

INTERSECTIONALITY IN AFRICAN RESEARCH

Findings from a systematic literature review



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Intersectionality in African research: Findings from a systematic literature review

Abstract

Intersectionality is a term used to describe the ways in which social identities – such as gender, sexuality, age, race, class, and disability, among others – are interconnected and create unique experiences of oppression and discrimination for marginalised persons. Adopting an intersectional framework in research and grant-making is increasingly acknowledged as important in meaningfully addressing persisting gender inequality and interconnected oppressions. To this end, the Science Granting Councils Initiative in Sub-Saharan Africa (SGCI), the Organisation of Women in Science for the Developing World (OWSD) South African National Chapter, and the German Research Foundation (DFG) are partnering to contribute to greater understanding of intersectionality, as it relates to the role of Science Granting Councils (SGC) in advancing equality in executing their mandates. This paper forms part of a series of reports and aims to establish the extent to and manner in which an intersectional framework has been adopted in African scholarship. This aim is addressed through a critical systematic review of existing intersectional research. The findings point to three main trends in African scholarship, centring on: (i) the politics of knowledge production; (ii) diversity and depth in research; and (iii) methodological innovation. We conclude with practical recommendations on the role of SGCs in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion through intersectional gender-transformative granting-making and stimulating research underpinned by intersectional frameworks.

1. Introduction and background

Research “provides a mirror to societies about what matters” (IDRC, 2019, p. 2), yet scientific knowledge production has a tainted history for being complicit in perpetuating gender inequality and related oppressions (Connell, Collyer, Maia, & Morrell, 2017). Feminist scholars have critiqued the manner in which claims of ‘scientific neutrality’ have smoothed over difference and complexity in research, to the detriment of women and other socially marginalised persons (Connell et al., 2017; Haraway, 1988; Harding, 1991; Keller, 1985; Mohanty, 2003). Despite significant advances over the past decades, knowledge production still carries the legacy of masculinist norms in both method and content (UNESCO, 2019). Addressing the unequal gender norms and power relations underpinning knowledge production is crucial to achieving higher quality, greater relevance and improved impact of research, not only to the benefit of women but for society broadly (UNESCO, 2018).

On the African continent, as elsewhere, there has been growing recognition that lasting systemic change requires addressing the structural drivers of gender inequality. Gender-transformative research takes this as its starting point, as an approach to research that seeks to understand how knowledge production can be mobilised in the service of social change (IDRC, 2019, p. 2). A gender-transformative approach to research emphasises the need “to examine a broader range of variables that may be independent and interactive causes of gender inequality and discrimination against women” (Medie & Kang, 2018, p. 38). Such a lens entails studying the manner in which social identities and experiences – such as gender, sexuality, age, race, class, and disability, among others – intersect in mutually reinforcing ways, to produce and compound contexts of vulnerability (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality theory, emerging out of black feminist activism in the US during the 1960s and 1970s, provides an analytical framework that illuminates this mutually constitutive character of overlapping oppressions. Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term, focused her analysis on how black women are positioned at the intersection of both race- and gender-based oppression, with the implication that their lived experiences of discrimination are distinct from those of white women and black men (1991). Intersectional theories and methodologies have been taken up across disciplines and borders, adding richer understanding of how social categories are interwoven to create positions of advantage and disadvantage (Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013). Science granting councils (SGC) play a key role in advancing an intersectional gender-transformative approach in knowledge production. SGCs contribute to setting and monitoring national research agendas and can stimulate research designs and content responsive to gender inequality and other intersecting oppressions, through adopting an intersectional gender-transformative lens in their grant-making practices. In this regard, there have been significant milestones globally as well as on the African continent. For example, the Global

Research Council (GRC) – which has significant representation from the African region – published its Statement of Principles and Actions on Promoting the Status and Equality of Women in Research in 2016 and constituted a Gender Working Group (GWG) to champion implementation of the Statement. Within the science and policy-making community, Gender Summit Africa has also provided a valuable regional platform for engaging gender throughout the research and policy cycle. Similarly, the Global Forum on Women in Scientific Research (GoFoWiSeR) initiative by the African Women in Agricultural Research and Development has promoted regional engagement on transforming systemic barriers to women’s full representation in science, technology and innovation (STI). Integration of an intersectional gender-transformative perspective in funding agencies’ policies and programmes, however, still remains uneven and lacks clear guidelines (Johnson et al., 2014; Sharman, 2012). In this paper we present findings from a critical systematic review of intersectional African scholarship, to provide recommendations to African SGCs in adopting an intersectional gender-transformative approach to policy, programs and research.

1.1. Gender and intersectionality in research designs and content

Integrating gender and other intersecting identities and experiences into research designs and content is key to advancing gender transformation in knowledge production in the region. Gender-blind research – research that either ignores or deliberately does not address gender, on the assumption that gender-based differences do not apply – not only perpetuates gender inequalities and bias, but also detracts from the quality, credibility and relevance of the findings (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007). Gender-aware research may include gender in the rationale for the research and “consider gender-differentiated experiences in a limited number of areas, but [...] not extend the analysis to all relevant areas” (IDRC, 2019, p. 4). Gender-sensitive research, while attending to different experiences, needs, and inequalities among women, stops short of interrogating the root causes of gender inequalities (WHV, 2012). Gender-responsive research considers gender and intersectionality “in the rationale, design, and methodology, but [does] not incorporate the deeper root causes of gender power relations and structural issues such as norms, policies, and laws” (IDRC, 2019, p. 4). Gender-transformative research, however, “examines, challenges and ultimately transforms structures, norms and behaviours that reinforce gender inequality, and strengthens those that support gender equality” (WHV, 2012). Best practices in gender-transformative research include: embedding research in context, so as to address root causes and structural barriers driving gender disparities; avoiding a ‘one-size fits all’ approach; meaningful engagement through participatory methods; engaging actors who have systemic influence; and where relevant, drawing on mixed methods (IDRC, 2019; WHV, 2012).

As research informed by intersectional frameworks has gained traction, literature reviews reflecting on and synthesising this growing body of work have also appeared. These include, for example, recommendations for an intersectional approach to health research and funding (Sharman & Johnson, 2012); a genealogical analysis of intersectionality as theory and methodology (Rice, Harrison, & Friedman, 2019); and guidance for applying intersectionality to public policy analysis (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011), sociological research (Choo & Ferree, 2010) and psychological research (Cole, 2009; Shields, 2008; Warner, 2008). These publications are, however, largely discipline-specific and do not constitute a more comprehensive review of existing literature. Further to this, none of the reviews focus on a Global South region such as the African continent.

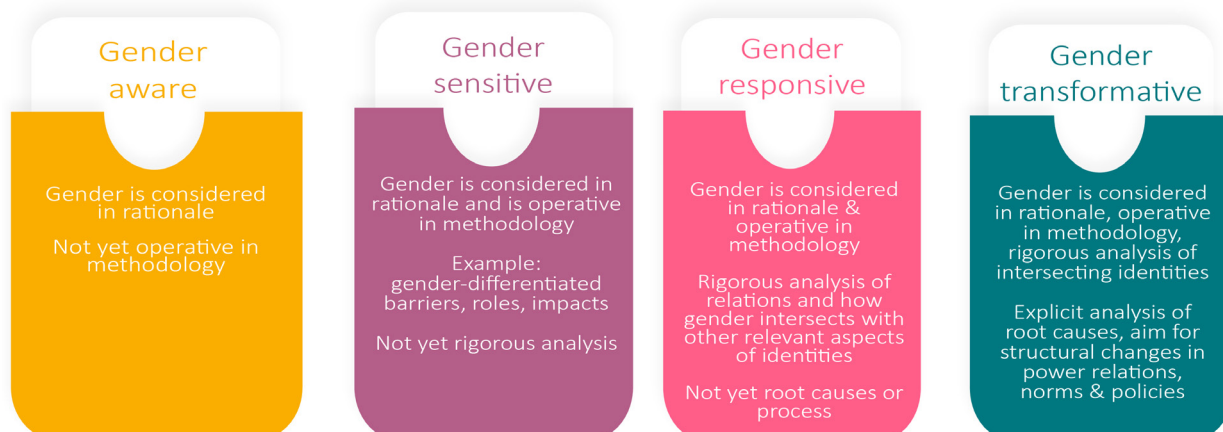


Figure 1: Gender analysis in research, adapted from IDRC (2019)

1.2. Intersectional grant-making practices

Grant-makers are central to strengthening and deepening gender-transformative research, through influencing research content as well as methodologies. Applying a gender analysis lens in grant-making – while still not fully mainstreamed in the policies, programmes and practices of SGCs – has been gaining momentum. For instance, funding applications of the French National Research Agency, German Research Foundation, Irish Research Council, Research Council of Norway and Canadian Institutes of Health Research, among others, require applicants to indicate how a gender analysis will be integrated throughout the project cycle with some agencies providing related training modules and tools for researchers and reviewers (Gendered Innovations, n.d.). In the African context, emerging examples include a gender strategy developed by Mozambique's Fundo Nacional de Investigação and Kenya's National Commission for STI which is in the process of developing a policy on youth, gender and other marginalised groups in STI (as noted in the SGCI Gender Mainstreaming Framework and Action Plan). In the main, such policies are, however, largely restricted to European and North American public funding agencies. Further to this, the majority of policies are limited to gender, without consideration of other intersecting social identities and experiences such as age, race, class, sexuality and disability, among others (Schiebinger et al., 2010).

This paper responds to the above gaps through a systematic review of intersectional research. The review forms part of a larger project aimed at establishing the extent to and manner in which an intersectional framework is adopted throughout the grant-making and research cycle, with a focus on participating SGCI countries^a. The objectives of this larger study are attached as appendix A. We focus here on a sub-set of data, to present findings of a critical systematic review of scholarship produced on the African continent.

2. Aims and objectives

Our critical systematic review is aimed at establishing main trends and patterns in African scholarship informed by an intersectional framework, in order to offer productive insights for researchers and practitioners – and SGCs in particular – towards advancing equality, diversity and inclusion in research. Specifically, our systematic review is interested in exploring the following domains in African scholarship:

- a. When, where and by who research is conducted
- b. Conceptualisations of intersectionality in research
- c. Theoretical frameworks used
- d. Research methods and disciplinary focus
- e. Main social identities focused on in research
- f. Main thematic areas explored
- g. Sources of funding

In what follows we outline the methodology informing the review, before presenting the findings. We conclude with a discussion and recommendations emerging from the review.

3. Methodology

Our critical systematic review differs from a traditional literature review in that it relies on a rigorous and explicit methodological framework, developed in response to a clearly conceptualised research question about a body of literature (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005). Using selected key words and specified inclusion and exclusion criteria, we conducted a systematic search of standard academic databases to identify relevant literature published in academic peer-reviewed journals; published between January 2010 and December 2019; and comprising empirical, theoretical, methodological, literature and systematic review article types. We excluded editorials, book reviews and books.

^a The 15 councils in Sub-Saharan Africa participating in the SGCI include Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Ghana, Senegal, Kenya, Uganda, Tanzania, Rwanda, Ethiopia, Botswana, Malawi, Mozambique, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe. This group of councils and additional councils representing the SGCI funding partners - South Africa, Canada, Germany, United Kingdom, and Sweden - are the focus of this project.

3.1. Literature selection

The literature search made use of EBSCOhost – an aggregator library database that collates content from 375 full-text publisher databases. EBSCOhost traverses all major academic disciplines and is not restricted by language of publication. It includes all African journals that have an international accreditation (such as ISI, Scopus and IBSS). Further to this, EBSCOhost does not limit the search to databases to which one has institutional access.

In conducting the search, we first identified keywords corresponding to the study objectives. The first set of keywords was: 'Intersectionality'; 'Intersectional framework'; 'Social identities'; 'Social transformation'; 'Funding agencies'; 'Grant-making'; and 'Human capital development'. These keywords were tested in an initial search in EBSCOhost to determine the effectiveness of the keywords for subsequent searches. The final list of keywords confirmed by the research team were: "Intersectionality*"; 'Funding agencies'; 'Grant-making'; and 'Human capital development'. These keywords were then established into Boolean phrases and once again verified on the same database. We decided that joining numerous keywords with the Boolean operators (i.e. AND, OR, and NOT) will advance the search and improve efficiency. This resulted in two phrases as it reached a wider range of studies from several parts of the world. For example, Boolean phrase 2 (see below) yielded many results, whereas Boolean phrase 1 did not yield results relevant for the study. This process was conducted during January-February 2020. The two identified Boolean phrases are as follows:

Boolean phrase 1

Funding agencies OR grant making AND intersectionality

Boolean phrase 2

Intersectionality* AND funding agencies OR Intersectionality* AND grant making OR Human capital development AND funding agencies OR Human Capital Development AND grant making.

We took two additional steps to ensure that we did not omit any articles published in French or Portuguese. First, we combined keywords to create Boolean phrases with French and Portuguese speaking African countries, such as (a) Intersectionality AND Mozambique OR Burkina Faso OR Ivory Coast OR Senegal; (b) Funding agencies AND Mozambique OR Burkina Faso OR Ivory Coast OR Senegal; (c) Grant making AND Mozambique OR Burkina Faso OR Ivory Coast OR Senegal; (d) Human capital development AND Mozambique OR Burkina Faso OR Ivory Coast OR Senegal, limiting the language of the search to French and Portuguese. Second, we used the keywords of the initial search, namely (a) Intersectionality AND funding agencies OR Intersectionality AND Grant Making, but changed the language of the search from English to Portuguese and French only.

Database search: An all-inclusive search of EBSCOhost databases was conducted using the Boolean phrases presented above. The titles of articles identified across EBSCOhost databases were assessed based on whether their titles met the inclusion criteria and based on the relevance of the title to the study objectives. The titles that were considered appropriate for inclusion were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet. We conducted a Google Scholar search to identify any articles that were not included in the database search and also recorded these on the Excel sheet. Screening: The title search yielded 119 articles. We reviewed the abstract of each article against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Eligibility: At this stage, we screened the full text of the 119 articles that had been included based on their abstracts, to ensure each article had an Africa focus. Studies conducted outside of Africa were excluded. This process yielded a final data set of 50 articles, all published in English language journals^b.

3.2. Codebook development, coding and analysis

Adopting a deductive, but iterative approach we developed a set of a priori codes based on the study objective,

^b The database search yielded three articles published in French and Portuguese, but none of these met inclusion criteria as they did not have an Africa focus and were not based on African research contexts.

subsequently refined to capture the evolving complexity of the data set. We used qualitative data analysis software (ATLAS.ti, version 8) to organise, code and analyse the data set (Friese, 2014; Woods, Paulus, Atkins, & Macklin, 2016). Articles were first downloaded from the selected data bases and captured in Mendeley, an online reference manager used for managing and sharing research articles. From Mendeley the articles were imported into ATLAS.ti. Each article was then coded using the developed set of codes, e.g. conceptualisation of intersectionality, article type, research design and social identities of study participants.

At this point, we were able to export the codes and the quotations into a word document, for analysis. We conducted a descriptive quantitative analysis, treating the coded documents as data (Dixon-Woods, Agarwal, Jones, Young, & Sutton, 2005; Lynch et al., 2018). This was supplemented with qualitative analysis, to “identify patterns and themes, done iteratively through referring to primary data sources where needed” (Lynch, Swartz & Isaacs, 2017, p. 5). Our interpretation of the data was informed by a critical feminist understanding of knowledge production as a socio-political project (Lynch et al., 2019).

4. Findings^c

4.1. When, where and by who is research produced?

While the time period included in the review spans the past 10 years, the majority of articles (68%) were published between 2016 and 2019, indicating growing interest in using intersectional frameworks in African research (Figure 2).

The country contexts in which research was conducted demonstrate some diversity, although as Table 1 indicates, just over half of studies were conducted in South Africa. (Countries where only one study was conducted, and not listed in the table, include Liberia, Nigeria, Rwanda, Tunisia, Uganda, Zimbabwe and Guinea-Bissau). This trend continues when considering authors’ institutional location^d : Authors based in South Africa are most commonly represented in the data set, at 46%. This is followed by authors based in the US (20%), Canada (12%), UK (8%) and Sweden (4%). Authors from countries elsewhere on the continent and the Global South comprise only 8% of the total data set (specifically, Ghana, Nigeria, Kenya and South America).

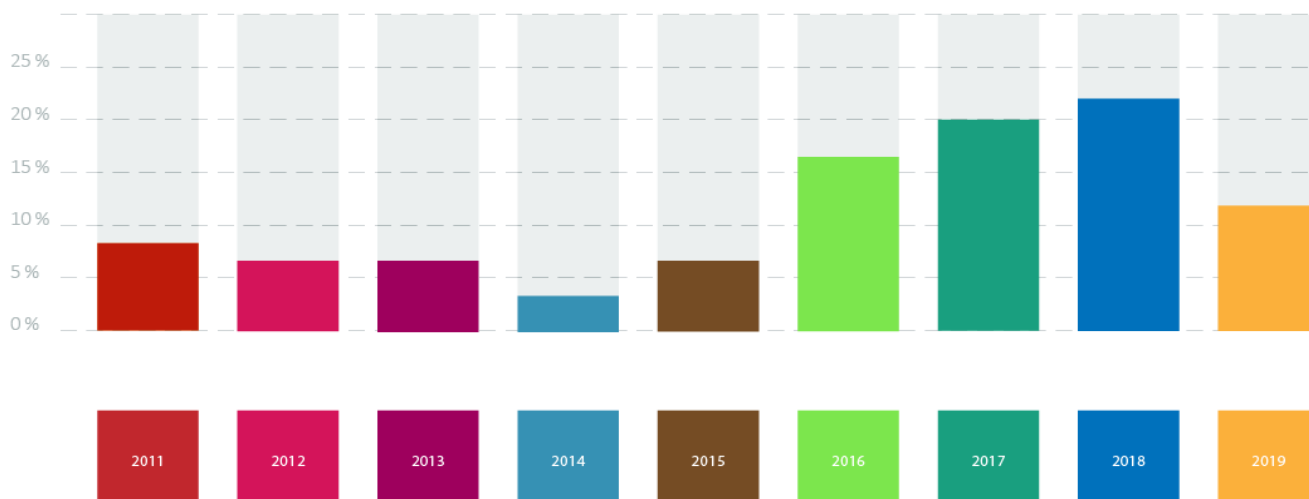


Figure 2: Year of publication

^c In instances where totals for different code categories do not add up to 100%, this is due to overlap across studies.

^d We follow Medie and Kang (2018) in that we do not assume that authors’ institutional location necessarily reflects citizenship. We refer to institutional location as it relates to ‘place’, rather than ‘nationality’, where “place matters particularly on the grounds of equality, knowledge advancement and symbolic representation” (Medie & Kang, 2018, p. 43).

Given that being listed as first or sole author in publications often supports professional advancement and funding success, we were interested in reviewing authorship order against gender. When considering the gender of the first author (or sole author) listed in articles, articles were largely authored by women (72%), with 26% authored by men, and 2% of articles not providing this information^e. Single-authorship only differed marginally between men and women. Of the articles first-authored by women, 42% were single-authored and of those first-authored by men 38% were single-authored. The majority of articles made use of qualitative methods (this is explored in more detail in section 4.4), providing some insight into the higher number of studies first-authored by female researchers. A review of journal articles across academic disciplines concludes that women “are more likely to use exploratory and qualitative methods and males are more likely to use quantitative methods” (Thelwall et al., 2019, p. 1). Similarly, a review of studies published in management journals found that “women are over-represented and men are under-represented in published qualitative studies as compared to non-qualitative authors” (Plowman et al., 2011, p. 64).

Country	Percentage
South Africa	54%
Kenya	10%
Ghana	8%
“Sub-Saharan Africa”	6%
Lesotho	4%
Malawi	4%
Namibia	4%

Table 1: Research country contexts

4.2. Conceptualisations of intersectionality in research

Authors largely aligned their conceptualisation of intersectionality with that of Crenshaw (1991) (e.g. Agboola, 2018; Amroussia, 2017; Boonzaier & van Niekerk, 2018; Braun, 2011; Carrim, 2016; Gouws, 2017; Hajdu, 2013; Mokoele, 2017; Moodley, 2015; Moreau, 2015; Ndinda, 2012; Sylvain, 2011; Wood, 2019; Yacob-Haliso, 2016). Boonzaier and van Niekerk (2018), for instance, define intersectionality as “a concept developed by second wave black feminists who posit that social identities and oppressions related to sexuality, ethnicity, gender, class, race, disability and so forth, intersect and are ‘interdependent and mutually constitutive’” (p. 4). Jaga (2018) similarly states that “intersectionality refers to the multiple dimensions of difference (e.g. race and gender) that intersect and interact to give rise to distinct forms of injustice and discrimination that shape people’s social and material lives” (p. 4).

Sylvain (2011) expands on this by drawing on Crenshaw’s delineation of two types of intersectionality: ‘structural intersectionality’ pertaining to how racialised minority women are “at the intersection of multiple and mutually reinforcing systems of inequality”; and ‘political intersectionality’ pertaining to how racialised minority women are “positioned within two (or more) groups that often pursue competing agendas” (p. 90). Sylvain (2011) presents the example of San women and their experiences of harm at the intersection of structural and political dimensions:

My aim is to illustrate how structural intersectionality influences the particular forms of harm San women experience, and how political intersectionality often positions San women at the intersections of competing political agendas predicated on monolithic categories of race, ethnicity and gender. A significant source of political intersectionality for San women is the tension between collective group rights and gender justice that arises as a result of conceptions of ‘groups’ based on male experiences, priorities and perspectives (p. 90).

^e We coded the gender of first authors based on the demographic information provided in the articles or online institutional profiles. Where this information was not available, we coded this as ‘unclear’. None of demographic information indicated author gender identities outside of a normative male-female binary.

As an analytical tool, authors in the studies under review applied intersectionality to productively illuminate aspects of participants' experiences that would not be accessible using a theoretical lens that considers identities as discrete, as shown in the examples below:

Taking into account the intersectional approach, we argue that the participants had experienced these different forms of power relations simultaneously. The single mother's social location as underprivileged contributed largely in framing these unequal power relations (Amroussia, 2017, p. 8).

The notion of intersectionality becomes useful in explaining how gender and race interact to construct the location of Black women in general and African women in particular, in business leadership in South Africa (Ndinda, 2012, p. 134).

4.3. Theoretical frameworks used

In reviewing the theoretical frameworks underpinning studies in the data set, most studies described applying an intersectional framework only. A substantial number of studies (28%), however, drew on other theoretical frameworks and analytical tools, in addition to that of intersectionality (see Table 2). Of these, almost half were critical feminist, gender and post-colonial theories.

Our analysis indicates that such cross-pollination has several other benefits for the studies under review. It embeds intersectional research in localised realities. Lundy et al. (2016), citing Oyewumi (1997), states that "analyses and interpretations of Africa must start with Africa, they should reflect specific cultural and local contexts" (p. 62). Similarly, Moreau (2015) argues that bringing intersectionality into conversation with other theoretical frameworks has the potential to enrich understandings of "context-specific power dynamics" in African contexts (p. 508).

Finally, integrating other theoretical frameworks with intersectionality challenges conventional hierarchies in

Fusing intersectionality with other theories also facilitates analysis of the continued influence of pre-colonial, colonial and post-colonial structures on women's and other marginalised persons' lives (Lundy, Fernandes, & Lartley, 2016; Mkhize & Cele, 2017; Reygan, 2013). For instance, Mkhize and Cele (2017) argue that their integration of intersectional theory with postcolonial feminist theory enables "understanding and acknowledgment of specific women's past and present history", locating the research "within the context of the brutal history of colonialism and apartheid" (p. 132).

Further to this, it allows for meaningful interrogation of agency: "We understand agency as the power people have to think for themselves and act in ways that shape their experiences and life trajectories" (Lundy et al., 2016, p. 62), including how agency is constrained by "intersecting social structures of power" (Wågström, 2018, p. 2). An integration of other theoretical frameworks also allows research to be more attuned to the social construction of gender and other intersecting identities, with the implication that fixed understandings of normative (Western) conceptualisations are not always relevant across contexts (Lundy et al., 2016; Reygan, 2017).

Theoretical frameworks
African feminist theory
Intersectional citizenship theory
Feminist epistemological standpoint theory
Dialogical self-theory
Social justice pedagogy
Poststructural feminism
Femist political ecology
Relative change theory
Critical diversity literacy
Livelihood resilience
Mental models theory
Bourdieu's 'habitus'
Interpretivist theory
Post-colonial feminist theory

Table 2: Theoretical frameworks underpinning studies

knowledge production and decision-making about how research findings are applied in policy and programmes: “the conventional top-down approach of policy-making process may risk perpetuating existing power dynamics between policy makers and policy beneficiaries”, arguing instead for policy development that accommodates alternative knowledge production methods, e.g. participatory research, and centres beneficiaries’ voices (Nyariro, 2018, p. 311).

Such cross-pollination of intersectionality and other theoretical frameworks expands the analytical tools available to researchers and makes an important contribution to intersectionality scholarship emerging from the continent.

4.4 Research methods and disciplinary focus

The articles under review were predominantly empirical (80%), followed by document analyses (4%), theoretical articles (4%) and literature and systematic reviews (3%).

Empirical articles mostly relied on qualitative research methods. Of these the majority used individual in-depth interviews, followed by focus group discussions. Other qualitative data collection methods are listed in Table 3. While not as common as interviews and focus group discussions, the use of participatory methods such as photovoice, workshops structured to foster discussion, and participatory mapping align with an intersectional gender-transformative approach and in that manner, provides opportunities for studies to speak to structural issues such as gender norms underpinning inequalities and foster agency among participants (IDRC, 2019). Several empirical studies also made use of mixed methodologies. These included: surveys combined with household interviews; household surveys combined with “qualitative work”; and participant observation combined with interviews and archival review of newspapers, books, journal articles and other documents to help sketch the background and study context. Where quantitative methods were used, these included a market survey, household survey, and quantitative analysis of existing data sets.

Qualitative methods (74%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> In-depth interviews Interviews as part of evaluation activities Life story interviews Focus group discussions Workshops structured to foster discussion in a safe space Case studies Narrative inquiry Participation observation as part of ethnographic studies Photovoice Participatory mapping
Quantitative methods (13%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Household survey Market survey Quantitative analysis of existing data
Mixed-methods (10%)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Surveys combined with interviews Household survey combined with qualitative work Participant observation combined with interviews, archival interviews
Documents reviews	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Document reviews Review of existing records Archival review Policy analysis

Table 3: Research methods

In order to establish the discipline within which research studies were situated, we reviewed the disciplinary focus of the journals they were published in. Articles were published across 39 different journals (thus, some journals published more than one of the articles in the data set). Journal disciplines represented in the data set were categorised as follows: Social Sciences and Humanities; Health Sciences; and interdisciplinary journals^f. Social Sciences and Humanities were by far the most common at 87%, followed by 8% of articles appearing in Health Sciences journals, and 5% in interdisciplinary journals. Notably, there were no science, technology, engineering or mathematics (STEM) journals in the data set. This corresponds with the low number of quantitative methodologies used in the studies under review, where ‘hard sciences’ are more likely to employ such methods.

4.5. Main social identities focused on in research

While an intersectional analysis implies that a number of interconnected identities are simultaneously analysed, it is still possible to identify main identities or experiences brought into focus by the studies under review. Reflecting a global trend in intersectionality studies, gender, class and race dominate in the data set. There is, however, still substantial diversity in the range of identities represented in the articles under review, albeit in smaller numbers. African scholarship also engaged intersections of: age, marital status; sexuality (specifically, LGBTI^g focused); culture; unemployment; migrant, refugee and asylum seeker status; education; disability; health status (HIV/AIDS) and religion. The inclusion of sexual and gender minorities might seem incongruent with African research settings, but these studies are largely conducted in South Africa (12%) where an enabling legislative context is in place, with the exception of one study conducted in Kenya.

4.6. Main thematic areas explored

The thematic areas^h that form the main focus of articles under review span a range of concerns relevant to the region. Gender is, unsurprisingly, the dominant focus of the majority of studies and limited to the normative category ‘woman’. What is noteworthy, however, is that studies with a focus on masculinity comprise 8% of the data set which points to a more critical engagement with gender than the predominance of studies focused on women might convey. Consistent with the inclusion of LGBTI identities in the preceding section, the high number of articles engaging with sexuality as research topic corresponds with these studies largely being conducted in South Africa.

The range of topics covered in the data set is broad, but on closer inspection it is possible to see that four thematic areas dominate – gender, sexuality, climate change and policy-related analyses. Topics that appeared only once in the data set, and therefore not noted in Table 4, include: Tourism; child support grants; crime; food security; local government; millennium development goals (MDGs); male circumcision; entrepreneurship; water access; sustainable livelihoods; international development; land reform; rural economic development; disability; and health systems. While small in number, it points to the wide range of research topics engaged by researchers using an intersectional framework.

^f While many journals accept manuscripts from different disciplines, it was relatively simple to group journals according to these categories. Social Sciences and Humanities journals included, for example, *Gender, Place & Culture*; *Africa Education Review*; and *International Sociology*. Health Sciences included, for example, *BMC Public Health* and *Journal of Global Health*. Journals that we considered as interdisciplinary included, for example, *Anthrozoos* which publishes articles ranging from veterinary sciences to anthropology.

^g We use ‘LGBTI’ – an acronym for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex – as an umbrella term referring to sexual and gender minority persons. We do so mindful of contestations around language describing sexual and gender diversity on the continent, but also noting that this term is widely used and familiar in civil society, government and funding communities.

^h This was calculated based on topic focus as identified in article title.

Main topic focus	Percentage
Gender ('women')	32%
Sexuality	12%
Climate change	10%
Policy	10%
Sexual and reproductive health	8%
Education	8%
Masculinity	8%
Poverty	8%
Gender-based violence	6%
Agriculture	6%
Women in leadership	6%
Human rights	6%
Refugees / migrants	4%
HIV / Aids	4%
Xenophobia	4%

Table 4: Thematic areas

4.7. Sources of funding

Funding for the studies under review was supported by a wide variety of funders. Table 5 shows that funding support is mainly by grant-makers outside of Africa. Of these, most are located in the US and Canada. Funders acknowledged more than once for support are: Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC); International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada; Centre for International Governance Innovation, Canada; UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID); and the National Research Foundation of South Africa.

Sixty percent of the articles in our review did not acknowledge a funding source. This may indicate that this work was conducted without financial support. This could in turn mean several things, for example that papers were written while in fellowship positions or other academic positions, or that researchers conducted intersectional work while being funded for other larger projects. This might also relate to the hard-to-fund nature of small-scale, critical qualitative research.

Several publications acknowledged support from more than one funder or for specific aspects of the research

The following funders were acknowledged by authors:

Funder	Location
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	US
The Open Society Institute (OSI)	US
United States Agency for International Development (USAID)	US
The US National Institute of Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism	US
The US National Institute for Child Health and Human Development	US
Andrew W. Mellon Foundation	US
The World Bank	US
National Science Foundation (NSF)	US
Interdisciplinary Behavioural and Social Science Research program (administered by NSF)	US
Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC) (3)	Canada
International Development Research Centre (IDRC), Canada (3)	Canada
Centre for International Governance Innovation, Canada (2)	Canada
UK Government's Department for International Development (DfID) (3)	UK
Economic and Social Research Council	UK
Wellcome Trust Investigator Award	UK
John Fell Foundation (University of Oxford)	UK
The European Community and several European funding agencies	Europe
The Land Deal Politics Initiative, International Institute of Social Studies	Netherlands
NWO-WOTRO Science for Global Development Migration, Development and Conflict programme	Netherlands
The South Africa Netherlands Partnership for Alternatives in Development (SANPAD)	South Africa, Netherlands
National Research Foundation of South Africa (3)	South Africa
Swedish International Cooperation Agency through the Africa Regional Programme of the International HIV/AIDS Alliance	Sweden
The African Development Bank	Côte d'Ivoire
AGRA, or the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, is a Nairobi-based grant-making organisation co-founded by the Gates and Rockefeller Foundations in 2006	Kenya; US

Some authors also indicated that their research was conceptualised and written while on fellowship programmes, graduate research funds or supported by a faculty research fund. The following institutional support from universities was acknowledged: W.E.B. Du Bois Research Institute at Harvard University; University of Denver's Faculty Research Fund; the Department of Geography & the Environment, University of Denver; and a Public Good Fund from the University of Denver's Centre for Community Engagement to advance Scholarship and Learning (CCESL). Other universities, institutes and fellowship programmes listed are: US Borlaug Fellows in Global Food Security Graduate Research Grant; Doctoral School of the University of Sussex; Harry Frank Guggenheim Foundation and the University for Peace Africa Program.

5. Limitations of the study

Our analysis could be seen as limited by our exclusion of books, monographs, unpublished research reports, and theses. However, when considering accessibility, it is likely that academic journal articles are generally more widely accessible to academic communities than books and other publishing formats and therefore more readily influence and reflect the state of current scholarship.

6. Discussion

It is possible to identify three main trends across the findings: (i) the politics of knowledge production; (ii) diversity and depth in research content; and (iii) methodological innovation. These trends speak to the contribution of African intersectional scholarship to improving research excellence and advancing knowledge production in the service of intersectional gender-transformative change.

6.1. *The politics of knowledge production*

In the main, African intersectional research is either unfunded, or supported by funding from Northern grant-makers, with the latter aligning with a broader regional funding trend across research topics and disciplines (Chataway et al., 2017; Tijssen & Kraemer-Mbula, 2018). There is low regional diversity among authors, with our findings indicating that more than half of studies are conducted in South Africa. Similarly, researchers are largely based in South Africa, with nearly all of the remaining studies being authored by researchers based in the global North. Authors from elsewhere on the continent are severely under-represented. Medie and Kang (2018), in their analysis of African scholarship on gender, conclude that scholars located in the Global South are severely under-represented. While institutional affiliation does not necessarily reflect nationality – e.g. global South authors in the diaspora – location is important in that it shapes access to research funding and training opportunities and influences teaching loads, among other factors (Medie & Kang, 2018). The engagement of scholars from the global North is not in itself problematic; instead, it is the manner in which a lack of diverse voices risks undermining an intersectional gender-transformative agenda: greater diversity not only supports equality but produces higher quality research (Briggs & Weathers, 2016). A meta-analysis of research evaluations concludes that studies housed wholly in the global South generally rate highly on quality, use-value and legitimacy indicators (McLean & Sen, 2018), suggesting that “those closely linked to a particular problem seem to be well placed to develop a solution” (Lebel & McLean, 2018, p. 25). Further to this, the geopolitics of knowledge production speak to issues of power and representation: “The power relations underlying knowledge production about Africa continue to keep African scholarship and African scholars outside of the centre” (Anyidoho, 2006, p. 164).

Interestingly, the findings indicate that women overwhelmingly lead African intersectional knowledge production, in contrast to established gendered patterns indicating higher scientific outputs by male academics (Aiston & Jung, 2015). This finding should, however, be considered in relation to the fact that intersectionality research, as a body of scholarship, is positioned within Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines where women tend to be better represented than in STEM disciplines. This gendered pattern warrants further investigation and will particularly benefit from in-depth individual interviews with female scholars publishing in this domain. Such research can explore the influence of intersecting identities and experiences, such as age, parenting status, level of appointment and institutional support. We address this in phase 2 and phase 4 of the larger study this paper forms part of, to provide evidence-based insight to public funding agencies in this regard.

6.2. *Diversity and depth in research content*

There is substantial diversity in the content of African intersectional scholarship. In terms of volume of articles, however, gender, race and class dominate – echoing international research – while articles that include other intersecting identities occur in far lower numbers. Similarly, while the thematic focus areas attended to in the studies under review cover a range of research topics, the body of scholarship is largely dominated by a small number of topics, i.e. gender, sexuality, climate change and policy-related studies. Thus, while the findings point to breadth of intersectional research in terms of the wide range of social identities, experiences and thematic focus areas covered, there is still a lack of depth in terms of the extent to which different categories are populated. While gender, race and class remain significant markers of discrimination and marginalisation, such a narrow focus risks lumping together groups of people facing widely diverging and complex oppressions. Intersectional research that better identifies and addresses “the particular challenges faced by the most vulnerable” is critical for the development of transformative policy and programming that ameliorates systemic inequalities on the continent (Carr & Thompson, 2014, p. 1870). This underscores the importance of stimulating research that is responsive to dimensions of social difference that remain underexplored in African contexts. Our findings indicate that African studies adopting an intersectional lens are responsive to such a range of social identities, experiences and contextual challenges, thereby contributing to addressing this gap, but that this is being done on a small scale and needs to be further supported.

6.3. Methodological innovation

Our findings indicate that the deployment of intersectional frameworks is not yet crossing methodological and disciplinary boundaries. Instead, there is low methodological variation with the majority of studies drawing on qualitative methods and positioned in Social Sciences and Humanities disciplines. The paucity of intersectional quantitative studies and near absence of science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines echo the global research landscape. The high number of qualitative studies is to be welcomed, considering that qualitative methods are well-suited to researching interwoven, complex social dynamics and gaining depth of understanding. Bauer and Scheim (2019), however, argue for the value of quantitative intersectional analyses in, for example, analyses of their mediating drivers of intersectional inequalities. Such methodological innovation should be encouraged in the African context.

The findings indicate that only a small number of articles demonstrate theoretical and methodological engagement with intersectionality, with a complete lack of articles consolidating knowledge through reviews. Intersectional methods are often described as intimidating, due to the complexity of analysis, and there remains a need to translate concepts “into practical methods and research tools” (Schiebinger & Arlow, 2010, p. 47). The small number of theoretical and methodological articles means that guidance for conducting intersectional research in African contexts are lacking. However, the high volume of empirical studies being conducted offers an opportunity for researchers to critically reflect on contextualised methodologies and theorisations of intersectionality and contribute these insights to the local and global knowledge base.

7. Recommendations

We can draw several recommendations for researchers, practitioners and SGCs from our review findings: The findings related to the politics of knowledge production in Africa, about Africa – where African scholars are continually on the margins of knowledge production – is an ongoing concern. Similarly, the findings that research produced in Africa is largely supported by funding sources from outside of the continent aligns with previous research studies and requires attention. We recommend that African-based SGCs put into action practical measures to address these concerns by funding more intersectional work by African scholars and supporting outputs authored by African scholars. Alongside this, international funders could develop funding policies, models and grants that support research led by Africa-based principal investigators, or where such research requires international collaboration, ensuring equitable grant-making mechanisms in such funding instruments. These practices could assist in removing barriers to African leadership in knowledge production and promote intersectional research that benefits from locally embedded analyses. Related to this, efforts to address uneven contributions by authors from different African countries will increase the richness and use-value of research findings, through developing scholarship that is responsive to and relevant for particular local contexts. SGCs could invest in regional programmes through, for example, consortium funding models, as well as existing regional initiatives such as the SGCI, to pilot such approaches.

The review indicates that African scholarship addresses a wide range of intersecting identities and thematic areas, but that these categories still lack depth of inquiry and to a large extent mirror the dominance of race, class and gender found in international scholarship. Areas of study that are particularly salient in African contexts include gender and its intersections with age and generation, distribution of wealth in households (e.g. access to land), language, ethnicity, indigeneity, and rurality, among others. SGCs can grow the depth and diversity of identities and experiences in intersectional research through funding projects engaging these domains in particular through, for example, targeted funded programmes and calls for journal articles or special issues of journals, and / commissioned discussion papers.

There are several actions funding agencies can take to spur methodological innovation. As discussed previously, there are numerous strengths and benefits of bringing intersectionality in conversation with other theoretical frameworks, especially in enriching study findings and making sense of data within particular social, political and other contexts. At the same time intersectional methods are described as intimidating due to the complexity of analysis. Leveraging the benefits of fusing intersectionality with other theoretical frameworks, requires building researchers’ capacity to more confidently apply intersectionality as analytical tool. In this regard we suggest that SGCs fund training programmes for grantees in the application of intersectional frameworks,

in particular intersectional gender-transformative work which seeks to interrogate root causes of structural barriers driving gender disparities, and within particular contexts. A suggestion to this end would be for funding agencies to consider funding mechanisms that include capacity building for grantees in applying intersectional frameworks. SGCs could collaborate with experts to offer workshops to grantees, and consider application of intersectional frameworks in review and evaluation processes. Similarly, we recommend the funding of fellowships, postgraduate and postdoctoral scholarships in relation to intersectional research practice with the aim of supporting such research across different career levels.

While qualitative methodologies are well-suited to studying complex, interrelated issues and capturing nuanced and contextualised experiences, the methodology itself could in some sense be a limitation, if the aim is for intersectional work to influence change on a larger scale, e.g. policy changes. Small scale exploratory projects, where the intent is not to generalise to the larger population can be supplemented with research drawing on quantitative methods. Using mixed methodologies is promoted as good practice in intersectional gender-transformative research. The low number of theoretical, methodological and review articles in the data set is an area that can be addressed through targeted interventions. Also here, we suggest mechanisms such as special calls or commissioned discussion papers to stimulate methodological innovation and theory building regarding intersectional research on the continent.

Finally, SGCs can benefit from partnering with other sectors. Funders in the not-for-profit sector offer useful intersectional grant-making practices and models that could potentially be adapted by public funding agencies, in order to stimulate intersectional gender-transformative research and thereby deepen the impact of the research they fund. For instance, best practices for civil society intersectional grant-making include: supporting solutions that address root causes and seek systemic change; investing in both short-term and longer-term projects; building relationships with partners across traditional divides; engaging in regular self-assessment and adjusting strategies and practices accordingly (Funders for a Just Economy, 2018; Ryan, 2004).

8. Conclusion

Sharman and Johnson (2012) note that despite recognising the importance of integrating an intersectional lens, the complexity of the concept at times “create[s] challenges for researchers and research funding agencies, as both strive to bridge the gulf between theory and method, or between theory and funding mechanism” (p. 1812). The findings of this review indicate that African scholarship is not shying away from such complexity and generating rich analyses of the ways in which multiple systems of oppression create contexts of vulnerability in local contexts. Grant-makers such as SGCs can wield their influence to further the contributions made by this body of scholarship to transforming knowledge production and spurring social change.

Appendix A: Methodological overview of SGCI Intersectional Research and Funding study

The table below summarises the objectives of the larger SGCI study in which this paper is situated, titled ‘Intersectional research, grant-making and human capital development: Considerations for public funding agencies in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion’.

PHASE 1: CRITICAL REVIEW
<p>Objective 1: Review existing research using an intersectional framework, across the 19 selected countries. This will provide information on, inter alia:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Conceptualisations of intersectionality in research b. The theoretical frameworks, research designs and methodologies used in research c. Main social identities focused on in research (e.g. race, gender, age, dis/ability) d. Source(s) of funding e. Regional and national variations (e.g. trends in intersectionality research conducted in selected African countries, funded by public funded agencies) <p>Method: A critical review of academic and grey literature</p>
<p>Objective 2: Identify policies, programmes and strategies employed by public funding agencies to integrate intersectionality into research funding and human capital development, across the 19 selected countries. This will provide information on, inter alia:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Different areas of the research and grants management process in which intersectionality is addressed b. Social identities included in public funding agencies’ grant making considerations, across countries (e.g. race, gender, age, dis/ability and so forth) <p>Method: A critical review of public funding agencies’ policies, institutional reports</p>
PHASE 2: NARRATIVE SYNTHESIS
<p>Objective 3: Identify main themes in existing intersectional research about the training and career experiences of researchers/academics, across the human capital development pipeline, in the 19 selected countries. This will provide information on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Barriers, sources of support, and resiliencies in marginalised researchers’ and academics’ accounts of their experiences in universities / research institutions <p>Method: Interpretive synthesis of selected studies, identified from coded data set produced during Phase 1</p>
PHASE 3: CASE STUDIES
<p>Objective 4: Develop case studies of research exemplifying key tenets of an intersectional framework. This will provide information on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. The manner in which an intersectional framework (or the absence thereof) impacts diversity in human capital development, contextual relevance of research, and research quality <p>Method: Summary of selected research studies, identified from coded data set produced during Phase 1</p>
PHASE 4: INTERSECTIONAL METHODOLOGIES
<p>Objective 5: Review existing research about intersectional research designs and methods and conduct key informant interviews with relevant methodology experts. This will provide information on:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. Research practice – i.e. theoretical frameworks, research designs, methods of data collection and methods of data analysis – employed in intersectional studies <p>Method: A synthesis of existing literature regarding intersectional research designs and methods, identified from coded data set produced during Phase 1, supplemented by key informant interviews with subject experts.</p>

Appendix B: Literature included in the systematic review

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