

***Book review***

Crenshaw, K., Andrews, K. and Wilson, K. (Eds.) 2024. *Blackness at the Intersection*. London: Bloomsbury Press.

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The concept of intersectionality has advanced within academic circles, particularly in studies focusing on Black women's experiences and narratives. Before we present this review, we acknowledge our standpoint as educated black women from a working-class background in their PhD studies in the spirit of reflexivity. We recognise that our positionality influenced this review to some extent as we both used intersectionality as our theoretical analysis in our research. Therefore, this review examines the key themes explored in *Blackness at the Intersection*, assessing the practicality of intersectionality theory and its intellectual contributions. One challenge associated with intersectionality research lies in its frequent superficial application, lacking a comprehensive grasp of its historical roots and practical implementation in research. The book serves to enhance our comprehension of these aspects. This review is structured around the book's three parts, which we discuss in relation to insights it provided for our own research on student experiences of higher education in South Africa and The Netherlands.

**Part 1: Institutional Oppressions**

Part one of the book provides a platform for critically examining the meaning of blackness. It prompts an inquiry into the origins and beneficiaries of blackness as a label in general and within political solidarity. It initiates a broader discussion on self-identification as a viable option. The authors of this book purposefully present diverse perspectives on the concept of blackness to effectively convey their argument. The Chapters highlight the intricate ways in which oppression is manifested through the convergence of social factors such as class, race, gender, and mental health. For example, in Chapter Two, Annabel Wilson underscores the significance of sharing personal narratives to counter institutional oppressions, reshape the discourse surrounding black women, foster broader dialogues, and preserve the voices of black women often marginalized within institutional settings. Through Paulette's narrative, Wilson elucidates the concept of intersectionality, revealing how marginalized voices are silenced within societal norms. In Chapter Three, Katucha Bento Presents a critical analysis of how we view intersectionality concerning Brazilian women in the diaspora and argues that they should not be viewed as a binary (oppressed and privileged, rich and poor, and White and non-White). However, it calls for a multidimensional perspective, which opens a conversation about the



multiple and conflicting dimensions and experiences. One area not thoroughly explored in this book Chapter was the need for a comprehensive discussion on the significance of recognizing Brazilian women's privileges and oppressions, which can often intersect within various contexts as we navigate diverse identities. Katucha Bento delves into the intricate narratives of Ceci and Gabriela, focusing on humanising their voices and seeing them as knowers. In Chapter Four, Francesca Sobande shifts the focus towards the significance of intersectionality in elucidating the diverse experiences of black women. It underscores the notion that there is no singular narrative or unified sisterhood among black women but rather a spectrum of individual experiences.

These three Chapters have been valuable in Abongile's work, particularly in delving into the essence of black identity and questioning whether blackness is an imposed label utilized to oppress individuals of African heritage rather than allowing them the autonomy to define themselves. The Netherlands, being a diverse nation with a significant non-white population, presents an intriguing scenario where not all individuals of non-white descent identify as black.

## Part 2: Marginalizing Black Voices

Chapter Five by Constantino Dumangane expands upon the points raised in the previous section, looking at the concept of marginalizing Black voices. This Chapter explains the stigma often portrayed to black men as an enforcer of patriarchy, a role that they are seen to uphold, albeit within a system that simultaneously oppresses them. The discussion on hypermasculinity and stereotypes within the UK education system in Chapter Five mirrors similar issues present in the South African context, especially within historically white higher education institutions. This Chapter resonated with Asiphe's research, where she investigated gender dynamics among students in tertiary education. Asiphe's study uncovered societal stigmatization directed at black male students, highlighting the susceptibility of black masculinity and the widespread prevalence of hypermasculinity. Chapter five of the book would be advantageous for researchers conducting studies on masculinities in the field of education, especially those examining the societal construction of manhood.

Chapter Six, by Kelena Reid, and Chapter Twelve, by Miranda Armstrong, extensively discuss the significance of the archival project. Chapter Six examines the digitised archival realm of the Atlantic slave trade and British slave ownership through the lens of intersectionality, similarly Chapter Twelve by Miranda Armstrong also interrogates the narratives surrounding the archival of the challenges faced by Black British urban single-mother families in raising children and navigating black masculinity. The archival project highlighted in these two Chapters challenges and decolonises conventional notions of knowledge production, intersectional experiences, and the individuals deemed worthy of contributing to archival research. As readers and PhD Candidates who are also mothers, we felt that Chapter twelve resonated with our own experience as we face demands of motherhood, striving to provide for themselves, and conduct research in higher education institutions which were not originally designed to accommodate our needs.

In Chapter Seven, Viji Kuppen focuses on the invisibility of the experiences of disabled black women in doctoral education through colour-blindness discourses. Abongile finds this useful for her study in the Netherlands and identifies that there is a discourse of colour blindness and the university's openness to disabled and abled bodies. So, the chapter helps her reflect on the experiences of those women who identify as black and disabled fall into the cracks because of a one-size-fits-all approach and superficial attempts to diversity and inclusion, that focus more on ticking the boxes than amplifying the voices that often go unheard. Using intersectionality allows the colour-blind system to see the blackness in those experiences that have often been rendered invisible and to give a microscopic vision that allows for the intersection of experiences of blackness and ableism to emerge.

Chapters Eight by Mary Igenozza and Nine by Dionne Taylor focus on black women's beauty and stereotypical images, with the microscopic vision of representational intersectionality. This echoes the words of Sojourner Truth "Ain't I a woman?" It highlights the challenges faced by black women simply because the word black comes before the word woman. This Chapter opened a moment of reflection for Abongile as she researches on unique experiences of black women, both within and beyond the academic sphere. Her research highlights how societal expectations imposed on black women play a massive role in the trajectory of their PhD and their lived experiences including the "stereotypical images of blackness" and that is reflected in this chapter.

### Part three: Counter-Narratives

Part three of the book delves into the concept of transcending the single-axis framework previously discussed by Crenshaw (1989) in her foundational works on intersectionality. In Chapter Ten, Eddie Bruce-Jones and Ajamu X explore moving beyond identity, a pivotal concern addressed by scholars critiquing intersectionality. This perspective does not advocate for the dismantling of identity; rather, it seeks to comprehend the multifaceted experiences of individuals. The authors do this work by examining the complex experiences of black queer individuals. The proposition of surpassing the single-axis framework is further elucidated in Chapter Eleven, where Kadian Pow scrutinizes the layered experiences of black women at the intersections of race and gender. This speaks to Asiphe's doctoral research, where she argues that individuals cannot simply exist as Black or Woman in isolation; rather, their experiences and interactions within the higher education system are shaped by their dual identity as black women.

*Blackness at the Intersection* presents a collection of narratives authored by various scholars, focusing on individuals marginalized by different systems. Despite the diverse nature of the narratives and contexts in which they are found, they are interconnected and resonate with the context of higher education in South Africa and the Netherlands, our interest area. The collection of Chapters amplifies the voices of individuals marginalized, rendered invisible, or silenced by societal structures. The final Chapter, "Blackness is the Intersection," reflects on the application of intersectionality in various contexts, including its evolution beyond its original focus and the argument that Blackness may not always be central to its application. Through this book

and other intersectional projects, intersectionality has revealed how diverse experiences demonstrate the entrenchment of multiple forms of oppression and privilege. This book will be of interest to seasoned and emerging researchers, it will also be beneficial to newcomers. What is most exceptional about this book is that it speaks not only to researchers in the academic space but is a useful tool for those who would like to understand the complexity of intersectionality in society as a whole.

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