Unveiling Intersectionality: Identity and Difference in a Female Immigrant's Narrative

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Abstract   The "intersectionality" paradigm within feminist theory posits that several dimensions of women's identities, including but not limited to age, race, socioeconomic status, nationality, and sexual orientation, indeed intersect and interact with one another. The aforementioned factors encompass age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and nationality. When conducting a thorough investigation of intersectionality, the complexities arise due to the numerous contradictions that exist across various perspectives. Concrete inquiries such as "who determines the decision-making process," "when does it occur," and "which distinctions are deemed essential in specific concepts and which are not," may elicit an unsettling silence. The purpose of this study is to examine the correlation between diversity and identity by examining a narrative life interview conducted with a female immigrant residing in Vienna. This analysis aims to emphasise certain aspects of the individual's identifications and differentiations, while also considering their temporal and spatial context. It achieves this by focusing on the individual's self-presentation and the various categories of difference that they embody, including gender, social class, and ethnicity. This analysis centres on the manner in which she presents herself and the various types of distinction that she exhibits. The objective of this article is to make a contribution to the continuing discourse surrounding the dynamic characteristics of subjectivities and the intricate relationship between power and influence.

How to Cite

Introduction

During the mid-1970s, African American feminists in the United States commenced openly scrutinising the political ideology espoused by their white feminist counterparts. The main aim of their efforts was to address the marginalisation of women of African origin and women from Third World nations within the prevailing feminist ideology, which failed to acknowledge the significance of race and racism in their experiences. The ideology of feminism, in its implicit reliance on a standardised notion of womanhood, tended to disregard gender distinctions while highlighting the dichotomy between men and women. This resulted in certain consequences.

Squires (1999) asserts that within the realm of political theory, the study of gender has gradually shifted away from perceiving gender as a strictly binary construct, a trend that has been observed since the mid-1980s. In alternative terms, the focus is no longer solely centred around the binary distinction between male and female. The research has seen a shift in focus, moving away from the traditional binary gender paradigm and towards a critical reevaluation of the disparities and injustices that impact women. Within the realm of feminist theory, this particular line of thinking is commonly referred to as the "diversity approach."The diversity approach's normative framework facilitates a dynamic plurality among women. Based on the framework being discussed, it can be argued that the absence of homogeneity within any given group can be attributed to the presence of diverse individual traits among its members. The utilisation of labels to distinguish various markers, including but not limited to gender, colour, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, nationality, religion, and age, results in overlapping categorizations. The term "intersectionality" was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, an American attorney, in 1989. It refers to the concept of various intersecting markers of difference converging and interacting, commonly referred to as "intersections" (Crenshaw, 1989; Higginbotham, 1992; King, 1988; Moore, 1994; Schein and Strasser, 1997). This phenomenon has also been explored by other scholars (Higginbotham, 1992; King, 1988; Moore, 1994; Schein and Strasser, 1997). The overwhelming majority of elaborations put out a subtle plea for the adoption of an inclusive methodology in the study of minority groups. This paradigm incorporates an examination of power dynamics and injustices encountered by minority groups, while also considering their unique distinctions.

Two prominent strengths of this approach are its emphasis on "otherness" and its avoidance of essentialized, fixed, or homogenised notions about identity. The

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aforementioned perspective diverges from the central emphasis of feminist theory and analysis, which primarily centres on the sex-gender disparity, also referred to as "genderism." Consequently, it tends to downplay the significance of other types of discrimination that affect women.

When applied to empirical research, intersectionality exposes certain limitations. These limitations can be identified as follows: firstly, the implications of intersectionality for empirical analysis seem to provide unresolved challenges; secondly, they entail a rigid understanding of differences. This phenomenon can be attributed to the presence of a considerable multitude of distinctions, potentially bordering on an infinite quantity. There will perpetually exist disparities that are either excessively substantial or excessively minute to be taken into account.

Determining whether a woman has experienced discrimination based on factors other than her gender, such as having a foreign accent, might pose subjective challenges. The challenge inherent in addressing intersectionality lies in the inherent complexity of disentangling and untangling the various dimensions of difference.

Based on this perspective, it is argued that gender, racial, and economic inequalities intersect and exacerbate each other, resulting in a compounding effect rather than a mere addition. As asserted by King (1988), the oppression experienced by a Black woman is not simply the sum of being both Black and a woman, but rather a multiplicative experience of oppression.

The use of the term "and so on" is considered a potential limitation in intersectional approaches, as discussed by Butler (1990: 143) and Klinger (1995: 813). This phenomenon arises from the infinite nature of the list of distinctions. Feminist identity theories often encompass a comprehensive examination of several intersecting factors such as race, gender, sexual orientation, class, and physical appearance, among others. However, it is not uncommon for these theories to conclude with an abrupt and perhaps inelegant "etc." According to Butler, this assertion holds true. When endeavouring to comprehend a certain topic, these approaches are inherently insufficient as adjectives follow a horizontal path rather than a vertical one. However, this failure imparts a significant lesson regarding the potential political traction that can be derived from the commonly employed exasperated expressions such as "etc." that often conclude sentences of this nature. According to Butler (1990), on page 143 of her book,

The notion that the diversity of human characteristics can manifest in an unlimited array of forms represents a clear limitation of intersectional theory. The omission of certain questions in published works introduces complexity to the process, specifically pertaining to the selection of accepted distinctions and the exclusion of others. This raises inquiries regarding the individuals responsible for making these selections, the timing of such decisions, and the underlying motivations behind them. Furthermore, it is recommended to consult the work of Klinger (1995).

Given the aforementioned concerns, the objective of this study is to provide elucidation on those matters. However, a consensus over the further actions to be undertaken has not been reached. In a recent scholarly discourse, Leslie McCall (2005) put out three suggested approaches for the examination of the intricate dynamics of intersectionality:

In quantitative research, the application of a "categorical approach" can be employed to examine and substantiate the connections between various categories. One example of a beneficial approach is to construct models that analyse pay indicators and income discrepancies among certain groups (McCall, 2005: 1790). The issue of infinite complexity can be effectively addressed through the utilisation of the categorical approach, which involves the practical implementation of predetermined categories to determine the point at which the exhaustive list will conclude. Given that the objectives of the article do not encompass this particular approach, further investigation into it will not be pursued.

In the second half of her work, McCall (2005) presents supplementary details pertaining to the "anti-categorical" approach (p. 1779). McCall (2005) identifies the concept of a "anti-categorical critique of categorization," which might be interpreted as a broader postmodern critique of categorization. In alternative terms, following the advent of postmodern deconstructionism, gender emerges as an outcome of specific discourses, hence rendering the gender category devoid of utility. The concept of "race," as well as several other related notions, follows a similar pattern. The artificiality of social categories and their intersections has been evidenced in various academic disciplines. Anthropology, for instance, has utilised new ethnography to demonstrate this phenomenon. Similarly, historical science has employed genealogy to explore the constructed nature of social categories. Furthermore, the application of deconstruction in literary analysis has revealed the artificiality of these categories. In

each of these instances, the conclusions drawn highlight the inherent artificiality of social categories and their intersections.

My research interests deviate from the anti-categorical approach since I aim to recognise the social realities that underlie intersectionality, while simultaneously exploring its relationship with empirical data. The anti-categorical approach diverges from the conventional approach. While acknowledging the value of classification, I also aspire to exercise the autonomy to question its boundaries. Consequently, creating a harmonious equilibrium between these two concepts appears to be a complex endeavour.

The mathematical expression "247-87" represents the subtraction operation between the numbers 247 and In his work, Ludvig explores the various distinctions made for women in society.

The subsequent content delineates three objections posed by Black feminists, which, in my subjective assessment, bear striking resemblance to one another. Black feminists acknowledge the challenges inherent in employing categorizations strategically to accomplish political objectives, notwithstanding their reservations about the reliability of such categorizations. Furthermore, it is important to note that feminists of colour, although not necessarily endorsing categorizations, do not disregard the social realities that they encounter in their everyday lives. Despite being constructed through specific discourses, gender and sexuality have tangible impacts on individuals' daily lives (Maihofer, 1995). This phenomenon applies to individuals of both genders.

Racism is a tangible phenomena that arises from routine interpersonal interactions. Similar to the manner in which "race" is perceived as a human construct rather than an inherent biological reality, racism is understood as a social categorization made by humans.

According to McCall (2005: 1781), the utilisation of "personal narratives" and "single group studies" might effectively facilitate the examination of the intricate interplay between specific features within many categories and individuals occupying distinct social positions. According to McCall, the third plan can be classified as a "intra-categorical approach" as it does not attempt to address the intricacies of all potential dimensions inside all potential categories. McCall (2005) posits that the term "narrative" encompasses various forms, including but not limited to literary, historical, discursive, and autobiographical narratives.

Examining self-presentation proved to be an effective approach in exploring the variations and intersections of individual perspectives within interpersonal relationships, encompassing both intrapersonal dynamics and interactions with others. Wortham (2001) asserts that the speaker in a personal narrative consistently engages in discourse with others. In the subsequent sections, I will elaborate on my methodology before employing it to examine the manner in which a particular woman situates herself within a given context.

The narrative connection between identity and difference is a topic of academic interest.

In essence, the inquiry at hand pertains to the interplay between identities and categories of difference inside a narrative. According to Roberts (2002: 177), there exists a distinction between a narrative and a tale as asserted by certain authors. Specifically, a tale is concerned with the examination of study techniques, whereas a narrative focuses on the "story" relayed by the participants.

In the context of our discussion, I will employ the terms narrative, narration, and story to denote the oral account that is subsequently transcribed, encompassing an individual's unrestrained articulation of interrelated events or experiences.

In an illustrative case study, Wortham (2001: 76ff.) examines a single individual's narrative, focusing on an unstructured interview that provides minimal guidance and culminates in a dialogue between the interviewer and the interviewee. The primary objective of Wortham's analysis is to ascertain the manner in which the narrator situates herself in relation to the interviewer and the two distinct selves that are presented: the passive, vulnerable self and the active, assertive self. The primary objective of this analysis is to examine the construction of identity and differentiation categories inside an individual's narrative events, rather than exploring how these categories reinforce their self-representations. The reference provided is to article 248 13(3) in the European Journal of Women's Studies. Various factors contribute to the differentiation of individuals, including class, gender, nationality, race, culture, and age.

The utilisation of narrative effectively elucidates subjectivity and the various dimensions of identification as perceived through the lens of a particular individual. The concept of subjectivity becomes prominence in the construction of identity as individuals start to acknowledge the manner in which they see and interpret their connection with the external environment. The perception, cognition, and discourse

surrounding an event are subject to variation based on an individual's cultural background, personal affiliations, and distinctions made by the individual.

From this perspective, the concepts of "identity" and "difference" are interrelated and mutually constitutive. One significant factor contributing to this phenomenon is the organisation of difference based on binary oppositions, such as nature versus society, male versus female, black versus white, raw versus cooked, and so forth (see to de Saussure [1974] and Lévi-Strauss [1966] for further elucidation). The neutrality of dichotomies is subject to scrutiny since they have been employed to establish and reinforce specific interpretations that have historically perpetuated power dynamics and inequities (Derrida, 1979).

In alternative terms, the construction of meanings relies on the establishment of binary oppositions rooted in differentiation. The process of identity formation involves the recognition and delineation of distinctions among various modes of categorization. Differences can be employed to illustrate a pessimistic perspective from an external standpoint, or alternatively, they can be utilised to foster constructive notions and self-representations within an individual. This encompasses the act of ridiculing individuals and collectives based on their differences, hence potentially fostering xenophobia, sexism, racism, and various other societal issues.

The concept of identity holds significant appeal due to its prominent role in the ongoing discourse surrounding the interplay between structure and agency within social theory (Giddens, 1971, 1984). The paramount concern lies in the extent to which individuals are influenced by external classification systems that are intended to preexist and delineate them. To what extent do the interconnections among individual players influence and delineate their collective reality? These two divergent positions are incompatible. If an individual's identity is influenced by societal frameworks, they may encounter limitations in their ability to modify these frameworks. Conversely, individuals possessing agency in constructing and moulding their own identity may potentially exert influence over those systems. According to the second perspective, an individual's ability to define their personality is contingent upon their possession of social, cultural, and economic capital, as posited by Bourdieu (1976, 1983). Bourdieu has established a correlation between the concept of "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1976: 165) and the domains of structure and action. Individuals engage in various professional domains, and architectural structures possess the ability to

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influence and be influenced by individuals within these domains. The available resources determine the range of actions they are capable of undertaking.

The availability of Women's Distinctions, Ludvig? 249 contributes to the enhancement of their reputation within the sector and among the general public.

From this perspective, my research primarily focuses on the enduring contradiction between the malleability of individuals' conceptions of identity and subjectivity and the constraining influence of political structures on these notions. This leads to the final issue regarding the Austrian example: what insights may be gained about the political and social structures in Austria based on the speaker's self-perception and ideological position?

Austria self-identifies as a nation with a stance against immigration, and its legislative framework incorporates specific regulations and limitations pertaining to individuals from non-European Union (EU) nations. It is imperative to emphasise the significance of considering power dynamics when discussing difference and its intersection with power (Phoenix, 1998).

The narrative might serve as a means to illustrate the individual's comprehension of the rule and their corresponding behaviours in their everyday existence. Thus, it is possible to situate perceptions within an Austrian framework. In conclusion, the primary focus of this study is to address the practical inquiry pertaining to analysis, namely:

The interview account upon which this composition is predicated explores several concepts pertaining to identity, difference, and belonging.

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