

Intersectional Stereotypes: Research, Summary and Outlook

Xianyang Wang^{1,a,*}

¹*Saint Mary's University, 923 Robie St, Halifax, NS, Canada*

a. Xianyang.Wang@smu.ca

**corresponding author*

Abstract: With the concern for social justice, more and more disciplines are focusing on and studying intersectional stereotypes and calling for as much attention and protection of the rights and fair treatment of different groups as possible. However, as an interdisciplinary field, the findings of intersectional stereotypes lack a system and are more difficult to integrate. This paper aims to collect the existing scientific findings, outline the existing research directions and look into the future. The article first reviews the definition and origin of intersectional stereotype, then summarizes the existing research and divides it into two parts, focusing on whether intersectional stereotype exists in different factors and scenarios, and how intersectional stereotype is formed. As the scope of intersectionality research in academia expands and deepens, this paper aims to contribute to the discussion and development of the field by summarizing existing knowledge and focusing on emerging research directions and themes, and also appealing attention to groups that are negatively affected by intersection stereotypes and implicit discrimination.

Keywords: intersectional stereotype, gender, race, sexual orientation

1. Introduction

YouImagine five black women appealed to the court because they felt discriminated against in the factory. However, the court was unable to find racial or gender discrimination in the factory because neither the black men in the same black group as they belonged to nor the white women in the same female group as they belonged to were treated unfairly, and the appeal failed [1].

The above is a real case that took place in the 1970s and is considered the origin of intersectionality. Five black women first filed an unsuccessful lawsuit against the car company they worked for in 1974 for racial and gender discrimination, which has led to a reflection on the one-line thinking and categorization that has been used against discriminatory behaviour. The first scholar to study the case and propose intersectionality indicates in a paper that if black communities are to be freed from oppression stemming from racial subordination stereotypes, related research theories and support strategies must include an analysis of gender discrimination; similarly, feminists cannot ignore the influence of race if they want to present the voices of non-white women [2]. The APA Dictionary of Psychology defines the stereotype as a limited cognitive generalization of the qualities and characteristics of members of a group or social category that simplifies and accelerates perception and judgment. The intersectional stereotype is defined as the overlap of multiple identities leading to the superposition of stereotypes that can lead to unique or more severe discriminatory behaviours [2]. Most of the studies at this stage focus on the existence of special

discrimination formative by multiple stereotypes in different environments and explain these phenomena at the level of intersectionality. The types of stereotypes studied are mostly gender, race, sexual orientation and other hot topics. In recent years, research has gradually begun to investigate whether each stereotypes have different effects on the eventual formation of complex multiple discrimination in different contexts and has found that intersectionality is not simply the sum of the results of multiple stereotypes. This paper will summarize the history of the development of intersectionality and provide a relevant theoretical framework, discuss how stereotype builds up multiple discrimination at the level of intersectionality, summarize relevant studies, analyze the more complex and difficult-to-observe inequities brought about by intersectionality and stereotypes and talk about the research gaps and future research directions in the field to appeal to the importance of viewing social inequities from the perspective of intersectionality and avoiding the intersection of stereotype and discrimination. summarize relevant studies, analyze the more complex and difficult-to-observe inequities brought about by intersectionality and stereotypes, discuss the research gaps and future research directions in the field, appeal to the importance of viewing social inequities from the perspective of intersectionality and avoid ignoring the existence and harm caused by multiple discrimination or multiple stereotypes just because they cannot be simply categorized into the existing unilinear stereotype framework.

2. Intersectionality and Stereotype: Background and Theory Framework

The concept of intersectionality first appeared in the 1980s in Kimberle Crenshaw's black feminist essay, which critiqued the limitations of one-way categorization of discriminatory behaviour. The case of *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors* appears in the paper that saw as a representative case that opens the field of intersectionality. In that case, five black women sued General Motors, arguing that the company's system reflected a continuation of past discrimination against black women. The plaintiffs presented evidence that the company did not hire black women until 1964 and that all black female employees at the company after 1970 were gradually fired by the company under the pretext of lack of seniority. However, the appeal was dismissed by the local court on the grounds that neither black men nor white women at the company suffered such discrimination, so the black women's experiences could not be classified as "sex discrimination" or "racial discrimination," and therefore they cannot prove that they belong to a group that is entitled to be protected and receive compensation after experiencing discrimination by the law, and the relevant regulations do not create a classification for "black women". The decision found that the black women's discrimination complaints seek to combine two types of discrimination to obtain "Super-compensation" and that the company could not be found to have discriminated unless everyone in the female group, or everyone in the black group, had the same experience as they did [2].

Originally proposed, here to provide a more inclusive and non-monolithic approach to understanding the impact of sexism and racism on black women's lifestyles, the theory of intersectionality is also considered a landmark contribution to feminist studies. Intersectionality is seen as a theoretical framework for the particular oppression caused by the interplay of multiple social identities [2]. The theory is based on the perception that individuals have multiple identities in society, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, appearance, etc., and that these identities make up the individuals themselves and shape their experiences [3]. In addition, when people talk about multiple identities and intersectionality, they have to talk about the power system in society. There are both dominant and marginalized groups in each type of identity. For example, whites have been dominant in various races, and heterosexuals are often dominant in various sexual orientations. Being mainstream means having all kinds of rights, while marginalized groups are often oppressed and neglected, and multiple marginalized group identities create multiple oppressions. Therefore, if anyone want to study intersectionality, they cannot ignore the role of the

power system in it. It is the power system that catalyzes the formation of social inequality, and the intersectional power system leads to more complex forms of social inequality [4].

The fact that individuals have multiple identities means there are various stereotypes for these identities, and the power system is one of the influencing factors for stereotype formation. Stereotypes of multiple identities for individuals comprise complex intersectional stereotypes of their experiences. Stereotypes are defined as beliefs about the characteristics, attributes, and behaviours of members of certain groups. As a cognitive approach to facilitate human thinking, stereotypes reflect a degree of reality. However they can also lead to overgeneralizations about the characteristics of group members, which can lead to ignoring the characteristics of some individuals in the group or believing they possess characteristics that do not exist and to bias or discrimination [5]. Intersectional stereotypes arise when one has two or more marginalized identities, so intersectionality consists of multiple stereotypes superimposed.

3. Previous Research

As early as the 1980s, the existence of intersectionality was demonstrated by Crenshaw et al. based on real-life cases. Recent studies on intersectionality and stereotype can be divided into two categories, namely the “extrapolation” type and the “introspection” type. The first type of research is devoted to the use of intersectionality in explaining and thinking about various types of stereotypes and discriminatory behaviours to promote the understanding and resolution of social inequities. The second type is more concerned with thinking about the relationship between stereotypes and intersectionality through research studies.

“Extrapolation” type

The purpose of such papers is to explore the existence of intersectionality between different factors, to understand the effect of the superposition of different factors on people with different identities, and to observe their effects in different scenarios. Early research has focused on gender, race, and sexual orientation, but as the field has grown and become more saturated, the research has expanded to include age, social status, and faith, but mostly in conjunction with gender, race, and sexual orientation.

In a study explaining how educators can help students deal with intersectional stereotypes at the gender and race level, the authors focus on the intersectional stereotypes suffered by people of colour, especially African-Americans, in their paper. For example, black men suffer the worst racial oppression than white and black women, and black male artists are often portrayed as misogynists, violent users and sexual predators; for example, public schools of colour will receive far less funding than white schools for the same poverty. The identities of black, male, and poor may not seem special when they stand alone, but the stereotypes that result from the combination of the two are serious and lead to discriminatory behaviour. Through examples and analysis, the authors argue for the significance of intersectionality in the social dimension and further apply it to the teaching process, calling on teachers to consider the intersectionality dimension and multiple identity attributions when dealing with stereotypes and social justice themes so that they can appropriately deal with such issues when confronted in their teaching and help students better understand and affirm themselves and respect and identify with others [6].

Similarly, there are studies on gender stereotypes in the IT industry that incorporate an intersectionality perspective. The study was conducted by designing relevant scales, obtaining a large sample and summarizing the results. The results suggest that there is concrete evidence that gender stereotypes of IT skills vary within gender due to the intersectionality of gender and race [7].

Recent research has focused attention on the unique biases that come with the intersection of gender and faith. The study points out that Muslim identity is more strongly tied to gender than Christianity, bearing more severe gender stereotypes. The study attributed this phenomenon to

ingroup heterogeneity, a reference point for the study, which was conducted on a North American-based group and a sample drawn from North America, where participants had access to more male and female Christians in their daily lives. The participants did report more familiarity with Christianity and closer contact with believers than Muslims, which seemed to give them more sources of information and thus a blend of masculine and feminine concepts of Christianity, making them less likely to use gender stereotypes when dealing with Christians [8].

There is also some research related to the age factor, and studies have found that age and gender also create specific intersectional stereotypes. Age has a much more negative impact on women than on men. Women feel more pressure from age and are more likely to try to hide aging and appear younger, and gray hair is a negative sign for older women, but may be perceived as a sign of excellence and experience for men. Age discrimination in the workplace also has a much greater impact on women's hiring, career opportunities and pensions than men's, with women receiving 27 percent less in annual pensions than men in the organization for economic cooperation and development countries [9]. While gender differences become less important in older age groups as age progresses and dependency increases, the older female population still suffers higher negative health and well-being impacts than older men, and the gender additive tends to make older women largely more invisible and harder to integrate into contemporary social policies [10].

Overall, more and more factors are being added to the study of intersectionality, and the results are being used in relevant contexts to better understand what individuals with multiple identities are experiencing. There is a call for greater segmentation of groups through the multiple identities held by individuals, and for the protection of the interests and rights of each small group as much as possible, avoid the superimposition of multiple identities causing some people to be overlooked because of simple group divisions.

“Introspection” type

Rather than generalizing and applying the theoretical framework of intersectionality, this category of papers tends to investigate whether intersectionality relies solely on the composition of multiple stereotypes, or how multiple stereotypes synthesize the results of existing complex discrimination.

Several studies have now demonstrated that intersectional stereotypes are not simply superimposed, but are more complex and require more consideration. Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach (2008) introduced the concept of intersectional invisibility, noting that masculocentric, ethnocentric, and heterosexual-centric ideologies can cause individuals with multiple subordinate identities to belong to groups that do not conform to the archetypes of their respective identity groups [11]. Among global intersectional stereotypes of race and gender, minority men's characteristics converge more closely to minority archetypes than women's, this result was proved among Blacks, Middle Eastern Americans, Latinos, and Whites, but differing among Asian Americans. Because Asian American stereotypes carry typical feminine traits such as mildness, submissiveness, and shyness, there is more overlap between Asian stereotypes and feminine stereotypes relative to other races. The findings show that stereotypes of Asian Americans are no more similar to stereotypes of Asian American men than to stereotypes of Asian American women. And in addition to racial stereotypes tending to be closer to males, the study also found that cultural stereotypes of women were most similar to those of white women, less similar to minorities, and least similar to black women, a finding that is also consistent with the gender hypothesis. However, while men's cultural stereotypes were most similar to white males and less similar to minorities, black males were not the least similar to male stereotypes, and minority male' stereotypes were mostly very similar [12].

In terms of how people perceive intersectional stereotypes, the study suggests that perceivers have a series of lenses in their brains that people use as a framework for thinking about others in a given social context, and are likely to use only one lens at a time. The study interprets lenses as

patterns used to categorize others in relation to specific situations and identities. For example, when a perceiver is extraordinarily focused on race, he/she is more likely to categorize others based on their racial group than on gender or other factors. As well, when intersectional lenses are more salient to the perceiver, the perceiver is more likely to categorize others based on specific intersectional lenses rather than other, non-intersectional factors [13].

In addition to studying the application of the intersectionality theoretical framework, the researchers began to investigate whether complex discrimination is formed by complex stereotypes by simulating three scenarios. That is, complex intersectional stereotypes can often be concluded by considering a combination of simple stereotypes and the perceiver's relevant thresholds for individual behavior. Scenario 1 examines intersectional stereotypes in the workplace that cause White men to be uniquely advantaged and Black women to be uniquely disadvantaged, using data from PayScale's 2019 survey of more than 1.8 million corporate employees, providing information on Black men, Black women, White men, and White women promoted to manager and executives such as supervisors, and used behavioural threshold models to see if such intersectional stereotypes lead to discriminatory behaviours that can be explained by simple sexual stereotypes and racial stereotypes. Scenario Simulation 2 and Simulation 3 address the inequalities that exist in NYPD citizen stops, and both studies use data from NYPD stop-and-frisk between 2006-2012. Scenario 2 sought to confirm whether patterns of racial-sex discrimination in police stops could be explained by simple race and gender stereotypes through a behavioural threshold model, while Scenario 3 worked to verify that patterns of racial-age discrimination in police stops do not require race and age intersectional stereotypes. The results of the study also supported their conjecture that complex behavioural patterns do not necessarily constitute evidence of complex cognition and that simple group stereotypes combined with threshold models can yield complex discrimination patterns with binary outcomes [14].

The effect of different perceptual impressions of different identities on intersectional stereotypes is also a type of study that has received attention nowadays. In a related study, researchers used the theoretical framework of intersectionality to examine how intersectional race and sexual orientation affect social perceptions of men in a sample of American men and women. In Study 1, participants completed an online survey to assess the impact of sexual orientation and/or race on perceived group similarity to confirm the perceived similarity between intersectional groups and a single group. The study predicted that intersectional stereotypes contained unique elements that were not simply the result of summing racial stereotypes and sexual orientation stereotypes. The study found that gay men were considered to be the group least similar to the general category "male", while black heterosexuals were considered to be similar to the norm for the "male" group. Homosexuality reduced the similarity of this male group to the "male" category, while the combination of homosexuality and blackness further reduced the similarity of this group to the total category. It was also found that each of the four intersectional groups produced by the intersection of race and sexual orientation produced characteristics unique to that subgroup but neither to its race nor to its sexual orientation group. However, it was found that sexual orientation identity had a greater effect on perceptions than racial identity, with "male" and "straight" trait stereotypes overlapping much more than "homosexual" traits. Homosexual identity reduced men's similarity to their racial group, but black identity did not reduce men's similarity to their sexual orientation group. There are many reasons for this, but at the very least, it suggests that the different uni-directional stereotypes in the intersectional stereotypes have very different effects on the complex discriminatory behaviours and stereotypes experienced by the group, depending on the perceiver itself [15].

4. Discussion

What does the intersectional stereotype look like? This paper first discusses the origin and definition of intersectionality, and then summarizes the existing scientific findings. The existence and effects of intersectional stereotypes are discussed in terms of race, gender, sexual orientation, age, religion, etc. Groups with multiple non-mainstream identities are subject to more serious stereotypes, which undermine their rights, oppress their environment, and even cause some groups to be ignored. However, intersectional stereotypes are never superimposed by a single stereotype, but are related to the perceiver's concern factors, environment, behavioral threshold estimation, and the degree of understanding of different identity factors.

By summarizing the relevant papers on intersectionality and stereotypes, the authors considered that there are two shortcomings in the relevant scientific research.

First, most of the papers in this category are predominantly American, with almost all the papers' subjects and participants extracted from the U.S., and most of the research on race is directed at blacks and whites but ignores a large number of other people of colour. To demonstrate the validity of the intersectionality construct in other racial and other cultural contexts, more relevant studies and data are needed to fill this gap.

Second, as the number of studies in this area increases, the focus of research is gradually expanding from race, gender, and sexual orientation to age, class, and religion. However, the range of relevant factors and combinations is vast, and there is no limit to the potential for research in this area to develop newer perspectives in the future.. In particular, most research on racial factors has focused on blacks, whites, and Asians, while relatively little research has been done on other minorities, such as Hispanics and Latinos. This is one of the areas that needs to continue to be researched and expanded.

The prospect of research development of intersectionality as an interdisciplinary field is huge, and it is predicted that the future will develop separately according to the two directions proposed in the paper, and will focus on more intersectional stereotypes composed of multiple identities and apply them in different environments, and likewise conduct more profound research in the direction of how single stereotypes intersect and form more complex intersectional stereotypes.

5. Conclusions

This paper summarizes existing research on intersectionality and stereotype and looks into the future. The first is the application of the intersectionality construct to thinking about and viewing discrimination in different contexts, to better understand the injustices and dilemmas experienced by marginalized groups, and to find solutions to protect their rights and uphold social justice. The second part is to explore how different stereotypes influence the structure of intersectionality and whether different factors have different effect sizes. This area has been gaining attention and research in recent years, but there is still a great space to be developed and studied. In the future, further research should be carried out in the direction of cross-cultural, multiple people of colour and different stereotypes to study and explore the field more deeply.

References

- [1] *DeGraffenreid v. General Motors*, 413 U.S. 717 (1976)doi.
- [2] Crenshaw, Kimberle (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics," *University of Chicago Legal Forum: Vol. 1989, Article 8*.
- [3] McCall, L. (2005). *The complexity of intersectionality*. *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 30(3), 1771-1800. doi: 10.1086/426800.

- [4] Collins, P.H.,(2015). *Intersectionality's definitional dilemmas*. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 41, 1-20. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-073014-112142>.
- [5] Rosenthal, L.& Lobel, M. (2016). *Stereotypes of Black American Women Related to Sexuality and Motherhood*. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 40(3), 414-427. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684315627459>.
- [6] Johnson, & Rivera, M. A. (2015). *Intersectionality, Stereotypes of African American Men, and Redressing Bias in the Public Affairs Classroom*. *Journal of Public Affairs Education: J-PAE.*, 21(4), 511-522. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15236803.2015.12002217>.
- [7] Trauth, Cain, C. C., Joshi, K. D., Kvasny, L., & Booth, K. M. (2016). *The Influence of Gender-Ethnic Intersectionality on Gender Stereotypes about IT Skills and Knowledge*. *ACM SIGMIS Database: The DATABASE for Advances in Information Systems*, 47(3), 9-39. <https://doi.org/10.1145/2980783.2980785>.
- [8] Erentzen, C. A., Bergstrom, V. N. Z., Zeng, N., & Chasteen, A. L. (2022). *The gendered nature of Muslim and Christian stereotypes in the United States*. *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 0(0). <https://doi.org/10.1177/13684302221138036>.
- [9] Rochon PA, Kalia S, Higgs P (2021) *Gendered ageism: addressing discrimination based on age and sex*. *Lancet* 398(10301):648-649. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736\(21\)01636-6](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0140-6736(21)01636-6).
- [10] Rießenberger, K.A., Fischer, F. *Age and gender in gerontechnology development*. *Z Gerontol Geriat* 56, 189-194 (2023). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00391-023-02183-2>.
- [11] Purdie-Vaughns, V., Eibach, R.P. *Intersectional Invisibility: The Distinctive Advantages and Disadvantages of Multiple Subordinate-Group Identities*. *Sex Roles* 59, 377-391 (2008). <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-008-9424-4>.
- [12] Ghavami, N., & Peplau, L. A. (2013). *An Intersectional Analysis of Gender and Ethnic Stereotypes: Testing Three Hypotheses*. *Psychology of Women Quarterly*, 37(1), 113-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0361684312464203>.
- [13] Petsko, C. D., Rosette, A. S., & Bodenhausen, G. V. (2022). *Through the looking glass: A lens-based account of intersectional stereotyping*. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 123(4), 763-787. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pspi0000382>.
- [14] Hester, Payne, K., Brown-Iannuzzi, J., & Gray, K. (2020). *On Intersectionality: How Complex Patterns of Discrimination Can Emerge From Simple Stereotypes*. *Psychological Science*, 31(8), 1013-1024. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0956797620929979>.
- [15] Preddie, & Biernat, M. (2021). *More than the Sum of Its Parts: Intersections of Sexual Orientation and Race as They Influence Perceptions of Group Similarity and Stereotype Content*. *Sex Roles*, 84(9-10), 554-573. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11199-020-01185-3>.