05 / Critical Intersectionality in Public Policy Research: Repoliticizing Power, Reclaiming Justice, Resisting Backlash

Topic : WORKSHOPS

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GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

Policy action to expose and reduce intersectional inequalities and injustices is more important than ever in light of increasing inequities, yet is also under increasing threat from the influence of far-right politics.

Scholarship concerning policy and inequality has to some extent expanded its focus from singular inequalities such as gender (in)equality to broader inquiries around multiple and intersecting inequalities and social justice. However, some of this scholarship can be understood as extending feminist institutionalist approaches in ‘gender plus’, ‘gender-first’ and identity-based frameworks, while other scholarship engages more critically with the Black feminist theory of intersectionality (Combahee River Collective 1977;Crenshaw 1989, 1991;Hill Collins 1990), offering critical perspectives on a gender-driven approach and one employing binary understandings of inequalities (Christoffersen & D’Agostino, forthcoming).

This workshop aims to advance the field of critical intersectionality research within the study of public policy. It will bring together scholars who apply intersectionality in their work to discuss its use in the broader field of policy studies, and seek to combine insights from decolonial policy theorisation (e.g. Jhagroe & Salazar-Morales 2025), showing how a colonial matrix of power, epistemic hierarchies, and racialized classifications persist in and shape modern policy systems, making them less responsive to intersectional injustices.

It is increasingly clear that intersectional policy analysis must centre intersecting structures of power, rather than identity categories and markers, and treat these constitutively and not additively; and must focus on the purpose of intersectional policy, i.e. to reduce intersecting inequities (e.g. Christoffersen & D’Agostino, forthcoming). Specifically, scholarship must address how the intersections of race, coloniality, migration status and gender (among others) structure policymaking spaces, privileging some voices and excluding others (Hawkesworth 2003;Brown 2014;Kantola et al. 2023;Christoffersen and Siow 2024). Emerging research shows that cross-nationally, policy processes systematically marginalise and delegitimise gendered, raced and Indigenous knowledges, hindering both access to, and influence within, deliberation and policy formation (Christoffersen, Siow & Bullock forthcoming). Moreover, epistemic injustices and their representative consequences are unequal among marginalised groups: knowledge contributed by extra-parliamentary actors representing (white) gendered interests is privileged over that contributed by Indigenous, migrant and racially minoritised groups (Christoffersen, Siow and Fowler 2026), and ontological frameworks and institutional logics privilege single-axis claims over claims made by intersectionally marginalised groups such as Indigenous or racially minoritised women. Policy scholarship must address the ways that intersectional inequalities shape the values and processes which determine policy makers’ consumption, production and evaluation of knowledge, and their (un)democratic consequences. In doing so, such scholarship can contribute to debates concerning what counts as knowledge in the policy process, and experiences of resistance in policymaking.

Research questions:

· How can intersectionality and policy be studied “critically”?

· How can intersectional approaches be advanced in the face of far-right mainstreaming, one effect of which is to dilute the concept?

· How can policy research help to resist the current consolidation of intersecting structures of power?

· How do colonial, raced and gendered normative standards, operational criteria, and design principles structure knowledge production, interpretation and application in policymaking?

The workshop will work towards an edited volume.

CALL FOR PAPERS

In order to meet the workshop aim to advance the field of critical intersectionality research within the study of public policy, this workshop seeks papers that broadly engage with the research questions above as well as related questions. Building on recent reviews of the fields of feminist political representation and intersectional policy analysis (Christoffersen & Siow 2024, Christoffersen &D'Agostino forthcoming), we also offer the following suggestions for innovative contributions:

· Papers are invited that offer their critical perspectives on gender-driven, additive and binary approaches to studying intersectionality and inequality

· We welcome papers that decentre 'women' and gender and centre diverse intersectionally marginalised groups

· We especially welcome papers that go beyond analysis of policy documents and utilize other innovative methods (e.g. mixed methods approaches, longitudinal analyses, ethnographic and participatory approaches that centre those who advocate for and have the most to gain from intersectional policy, research on co-production processes)

· Papers are invited that critically analyse the terms of epistemic engagement between policymakers and civil society organisation representing intersectionally marginalised groups, as well as individuals from intersectionally disadvantaged communities

· We further welcome papers that do not focus solely on policy development, but also explore implementation and (real and foreseeable) impact and interrogate the complexity and non-linearity of policy and policy feedback

· We welcome papers in any and all policy areas in multiple geographical contexts in the Global North and South

· Papers may centre social justice and lived experience (D'Agostino and Brown 2024), while also interrogating intersectional institutions via structural analysis (Christoffersen & Siow 2024)

· More theoretical papers are also welcome, exploring and applying intersectionality as a 'horizon-oriented politics' (Munoz 2009; Bilge 2016) that operates as aspiration for the future (futurity), radical political imagination, and ambition from the margins (Dowe 2020), aiming to resist far right backlash and the shrinking of civic spaces for policy engagement.