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Power, privilege and justice: intersectionality as human rights?

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ABSTRACT

How can we best connect and understand issues of power, privilege and justice in a human rights framework? One approach is to explicitly position intersectionality as a theoretical lens that can assist a critical understanding of the connections between these concepts and realities. The paper does this through an examination of the situation in Scotland via Show Racism the Red Card, an anti-racist non-governmental organisation that works with school-age children to raise awareness on the power of prejudice and discrimination in everyday, interrelated lives. It is shown that despite its complexities, intersectionality can work both conceptually and methodologically in complex environments such as classrooms. The realisation of rights is foregrounded and an appreciation of context, politics, social divisions and outcomes vis-à-vis inclusive equalities needs to be fully grasped. The case study of Show Racism the Red Card situates the nuances of intersectionality as both theory and method, illustrating the need for human rights to be mindful of past, present and future. Overall, it is argued that the example of Scotland offers opportunities to witness a critique of how power, privilege and justice are connected and challenged in a human rights context and how rights can be realised in everyday settings.

KEYWORDS

Intersectionality; Scotland; human rights; show racism the red card; education

Introduction

This paper critically examines three connected issues: power, privilege and justice. We do this via two complementary means: the conceptual lens of intersectionality; and an empirical case study from Scotland, the work of the non-governmental organisation (NGO) Show Racism the Red Card. We argue it is important to view human rights in an intersectional way so issues of class, gender and 'race' are properly accounted for. Further, there is a need to attach these global, theoretical issues of power, privilege and justice to a lived, empirical national action, and this approach is adopted throughout the paper.

Defining and connecting intersectionality and human rights is not unproblematic. For example, much of the literature is from the United States and emerges from a deconstruction of thinking, practices and ways of living connected to the civil rights era and what came later. Indeed, as Frances Fox Piven¹ has suggested, the links between scholarship and activism have been well established for many years and 'advocacy scholarship' is a

path that many take both inside and outside the academy – via their work being positioned as ‘relevant’ or having ‘impact’. Indeed, there is a leap to be made when shifting from a global theory of intersectionality to national actions that lead to the realising of rights in Scotland. However, this is where the use of a grounded case study adds weight and significance to the academic literature, allowing for connections to be made between theory and practice.

There is a need for ‘working definitions’ and, importantly, our core argument is that more needs to happen, both conceptually and empirically, to link intersectionality and human rights together. To date, attempts to make connections have been narrow in scope and ambition as well as often being limited by an overt disciplinary focus. Indeed, too often different issues and areas of human rights interest are split into problematic and separate categories and are subjected to disruptive hierarchies of ‘identity politics’. As an example, this was evident in the Scottish Human Rights Commission (SHRC)’s Scottish National Action Plan (SNAP) work where competing claims from groups with a gender focus and those with a class or ‘race’ focus sat uneasily beside one another. We will show that by adopting a conceptual starting point of intersectionality some of these ‘divide and rule’ issues can be accommodated and dealt with, paying heed to the insights of feminist scholars such as Crenshaw, Davis and McCall.²

Surprisingly, the academic and policy literatures offer only brief commentary on intersectionality and human rights as connected issues. This opening section reviews how existing papers across law, sociology and other fields of study can be built on to develop work in this area. Policy and practice reports are also beneficial to look at here too: where, for example, equalities legislation has been merged (e.g. the UK Equalities Act, 2010, and some of the issues arising from this). The focus here, we argue, needs to be on a critical appraisal of existing work and why an explicitly intersectional approach to viewing multiple human rights issues needs to be a concern. We also ask: Why is there this gap in the legal and socio-legal literature around intersectionality?

Our case study, a critical analysis of the work of Show Racism the Red Card (SRtRC), aims to address the issues of power, privilege and justice, and this will constitute the main section of the paper. The case study will focus on some of the discussions raised during the research work that went into the SHRC SNAP document, and examines contested dialogue over how to implement and monitor this work. For example, how did issues of gender and ‘race’ sit beside one another in this work? What of disability, class, sexuality? More directly, do some groups still have more ‘rights’ than others, and is there a ‘hierarchy of oppression’ as Fiona Williams³ has argued? And if there is, how does this reflect in the SHRC work and other forums? In a sense, this section is led by data and examples, but is supported by the evidence from the literature introduced in the previous sections.

Overall, the key argument is this: the greatest danger or threat to a genuine human rights-based approach to realising rights and securing justice, dignity, and respect in public and private life is the splitting and dividing of class/gender/‘race’ interests. Instead, by adopting an intersectional perspective, we can navigate ‘identity politics’ and ensure that justice prevails over vested interests of power and privilege. The shift from global theory to national action takes place in the connections between the critical reading of the literature and the day-to-day work of SRtRC.

Intersectionality and human rights

‘Intersectionality’ refers to the interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power.⁴

As a framework and concept within the social sciences, intersectionality has its roots in a seminal paper written by University of California, Los Angeles law professor Kimberlé Crenshaw entitled ‘Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory, and Antiracist Politics’.⁵ Her main argument proposes that ‘intersectionality’ can assist in examining the multi-dimensional situation, struggles and ‘voices’ of, in particular, Black/minority women who found themselves occupying an invisible ‘space’ within more mainstream and middle-class anti-racist and feminist discourses. The starting point for Crenshaw was the fact that both issues of ‘race’ and those of gender had to be viewed in terms of their interaction, engagement and connection with one another – that is, how they impacted on the ‘real life’ experiences that many Black/minority women faced daily.

Indeed, since the publication of Crenshaw’s paper in the late 1980s, the conceptual and methodological impact of intersectional approaches within the arts, humanities and social sciences has been profound. Other definitions have now emerged: for example, Leslie McCall, a sociologist at Northwestern University, defines intersectionality as ‘the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations’, and then goes on to suggest that intersectionality has been ‘the most important contribution that women’s studies, in conjunction with related fields, has made so far’.⁶

Academics from a range of disciplines, theoretical positions and political stances have rallied to the cause of advocating intersectionality as a means of addressing the multiple nuances of how to implement an engaged, flexible anti-discriminatory perspective that recognises the requirements and positions of different approaches to inequality, whether the gaze is through the lens of gender studies, disability perspectives, a political economy focus, queer studies or socio-legal concerns. This is not to suggest that the conceptual road has been an easy one to travel, whether in the USA or Europe; there have been many debates in both seminar classrooms and the pages of academic journals that illustrate how contested and problematic the term is. A useful summary of the terrain occupied by intersectionality, and the interests of this admittedly rather abstract theoretical paradigm, is provided by Choo and Ferree, who state that there are at least three areas, conceptually, where it has an important role to play – and this is due to:

the importance of including the perspectives of multiply-marginalized people, especially women of color; an analytic shift from addition of multiple independent strands of inequality toward a multiplication and thus transformation of their main effects into interactions; and a focus on seeing multiple institutions as overlapping in their co-determination of inequalities to produce complex configurations from the start, rather than ‘extra’ interactive processes that are added onto main effects.⁷

The key issue here, highlighted by Choo and Ferree, is the way in which intersectional approaches to research, and interacting with the social world more generally, assist in ‘mapping’ how varying ‘sites’ of oppression, such as ‘race’, class and gender, are connected and ‘overlapping’, rather than just adding one oppression on top of (or, indeed, below)

other types of oppressions. Further, it is evident that intersectionality has had impact: in fields such as ethnic and racial studies, social class, disability studies and gender/sexuality studies, professor and lecturers not only focus on their particular area of concern or expertise but examine the ways that, for example, 'race' and ethnicity connect to many other social divisions that can impact and shape, fundamentally, ethnic identity.⁸ To be sure, long gone are the days when gender studies involved merely deconstructing gender in theoretical isolation. In a multicultural, postmodern social world, difference and diversity (as well as discrimination) cannot be overlooked as a reality for all genders, and this intersectional understanding of experience is to be appreciated. Anti-racist thinking and teaching now go hand-in-hand and call for an examination of multiple and shifting identities, with regards to experiences of prejudice and discrimination. Published work in the social sciences and arts and humanities is now more likely to adopt intersectional, connected and multi-layered analysis that is theoretically and political progressive, if not entirely unproblematic, as will be shown.

The success of intersectionality as an anti-essentialist concept – as a productive heuristic device, in fact – is matched only by the confusion and panic it has generated amongst scholars and practitioners. What are the intellectual and practical complications of the term? At a basic level, there are issues around definitions and (mis)understandings of intersectionality. What exactly is it – a theory, a concept, a methodology, a political project? Is it all of the above? Authors such as Yuval-Davies⁹ have written about intersectionality as a means of deconstructing the varying 'axes' of identity and difference, especially in feminist political contexts and struggles where power relations are foregrounded, whilst Crenshaw's¹⁰ original idea was to look at how intersectionality offered the opportunity to view issues such as gender and 'race' through a 'crossroads' framework to analyse multiple forms of oppression and discrimination. In this sense, intersectionality is an explicit recognition that sexism, homophobia, racism and other forms of discriminatory actions and practices do not often act alone or independent of one another in the 'real world'; they interrelate, intersect and, to be sure, cause hurt and damage (this is important to acknowledge and make visible). At another level, is intersectionality best employed for understanding individual identity and experience or can it assess more structural and cultural matters at a group or social level? On this point many authors reach a modicum of agreement: the vague, porous and open-ended boundaries of the theory and method are both the strength *and* the weakness of an intersectional approach to understanding the murky terrain of social inequality and unequal power relations.¹¹

When applied to ethnic and racial studies – we are thinking here of the case study that follows – intersectionality helps us appreciate the fundamental challenges of acknowledging 'difference' within and between ethnic groups as well as gender variations across ethnicities. The reality of lived experiences among different ethnic groups across the globe – as with 'difference' among women – has become a central concern for academics working within the broad subject areas of ethnic and racial studies as well as gender studies. It is easy to appreciate why this is the case in both disciplines: it connects to the problem of exclusion and marginalisation of certain topics and 'voices' from debates that should have been more inclusive and accessible to different minority concerns and interests.¹² This is the juncture where intersectionality has a critical role to play; it puts 'difference' and, for want of a better expression, 'outsiderness' at the heart of discussions on identity, inequality and exclusion, and foregrounds the serious question of *power*

relations in terms of how different groups of people can position themselves in such debates and stake a claim in a more just and fair society empowered by human rights. Moreover, intersectionality aims to penetrate the multiple layers of oppression, and one such practical way of ensuring this occurs is perhaps best captured by the scholar Mari Matsuda's approach of 'asking the other question':

The way I try to understand the interconnection of all forms of subordination is through a method I call 'ask the other question'. When I see something that looks racist, I ask, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When I see something that looks sexist, I ask, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' When I see something that looks homophobic, I ask, 'Where are the class interests in this?'¹³

This simple and immediately recognisable strategy has instant appeal. How is 'race' gendered? How is sexuality related to social class? Such critical thinking forces us to 'make the familiar strange' and allows for an interdisciplinary, as well as intersectional, approach to complex questions of oppression. Indeed, it is noted that 'difference' takes on specific material forms in this regard – the impact and effects of class and gender, for example, on ethnic identities need to be appreciated in how different communities (for example, Roma and Sinti groups across Central and Eastern Europe, or Arab-Americans in contemporary US society) communicate their identity and experiences to others, as well as advance their struggles for socio-economic recognition and political and human rights. In a similar way, as in gender studies, the exclusion of economically disadvantaged women and/or women from minority ethnic backgrounds in more mainstream feminist debates has long been recognised, but intersectionality offers, potentially, the opportunity to disrupt this and capture what Deborah King¹⁴ has referred to as the 'multiple jeopardy' perspective on analysing the impacts of gender, class and 'race': that is, with every new category comes another layer of potential social, economic and political disadvantage and oppressive practices. Further, feminist scholars such as Patricia Hill Collins and Floya Anthias¹⁵ have proposed that the focal point has to be the moment when gender, class and 'race' can politically connect and unite to challenge and destabilise existing racist and patriarchal power relations to a new set of progressive values and norms that do not, as a rule, aim to disadvantage or exclude those who are most vulnerable to the dominating and unequal conditions imposed by neoliberalism and globalisation.

However, it is crucial to acknowledge that other approaches to intersectionality have been less materialist in their epistemology or politically routed in their intellectual conception and theoretical direction of travel. It was Black feminist thought in both the United States and Europe that led the way with critical thinking on intersectionality, but it was not a lone voice for very long. For example, deconstructive postmodern scholars working in fields such as Diaspora studies¹⁶ and post-colonial studies¹⁷ have long regarded intersectionality as a tool in furthering the battle with what is viewed as an unhealthy and uncritical regard for essentialism and universalism in examining identity, as well as rendering binary oppositions as unhelpful, static, dichotomies of the modernist past.¹⁸ In other words, knowledge is situated, and what could be positioned as being central within postmodern accounts is a focus on self-aware reflexivity in terms of advancing theory and, in particular, the way intersectional identities could transgress universalist thought vis-à-vis the practices of both researched and researcher. This is in keeping

with a body of work located within both postmodern feminist and post-colonial ethnic and racial studies fields.

At the heart of both modernist and postmodernist interpretations and uses of intersectionality, however, is a shared concern with how the concept can be employed to critically examine matters of difference and diversity. However, this connection has given rise to a questioning of once-trusted and certain foundations: What is the continued relevance of separate, but connected, feminist and anti-racist projects that aim to be universalist and inclusive in nature? Are such notions, almost by definition, pro-Western, homogenising and potentially imperialistic? Questions arise here of organisation, practices and platforms: *How can the intersectionality ship best be prevented from sinking into an ocean of ideas, internal contradictions and argumentative tensions in which even basic aims and objectives cannot be agreed upon and there are no more conceptual ports left to dock at?* In a way, intersectionality can address issues of difference and diversity without throwing the baby out with the bathwater: inclusivity does not have to mean a 'one size fits all' approach to challenging oppressive practices and at one and the same time the concept can challenge the ethnocentric assumptions of 'white' Western feminist and anti-racist thinking.

Additionally, we note that intersectionality can also position itself to give solid foundations to, for example, the study of ethnicity, class and gender as common and connected sites of discrimination whether concerned with how individual agency reacts against oppressive practices or a focus on structural barriers to liberation and equality. To be sure, intersectionality does offer some reassurances to scholars working in the fields of ethnic and racial studies, or gender studies for that matter, that such traditional modernist theories are not redundant. If anything, intersectionality helps illustrate the fact that scholars of whatever persuasion within the social sciences have a job to do – theoretically, methodologically and, one hopes, engaging with activists to help enact progressive social change and realise rights.

But such ideas and arguments do sound rather familiar and, indeed, it is important to remember that most, if not all, of the initial thinking and writing that was generated around intersectionality was not exactly 'new' when Crenshaw¹⁹ first proposed the term in the late 1980s (see, for example, the seminal edited collection by G.T. Hull, P.B. Scott and B. Smith, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave: Black Women's Studies*).²⁰ Multiple oppressions on the grounds of 'race', gender, sexuality, disability and class had long been recognised and explored in sociological circles, as well as by activists, in the late 1960s and 1970s seeking to advance the cause of, for example, a multi-racial approach to so-called 're-visionist' feminist thinking.²¹ One of the best examples of such progressive social movements was developed in the 1970s by the Combahee River Collective, in Boston, Massachusetts. Members of this group advanced the notion of 'simultaneity' – that is, their lived experience and everyday realities, as well as their challenges to oppression, were all guided by the combined influences of class, 'race', gender and sexuality. The collective actively critiqued and challenged both Black male perspectives, as well as white, heterosexual, middle-class feminist views, regarding the social, economic and political conditions they endured and resisted. Indeed, the anti-essentialist, anti-racist problematising of 'women' as a homogeneous category was crucial to the recognition that not all women shared the same situations or

experiences. Factors such as social class, disability and ethnicity, for example, impacted on life chances and social mobility.

To be sure, not all feminists were white and middle class, and nor were all anti-racists for that matter: the ‘voices’ of poor, disabled and gay activists within some feminist and anti-racist movement circles were being drowned out or just ignored by those intellectuals and activists who, theoretically, were on their ‘side’.²² In a similar way, Humphrey²³ has written very personally of her own struggles as a disabled woman, with a ‘hidden’ mental health impairment, who reported being sidelined for her gender and for her lack of visibility within the disability movement in the UK, and consequently felt the experience of disabled people (but notably women, non-physically impaired and non-heterosexual) was absent from the emergent scholarly outputs that made up the broad field of ‘disability studies’. McCall²⁴ has argued that one of the reasons intersectionality has been so important to the social sciences is the fact that it can be positioned as a political project that demands the inclusivity and visibility Humphrey²⁵ calls for: it sets out to address and understand what happens when multiple forms of oppression and subordination work against particular individuals and communities. Although it had echoes with developments in the 1960s and 1970s, intersectionality took new approaches to and perspectives on old problems.

So what was exactly ‘new’ about intersectionality when it emerged in the late 1980s? For one thing, even though it had its roots in feminist epistemology, it was purposely collaborative in spirit – it could connect critical voices across a range of theoretical positions, as well as advocacy groups, who were seeking to challenge the effects of class prejudice, sexism, homophobia and racism as well as offer a methodological ‘home’ to those scholars who arrived at such questions via more postmodern routes. For perhaps the first time, irrespective of the reasons why different individuals and groups were searching for a political toolkit to challenge oppression, or others merely wanted to playfully deconstruct the foundations and imposed categories of a subordinating ideology, there was a common theoretical approach that could be shared and developed in tandem: ‘a joint nodal point’, as Lykke²⁶ calls it.

For postmodernists such as Judith Butler,²⁷ the issue concerns ‘unsettling’ the essentialist and reified conceptual thinking of those modernists who are engaged in critical thinking across a range of social divisions in society, not least on the matter of identity politics and the positioning of ‘self’. By return, for modernist scholars, the postmodernist ‘turn’ had led to a lack of appreciation for the real, lived, material inequalities and experiences that poor women, Black men and transgender communities, for example, faced on a daily basis. Further, although categorisation had to be problematised and held to account, a politics of identity was not altogether unhelpful in both conceptual and activist terms of reference. Social change and a ‘better world’, as hooks²⁸ has noted, was not achieved via fanciful deconstruction but via challenging racism and sexism on the streets and in the corridors of power.

Nonetheless, despite some distance between the positions, intersectionality potentially offers a theoretical and methodological bridge that connects the postmodernists and those advocating a more materialist position. One of the central focal points for intersectionality is understanding and challenging power – the way power is sought, employed, held onto, abused and lost – and the multiple impacts it can have in terms of the continued subordination and oppression of a range of groups and communities

within contemporary societies. What intersectionality does well is offer several options; it can have a political purpose that aims to unsettle and challenge gender- and 'race'-based material inequalities, but it can also assist postmodernists in their own project of anti-essentialist deconstruction and resisting universalism, as well as allaying fears that postmodernism is too remote from the everyday lives of those facing oppression. In particular, intersectionality can help all scholars resist the so-called 'additive approach' to examining identity politics.²⁹

Another reason for the appeal of intersectionality is the fact that in a relatively short amount of time it has had great attention paid to it across a range of disciplines and interests, whether sociology within gender studies or cultural geography within ethnic and racial studies. It has become, whether by design or 'accident', a kind of 'grand theory' and, to a lesser extent, a working methodology, within the social sciences. As a term, it has become synonymous for how social scientists think about, and explain, 'difference' and identity across a range of social divisions. Intersectionality offers a conceptual and methodological 'map', and a road of travel, in terms of examining social and political practices and how they reproduce and sustain oppression, as well as, for activists, how challenges and resistance to oppressive social structures, institutions and practices might form. As Davis has noted, the concept of intersectionality seems to carry appeal for those authors who are both 'tourists' (the generalists, she calls them) in the area of feminist theory as well as those who are 'residents' (the specialists, she argues).³⁰ Whether tourist or resident, the points of the debate are apparent: Where are the boundaries and limits of 'difference'? What are the commonalities of our identities and, when proposing an intersectional approach, what social categories – if such essentialist thinking is countenanced – are to be included and excluded? How can intersectional research and writing be best used – if used at all – in unseating power and discriminatory actions? One way of drawing the lines for those adopting an intersectional approach to research, for example, is to be clear regarding the definitions and scope of the project being undertaken, although such clarity can be hard to pin down.³¹

A useful example to illustrate the interweaving complexities of intersectional approaches to social research might serve best here. Nadine Naber's work, especially her edited collection with Amaney Jamal³² entitled *Race and Arab Americans Before and After 9/11: From Invisible Subjects to Visible Subjects*, touches on many of the issues discussed above and aims to embrace an intersectional theoretical and methodological perspective to help understand the connections among culture, nation, ethnicity, sexuality and gender in the context of how the world shifted, post-9/11. In her work, Naber investigates the cultural dynamics and political processes at play in how an (Arab) 'enemy within' was created in the aftermath of 9/11 in US society. Her use of intersectionality explicitly acknowledges the racialised nature of such 'Arab' constructions, but she also connects these to their gendered and class-based roots – in terms of representation and treatment by non-Arab-Americans, as well as resistance to oppression and subordination. In a sense, Naber's work is a good example of what was discussed earlier with regard to Matsuda's³³ 'asking the other question' approach, examining how 'race' is gendered and vice versa. A part of this strategy, for Naber, is to examine the everyday implications for Arab-American men and women in terms of how they navigate US society with, for example, Arabic names and the wearing of different forms of religious dress. One quote from 'Farah' explains this clearly, as well

as indicating the unity and support that was apparent amongst ‘veiled women’ in a post-9/11 world:

Women who wear hijab were more of a target [after 9/11] because they’re more visible than Muslim men in public. The awareness that they were in more danger and were more impacted than men could be seen by all of the events that were organized in solidarity with veiled women in response to the backlash. There were days of solidarity organized across the nation.³⁴

What is useful in Naber’s work is the fact that the historical, political and legislative context is explained, especially detailing the legacy, and continued presence, of anti-immigration and discriminatory policies and laws across the United States. Indeed, in one summary paper Naber³⁵ explores the intersection of gender, nation and ‘race’ and how the public display and wearing of the hijab by Arab-Americans in contemporary US society brings with it both the opportunity for observing religious beliefs and solidarity with fellow Muslims and yet also harassment and vilification by those who would seek to denigrate and abuse such multiple identities in US public spaces. Her fieldwork ‘site’ was the San Francisco Bay area of California during 2002–2004, amongst Arab-immigrant communities, and she was keen to see how the ‘war on terror’ was being played out in a local form: to record the ‘narratives of harassment’ she heard from participants in her research work. What is significant about Naber’s ethnography is the fact that her evidence and argument suggest that government policies, including registrations, detentions and deportations, led to a ‘Foreign Other’ in political and media discourses that was presented as ostensibly Muslim, working-class, immigrant, male and, above all, ‘dangerous’. Yet, as her evidence shows, a whole range of other social categories – that is, individuals and communities – were drawn into this monitoring and surveillance ‘net’ under the guise of ‘national security’, including: ‘Arab Christians, Iranian Jews, Latinos/as, and Filipinos/as, women, and queer people, among others, illustrating that dominant US discourses on “Islam” and “Muslims” are not only malleable and fluid but are arbitrary, fictional, and imaginary at best’.³⁶ It is evident from Naber’s work that an intersectional theoretical and methodological approach helps connect cultural racism and nation-based racism, as well as the gendered and class-based dimensions to such contexts. As she further notes: ‘Racism did not operate as a separate, mutually exclusive, axis of power. Rather, it intersected with multiple axes of oppression, such as class, gender, and sexuality’.³⁷ As a result, her methodology was, by necessity, intersectional and included both formal interviews and participant observation work, whilst the geography of the sites was sensitive to class-based differences within and between Arab-immigrant communities in different parts of the locality. What is evident here is that Naber’s research is an illustration of the methodological application of intersectionality. Further, this example shows how ‘race’ is gendered and how gender is racialised: her case study involved problematising and deconstructing social and nation/religious-based categories such as ‘Arab’, ‘Middle Eastern’ and ‘Muslim’, but, in a sense, the approach and method could be adopted for other groupings and communities in many other societies (a point she is keen to stress). In closing this illustration, it could be suggested that the ways in which intersectionality chooses to frame and position an issue or social problem potentially increases the number of allies that are available to sympathise, empathise, agitate – and this is the political means by which rights can be realised.

Despite this illustrative clarification via the work of Nadine Naber,³⁸ the puzzle remains unsolved: How did intersectionality achieve the position and status it has within the contemporary humanities and social sciences? This is a pertinent question given the fact that as a body of work it is nothing if not hazy around the conceptual and methodological edges, despite the flurry of articles and classes being written and taught on what 'it' is and how 'it' should be done.³⁹ Perhaps it is this very fluidity of perspective/interpretation, and the porous nature of its uses and parameters, that makes the term so attractive and exciting?⁴⁰

It seems to be a connecting concept of discovery that can be used 'anytime, anyplace, anywhere': the possibilities and combinations are endless in terms of both theory and method for 'making the familiar strange' regarding multiple oppressions. But, even so, definitions of the term are hard to agree on; and that is just within the realms of feminist and anti-racist social theory, never mind scholarship across all the other social categories and divisions that intersectionality seeks to attach itself to, such as sexuality, class, disability, age etc.⁴¹ It is the case, potentially, that intersectionality might be rendered ineffectual by its own paradigmatic 'fuzziness' and the different competing interests of the social categorical tensions it aims to bring into the 'general theory' fold. On the other hand, part of the reason why intersectionality has generated the mass appeal and attention it has received is due to the fact it is so open-ended and full of potential for exploration and finding hidden connections across and between different social categories, vis-à-vis oppression and subordination: this is surely one of the most attractive aspects of intersectionality?

Despite the attention and praise, the less enthusiastic jury is still out on intersectionality as a tool for realising rights. For scholars such as Nira Yuval-Davies⁴² intersectionality is still proving itself; to have meaning and value and to be useful within and outside the academy, it needs to illustrate how it can bring together and resolve the competing logics, tensions, contradictions and purposes of the social inequalities it aims to unpick in both materialist and postmodernist terms. The outcomes of embracing intersectionality, perhaps, are as important as the processes. In a different way, in the field of feminist scholarship, authors such as McCall and Valentine⁴³ have argued that as well as the conceptual entanglements of intersectionality there needs to be a more robust analysis and investigation into intersectionality as 'doable' research methodology. How can it be used in projects that are always time- and budget-limited and have research council disciplinary conventions and codes of practice to obey? Intersectionality may be challenging and important, but how can such a 'fuzzy' concept apply itself within the complex and unequal social world we seek to both normatively and politically understand?

Before moving to the case study, it is worth considering this final point in the context of intersectional approaches to trying to make sense of this uncertainty. Ann Phoenix,⁴⁴ in an editorial on intersectionality for the journal *European Journal of Women's Studies*, perhaps said it best: if nothing else, this loosely defined concept has enough vague and open-ended possibilities to keep us all on our theoretical toes for some time to come yet. To be sure, depending on a researcher's epistemological, methodological and political position, intersectionality can either bring them to the discussion table or send them running from the room. For new generations of creative and progressive social researchers and activists, mindful of their own assumptions and multi-layered identities, it offers a potential for the reach and impact of their work that was first spotted back in the 1960s and 1970s

by the likes of the Combahee River Collective in Boston – about how to try and connect up the various forms of oppression and subordinating practices that were in evidence back then. Of course, many of those same patterns of behaviour, and the power structures that lie behind them, are still with us today, and if anything have become more deeply entrenched given the advances of neoliberalism across the globe and the global economic recession from the late 2000s onwards. Work is still to be done to try and best understand and employ intersectionality in social research, but there is a need and there is a will and this offers hope. In the following section of the paper, we connect an empirical national case study based in Scotland to the globally produced conceptual framework of intersectionality. In doing so, we argue that such a framework is critical in trying to show how it is possible to bring about meaningful change via an intersectional analysis of power, privilege and justice.

Case study: Show Racism the Red Card

Show Racism the Red Card in Scotland is fortunate to work in a progressive political climate where public statements of support for welcoming refugees and being open to diversity, multiculturalism and social inclusion are the norm. The current First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon, has repeatedly said that her Scottish National Party Government wants to promote a climate of inclusion and acceptance – and that Scotland is not a country that tolerates prejudice and bigotry. Indeed, she also recently stated that she would be ‘happy’ to have a Syrian refugee stay in her own home.⁴⁵ This climate is rather different to statements and reactions south of the border, in England, where politicians regularly use immigration, ‘race’ and anti-Muslim rhetoric as electoral tools.⁴⁶ This is not to suggest that Scotland does *not* suffer from the impact and consequences of racism – it does – but the overarching public ethos and mood, from Parliament to most sections of the press, is one of inclusion and diversity.

As an organisation, SRtRC in Scotland was established in 2003 and delivers anti-racism education with diverse audiences throughout Scotland; usually these audiences are children and young people in formal school settings. These young people, in both urban and rural settings, reflect the 96% white indigenous majority of the Scottish population, and while many will experience inequality and indeed a deficit in power due to their age they will not have experienced racism.⁴⁷ Only 4% of the young people SRtRC meet will belong to a Black Minority Ethnic (BME) minority, and some have spoken of the racism they’ve experienced, at school and in public settings. The bulk of SRtRC’s funding comes via the Scottish Government Equality Unit, and in the academic year 2013–2014 the organisation worked with almost 9500 young people in these settings. Participating young people take part in activities consisting of small group work, discussion and educational games, all of which are adapted according to the age and experience of the group but which encourage young people to think about the dangers of prejudice and stereotyping, the personal and collective impacts of inequality, and the development of skills and confidence to safely challenge discriminatory behaviours when they occur. In this way, the work encapsulates an intersectional approach to unpacking power, privilege and justice.

Given earlier statements regarding Scotland’s inclusive and anti-racist environment, why is there a need for an organisation like SRtRC? Unfortunately, the need is pressing:

the Crown Office and Procurator Fiscal Service, bodies holding statutory legal powers in Scotland, reported that in 2015–2016 there were 3712 racially motivated hate crimes reported.⁴⁸ This figure is more than twice the other four categories of hate crime combined (disability, religion or belief, sexual orientation, gender identity). The figure of 3712 equates to an average of more than 70 incidents a week, or just over 10 per day. We know that these types of hate crime – that is, a crime motivated by racial, sexual or other prejudice and often involving abuse or physical violence – are also drastically under-reported. However, with at least 10 lives per day tainted by hate crime based on the ethnicity of the victim, there has never been a greater need for the work of SRtRC and its ability to focus on connected issues of power and privilege. Further, research by the anti-racist NGO Coalition for Race Equality and Rights (CRER) has suggested that while 7% of school staff reported dealing with a racist incident in the last week, 29% of pupils report witnessing it in the same time period.⁴⁹ These figures suggest that racially motivated discrimination and prejudice in schools is both widespread and under-reported.

The importance of an intersectional analysis highlighted by Crenshaw, McCall and Choo and Ferree⁵⁰ mirrors the direct experiences of the role and function of SRtRC. Inequalities co-exist and weave together; there is an interplay between the various equality strands and the power and oppressive relationships that sustain hate crime and the abuse of power and privilege. An issue here, however, is the funding mechanisms that sustain groups and bodies such as SRtRC – for example, when stating the case for delivering anti-racism education work to young people across Scotland it is often reduced to a reductionist black/white dichotomy, but there is a need to do anti-racist work with young people because discrimination is experienced in many ways and not just because of a person's (often presumed) 'race'. Fiona Williams⁵¹ argues that there is still a 'hierarchy of oppression' in terms of some 'causes' being seen to be more 'deserving' than others, and this is certainly the case when it comes to leveraging funds from government.

We are considering, then, the applicability of intersectionality and human rights within the charity and third-sector environment, with reference to the work of SRtRC. It is argued that from a strategic point of view, the concept is a difficult framework to apply in terms of securing funding and meeting indicators of 'success' – certainly from a funder's point of view. This is due in part to continued 'silo thinking' at the funding level, where awards are made on the proviso of achieving agreed outcomes which aim to alleviate disadvantage for groups sharing a particular protected characteristic. This arguably propagates 'silo' working at the grassroots level with each civil society organisation/NGO championing its own specific cause, potentially perpetuating the worst excesses of the identity politics movement which feeds into an erroneous hierarchy of oppression which pits one 'cause' over another. This intransigent (and frustrating) approach which persists fails to appreciate the obvious paradigm shift: that those individuals and organisations who drove forward the identity politics movement and brought the private to the public realm in terms of 'race', gender, disability and sexuality from the 1960s onwards have paved the way for a more complex analysis of identity – an analysis that recognises the blended and intersecting facets of human experience.

The reality can be stark: for example, there are two main arguments for *avoiding* an intersectional analysis when making the case for funding the work of SRtRC. The first is rooted in one of the historical controversies regarding the implementation of human rights in the 'real world' as outlined by Kirchsclaeger.⁵² That is, as human rights are

not realised on an equal basis, with many groups experiencing violations of their rights because of who they are, it is argued that a ‘particularist’ approach is perhaps merited. Kirchsclaeger argues that the universality of human rights is a claim but not a reality – it is much more selective than this, in much the same way that there is a very real distinction between formal and substantive rights to citizenship, as noted by T.H. Marshall.⁵³ Thus, adopting a ‘strategic essentialist’⁵⁴ approach when trying to secure finite resources for the work of SRtRC, which emphasises the rights violations experienced by members of Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic communities, tends to prove more effective than arguing for a more intersectional and connected approach to challenging oppression.

The second argument is a realist position. As mentioned earlier, there is a significant challenge for feminist and anti-racist projects adopting an intersectional approach in terms of securing agreement on aims and objectives and an agreed foundation to work from. Certainly, in a tight funding environment which links ‘success’ to clear outcomes and evidence of change, adopting an approach which requires fluidity and is flexible to a myriad of interplays and crossovers is not an immediately attractive one for a body such as SRtRC. It is, in practice, much more pragmatic when negotiating a funding application or planning a work programme or reporting on the subsequent success or failure of one’s work to focus on one oppression, one power relationship. The recognition of interplay and connections can actually be a constructed barrier to ‘success’ of project X or project Y. In a sense, the ‘messiness’ or real life gets in the way of securing budgets and meeting targets.

However, it is clear that the ‘easiest’ approach is often flawed. As Crenshaw⁵⁵ observed, human interactions do not exist in one-dimensional spaces without impact or consequences. The work of SRtRC illustrates that it does not deal with binary or essentialist beings, ‘black’ or ‘white’, that occupy just one realm – in this case, the classroom. The participants in SRtRC projects, whilst mostly young and representative of the Scottish population, which is 96% indigenous white, are also male, female, trans. They occupy multiple identities and come from every socio-economic class, some having experienced poverty and some considerable wealth. They are gay, bisexual, fluid, trans, straight. They are disabled and not disabled by conventional societal norms. They have lives outside of the settings that SRtRC meet them in, which is usually a classroom within a school. Most importantly, their experiences, world view and potential for transformation are crucially shaped by the interplay among *all of the above*. This is the point to stress and why an intersectional lens to social justice work is so crucial – it is essential we recognise and shape such work around this dynamic reality and interplay.

Practicing intersectionality – the SRtRC experience

In the UK today, a stratified societal make-up still exists and this compounds inequalities on many grounds including ‘race’, despite the increasing emergence of legislation and policy designed to counter inequality.⁵⁶ However, some seven years on from the launch of the Equality Act in 2010, Hall’s⁵⁷ theories around the construction of ‘ethnic’ racialised identities persist in discourses which create static and stereotypical identities which belittle and infantilise minority ethnic groups or paint them as ‘deviant and disloyal’.⁵⁸ This ‘othering’ is strengthened by ethnocentric, neoliberal political and media discourse, specifically around Islam for example since the 9/11 terror attacks,⁵⁹ and through

fanning the flames of immigration, creating scapegoats for public fear around diverting resources away from 'hard-working tax payers' and more 'deserving' indigenous white/British people. Since the economic crash of 2008, the political promotion of 'austerity' has had a negative impact on public perception of minority groups and migrants,⁶⁰ and these negative views impact on the world view of young people that SRtRC come into contact with. Often, SRtRC staff must unpack these reified ideas and negative stereotypes with children and young people within workshops. The Community Education team is often met with the conflation of Muslim with 'terrorist' or immigrant with 'criminality'. Evidence seems to suggest this is worsening since the 'Brexit' referendum vote of June 2016 as a significant 'spike' in hate crime was reported.⁶¹ In addition, even in classroom spaces where there is a diverse mix, white children and young people still use terms like 'us' and 'them' or 'we' and 'they' when describing Black, Muslim or Asian individuals. This is something that an intersectional lens can assist in breaking down, by illustrating the multiplicity of identities we all have and often share.

In truth, it is the case that SRtRC does not explicitly discuss the complexities of intersectionality within anti-racism workshops, not in terms of using and employing this concept by name (bear in mind it is mainly younger people in the workshops and seminars). Nonetheless, exploring the concepts of *power*, *privilege* and *justice* with young people is an important way of exploring how identity is connected with the *material experience* of inequality. Typically children and young people will be unaware of their own white privilege, as racism may not be a problem to them personally, and in order to build empathy, participants are encouraged to break down the word 'inequality' and discuss in groups what they think this concept means, before exploring racism and its effects in more detail. This activity leads naturally into discussions around power, privilege and often denial of human rights.

As can be seen from Figure 1, it is impossible to talk about the effects of racism and inequality without discussing power, privilege and justice more broadly, as well as the role of individual agency. The example illustrated here, working with 13- and 14-year-

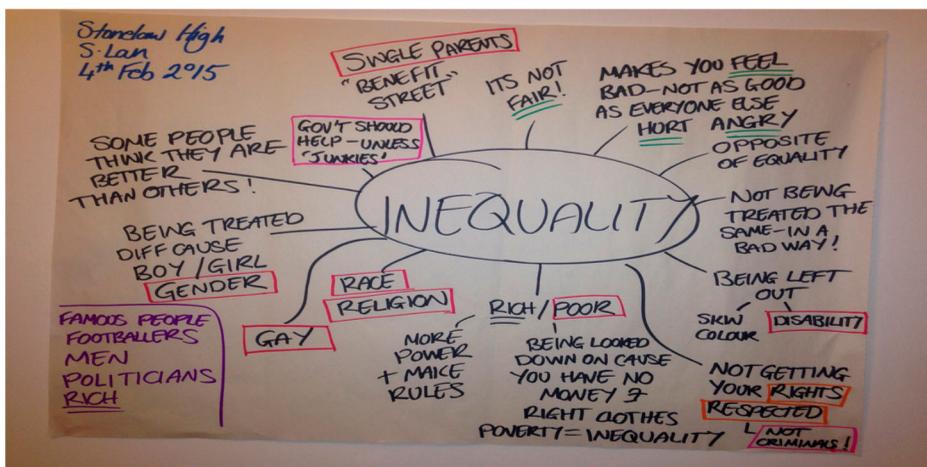


Figure 1. Worksheet from a small group exercise with young people (13–14 years old) exploring the ways in which 'inequality' can be experienced/felt by a range of different groups in society.

old S2 pupils in a Scottish school, reveals they are aware that inequality exists due to a deficit of rights and citizenship status of certain individuals and groups who hold less power due to certain key characteristics that person/group may hold, such as ‘race’, gender, sexuality, disability or whether one is rich or poor (interestingly, ‘age’ did not feature within this response although it has in other workshops). Participants understand this happens through the actions of some people in society who have more power and who make the rules. Restrictions on time and often a level of comprehension can inhibit the exploration of ‘whiteness’ and related matters in detail, although this could be down to the confidence of the facilitator and not wishing to alienate or confuse the audience. That said, these issues are touched on as anecdotally children and young people possess an awareness of racism and tend not to stray from the ‘black victim/white perpetrator’ paradigm despite knowledge of cultural racism and religious sectarianism. Interestingly, SRtRC workshops have shown that young people can often talk knowledgeably about the transatlantic slave trade, South African Apartheid and black subjugation in North America and the Civil Rights movement. In order to create balance and not encourage a ‘black victim’ narrative, information is given around the social construction of ‘race’ and challenges the dominant scientific findings around human genetics. Red Card facilitators encourage discussion in addition to biological examples of racism to explore racism on the grounds of culture, nationality, religion and socio-economic status.

In terms of a critique, it could be argued that the attempt by SRtRC to frame racism through the broader intersectional language of inequality, power, privilege and human rights, in order to build empathy with a majority white audience, doesn’t go far enough to explicitly highlight Black oppression and denies what are fundamentally connected issues. White young people do not experience racism and Black people continue to experience inequality and denial of rights at every conceivable societal level. This is the case globally as well as in Scotland. Minority ethnic communities and individuals are under-represented in every area of life from Westminster and Holyrood to levels of employment in the public sector, for example – even more so when including gendered aspects of such inequality. Racism is alive and exists in 2017, it is structural and those who have power and privilege are still largely white. However, SRtRC is in a privileged position and having access to young people means that anti-racism educators, working via intersectional and human rights-based pathways, can create a space where audiences are encouraged to question the negative information they receive about minority groups or groups who hold the minority of power. By building empathy through framing racism and other sources of discrimination in the language of inequality and human rights, staff can appeal to the instincts and emotions of *all* young people who experience inequality and encourage their power to challenge it and realise rights. For some it may be the beginning of a political education, and through making the links that all types of inequality affect the majority this will inspire solidarity to challenge the balance of power which lies with a minority elite. This is the quest for justice.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the connected issues of power, privilege and justice through the sociological lens of intersectionality in Scotland. As a conceptual approach to disrupting and challenging discrimination and structural inequalities, it has been shown, through

the empirical case study of Show Racism the Red Card, that such tactics can be fruitful when working with young people. This is not to suggest that there are not challenges here. To be sure, this is apparent when looking at the funding climate and the outcomes for those organisations, such as SRtRC, which attempt to employ explicit intersectional agendas in their anti-discrimination work. A key concern of this paper has been with attempting to agree on a common or shared foundation – that is, a basis for how intersectionality can best be understood through a socio-legal and human rights-based approach. This is where the ‘truth to power’ case study of SRtRC makes sense and is beneficial – it principally humanises concerns that are often dehumanised and rendered abstract or theoretical. In moving forwards, we advocate a politics of global solidarity to help deconstruct existing hierarchies of oppressions that appear to be as resolute as ever in a world riven with division, austerity and conflict. It is worth remembering that the goal of the Boston Combahee Collective back in the 1970s, as discussed earlier, was to challenge power and promote equality. This ambition remains true today, perhaps even more so when considering Naber’s⁶² post-9/11 work with Arab minorities and appreciating the multiple ways in which gender interacts with sexuality, nationality, ethnicity and how these are contested or acknowledged, often at the same time.

Ultimately, we argue that such dimensions – racism, sexism, classism, disablism, homophobia and all such oppressions – must be subjected to Matsuda’s⁶³ ‘test’ of ‘asking the other question’ when considering the impact that human rights can have on challenging the misuse of power and privilege on gender, class, ‘race’ grounds. It is evident that the opportunity we have in Scotland to realise rights is there for the taking, subject to how competing scenarios in the wider political organisation of the United Kingdom play out in a forthcoming post-Brexit reality. In truth, the realisation of rights will always be dependent on broader socio-economic and political concerns. This is, under capitalism, inescapable.

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