thinking societies.

Freedom, much touted as the foundation of contemporary democracies, is conventionally understood as the freedom of individuals to act, speak, and think without excessive restraint. In the modern era, however, the definition of freedom is more and more challenged through the prism of intersectionality—a framework that acknowledges how intersecting identities and systems of oppression condition people's lived realities and access to freedom.

A) The Emergence of Intersectionality

The term intersectionality was originally coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw back in 1989 to discuss how various social classifications such as race, gender, and class cross over with one another and form particular types of discrimination as well as privilege[1]. Crenshaw's initial work highlighted the ways in which the lives of Black women, say, could not be accounted for by means of a prism of race or a prism of gender alone, but at their confluence when they generated unique forms of disprivilege. Since then, this paradigm has expanded to other axes of identity, such as disability, sexuality, age, and religion, pointing out that freedom is not experienced uniformly by all[2].

B) Intersectionality and the Limits of Freedom

Intersectionality shows that the promise of freedom is frequently unevenly allocated. For instance:

- Women of color can experience both racism and sexism, leading to additive obstacles to complete engagement in society.
- LGBTQ+ individuals from marginalized racial or religious groups face distinctive types of discrimination not completely covered by movements exclusively targeting sexual orientation or gender identity.
- Dalit women in South Asia are subject to both caste-based and gender-based oppression, showing how dominant feminist or anti-caste movements tend to neglect those with intersecting marginalized identities[1].

These examples highlight that freedom cannot be conceptualized as one or a uniform experience but is influenced by the interaction of diverse social forces and identities.

Freedom in the modern era cannot be fully attained without an intersectional model. For example, struggling for women's rights without striving against racial inequality or LGBTQ+ prejudice limits the freedom of a privileged group. The experience of freedom for a white cis woman differs from that of a Black trans woman, although both identify as women.



Laws, policies, and social institutions must be reflective of this interdependence. Education, health, labor rights, and freedom of expression must be understood in terms of how various identities intersect with power systems.

C) Global Feminist Movements and Intersectionality

Contemporary feminist activism more and more employs intersectional methods to contend with the diversities of women's lives on a worldwide basis. The universal approach recognizes colonial pasts, economic inequalities, and cultural scripts intersect with gender to produce diverse experiences of domination and struggle. Latin American feminists, for instance, discuss the ways colonial inheritance shapes gendered and racialized hierarchies, while Dalit feminists in India emphasize responding to caste alongside gender[3].

With the emergence of social media and online activism, the oppressed voices have found new platforms to narrate their experiences and demand justice. Activism, such as #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and #DisabilityRights, has demonstrated how intersectional activism can bring forth layers of exclusion that are not emphasized in the mainstream narratives. Yet, digital freedom is also threatened. Censorship, algorithmic bias, and online harassment disproportionately impact people with intersecting marginalized identities, reminding us that digital spaces are not free or equal by nature.

D) Intersectionality as a Social Justice Tool

Intersectionality is not just an analytical tool but also a call to action. It calls for coalition-building along identity lines and disrupts the simplistic hierarchies of oppression. By recognizing the complexity of people's identities, intersectional activism aims to build more inclusive and effective methods of gaining freedom and equality[2,3].

"Intersectionality is a practice and an orientation, a heuristic and analytical framework... The expanded usage of the term today attests to its ability to pay attention to what black feminist theorist Patricia Hill Collins calls the 'interdependent phenomena' of oppressions, whether race-, gender-, class-, sexuality-, disability-, nationality-, or other social category-based." [2]

Even with increasing awareness, intersectionality is more frequently reduced to a buzzword than being put into practice meaningfully. Policymakers, educators, and organizations need to be committed to deeper structural shifts. Representation is not sufficient—there needs to be equity in voice, opportunity, and decision-making.

Real freedom in the modern era is not obtained when one person is freed and another is not. It is attained only when all individuals, no matter how their identities intersect, can live without fear, prejudice, or exclusion.

Intersectionality began as a critique of feminist and civil rights movements that tended to omit the experiences of Black women. Crenshaw's work revealed how antidiscrimination laws often were unable to apply to cases of intersecting race and gender discrimination, like hiring policies that detrimentally affected Black women in particular. This structure grew to cover other axes of identity, like class, sexuality, and disability, and it claimed that systems of oppression like racism, sexism, and capitalism are interrelated instead of compartmentalized.

By the 21st century, intersectionality had developed from a scholarly concept to a call to action among activists. It gave language to the shortcomings of single-issue politics and to the need to combat interlocking oppressions. As an example, the Combahee River Collective's 1977 statement, which stressed that "the major systems of oppression are interlocking," did early work toward this strategy. Contemporary movements now openly disavow hierarchies of oppression, understanding that fighting racism, say, necessarily involves fighting sexism, homophobia, and economic exploitation[4].

E) Modern Challenges: Neoliberalism and Libertarian Authoritarianism

The modern political landscape, characterized by neoliberalism and what some theorists refer to as "libertarian authoritarianism," makes it difficult to pursue freedom. Such a landscape tends to redefine freedom in language that safeguards the interests of the powerful to continue sexism, racism, and other oppressions while eroding public institutions and democratic engagement[2]. Under such circumstances, intersectional analysis is essential to reveal how freedom can be hijacked to legitimate exclusion and inequality.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's articulation of the intersectionality principle in 1989 has qualitatively shifted modern social justice movements by decrying one-dimensional models of oppression and promoting instead a more inclusive model of multiply embedded identities. By highlighting intersections between race, gender, class, sexuality, disability, and other social axes that create differential forms of exclusion, intersectionality has become central to inclusive activist discourses. This article considers its impact on movements such as Black Lives Matter, #MeToo, and climate justice and its impact on policy, coalition politics, and the critique of structural injustices.

F) Intersectionality in Practice: Case Studies of Contemporary Movements

a. Black Lives Matter and Coalition-Building

The Black Lives Matter movement is a stellar example of intersectionality in practice. Its organizational principles explicitly enumerate the value of Black queer, trans, disabled, and undocumented lives, pushing against restrictive conceptions of Blackness[4]. By putting those on the margins of the Black community in the forefront, BLM addresses systemic police brutality as inseparable from transphobia, economic disenfranchisement, and immigration policy. This has enabled coalitions with LGBTQ+ groups, disability rights organizations, and labor unions, expanding its base.

b. #MeToo and the Paradox of Virality

The #MeToo campaign illustrates both the potential and limits of intersectionality in online activism. Tarana Burke's original "Me Too" campaign, started in 2006, involved survivors of sexual violence in communities of color. However, the viral revival of the movement in 2017 had a tendency to highlight white women's narratives at the expense of Black and queer survivors. This tension highlights how even an intersectional movement can be hijacked by majoritarian groups. Yet community-based organizations like Survivors' Agenda have reclaimed the framework, advocating policies that respond to the specific vulnerabilities of low-income women of color and trans communities[8].

c. Climate Justice and Interlocking Vulnerabilities

Intersectionality has also influenced climate activism by exposing how environmental degradation disproportionately harms marginalized groups. Poor Black communities along American coastlines, for instance, are more vulnerable to flooding from centuries of redlining and infrastructural neglect. Indigenous women in areas of extraction also experience gendered violence along with environmental displacement. Climate activism, like the Climate Justice Alliance, now prioritizes leadership from these communities, framing climate action as inseparable from racial and economic justice[7].

d. Challenges to Enacting Intersectional Praxis

While intersectionality has strengthened social justice movements, putting intersectionality into practice is of enormous difficulty. Organizations often neglect to balance merging different voices with the need for collective demands. For example, migrant women's organizations in Europe have criticized mainstream feminist movements for prioritizing concerns like pay equity over immigration reform, upholding marginalization within activist spaces[6]. In addition, neoliberal institutions can hijack intersectional rhetoric but avoid structural inequalities, for instance, corporate diversity initiatives that emphasize representation over structural transformation[7].

The tension between identity-focused and universalist strategies complicates intersectional praxis even further. Movements must choose between highlighting specific experiences (e.g., police brutality against Black trans women) or advocating for sweeping reforms (e.g., completely defunding the police). The Movement for Black Lives has resolved this tension by marrying particular campaigns, such as justice for Tony McDade, a Black trans man killed by police, with expansive policy platforms like the BREATHE Act.

e. Policy and Institutionalization: From Theory to Structural Change

Intersectionality has increasingly shaped policymaking, especially for public health and human rights. The Intersectionality Policymaking Toolkit, created by maternal and child health advocates, offers guidelines for developing policies that respond to intersecting inequities. For instance, breastfeeding policies now acknowledge how racial healthcare inequities in access, workplace discrimination, and economic instability work against Black and Indigenous mothers. Similarly, the UN's Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination has integrated intersectionality into its assessments, urging states to consider how migration status and gender compound racial discrimination[7].

Yet institutional uptake threatens to water down intersectionality's radical origins. Institutionalizing the framework in bureaucracies tends to result in tokenistic consultation rather than meaningful power-sharing with oppressed communities. Implementation needs to put grassroots leadership at its center, as evidenced by the Green New Deal Network, which allies with environmental justice groups led by people of color to inform climate legislation.

II. FUTURE IMPLICATIONS

Better-Informed and More Inclusive Policy Design: With intersectionality becoming increasingly key to social justice dialogue, policies in the future will be less likely to take the "one-size-fits-all" strategy, instead reflecting the multifaceted realities that exist for people at the intersections of various identities (e.g., gender, race, class, and disability). This will yield more equal outcomes and mitigate the danger of neglecting the most marginalized.

Cross-Sectoral Collaboration: Intersectional responses will promote more cooperation across various policy areas (health, education, and housing, for instance), with a view to making action plans responsive to intersecting needs (such as integrating the perspectives of LGBTI homeless individuals in anti-poverty and anti-discrimination policies).

Empowering Marginalized Groups: Through the prioritization of the experiences and voices of the most oppressed, intersectionality can empower marginalized groups, cultivate solidarity between movements, and develop stronger and more inclusive societies.

International Policy Salience: Intersectionality is now increasingly acknowledged within international legal policy and is essential to respond to global issues such as climate change and technological shocks, which negatively affect marginalized communities.

Mainstream Intersectionality Throughout Policy Cycles: Integrate intersectional analysis throughout all phases of policymaking-problem definition, diagnosis, design, implementation, and evaluation-to guarantee that policies respond to the intersecting and layered nature of social injustices.

Create Intersectionality-Based Policy Tools: Leverage frameworks and toolkits (e.g., the Intersectionality Policymaking Toolkit) to assist policymakers in recognizing and responding to the unique needs of various populations, particularly in health, education, and economic opportunity.

Disaggregate Data and Targeted Interventions: Gather and analyze data that capture the multiple identities and experiences of individuals (e.g., by race, gender, socioeconomic status, and migration status). Utilize this data to create targeted interventions that respond to the specific barriers experienced by those at the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination.

Encourage Cross-Movement and Interdepartmental Collaboration: Enable coordination between government agencies and social movements to break down silos and ensure intersectional concerns are addressed comprehensively rather than in isolation.

Centralize Marginalized Voices in Policymaking: Make sure the most affected by intersecting sources of oppression are given effective roles in policymaking, implementation, and evaluation. This means calling for leadership by marginalized communities and prioritizing their voices in setting agendas.

Continuing Education and Training: Provide continuing education and training to policymakers, practitioners, and advocates on intersectional analysis and its use to prevent tokenism and ensure sustained commitment to equity.

Monitor, Evaluate, and Adapt: Adopt arrangements for regular monitoring and assessment of intersectionality-driven policies so they can be modified and refined by feedback from concerned communities and advancing evidence. Following these recommendations, future policy interventions will be better able to confront the complexity of social disadvantage, promote social justice, and build societies that actually leave no one behind.

III. CONCLUSION

In the modern era, the intersectional perspective is a necessary one for comprehending and promoting freedom. It shows that true liberty is not merely the lack of restraint but the existence of conditions under which all people, regardless of their intersecting identities, fully engage in society. As social justice movements continue to develop, intersectionality is an essential tool for envisioning and implementing a more just and truly free world. As we face mounting inequalities and more complex social issues, we need to ask ourselves: Are we prepared to go beyond Band-Aid solutions and really put at the forefront the voices of those who exist at the points of intersection of oppression? It is time for policymakers, activists, and ordinary citizens to call for more than symbolic gestures-let us pledge intersectional action that tears down systemic barriers and builds justice for all, not just a privileged few. The future of social change hangs in the balance of our willingness to confront complexity and act with authentic solidarity.

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