

Race, gender, social class and intersectionality

What is intersectionality?

Speaker 1, Umut Erel, Tracey Reynolds and Ann Phoenix:

SPEAKER 1: Race, gender, social class and intersectionality.

UMUT EREL: Hello. Today, I'm talking with Tracey Reynolds, who is professor of social sciences at the University of Greenwich, and I'm also talking to Ann Phoenix who is professor of psychosocial studies at Thomas Coram Research Unit, UCL Institute of Education. Both Tracey and Ann have longstanding expertise of researching, race, gender, social class, and the intersectionality of these. And that's what our conversation will be about, these concepts and how they matter in social research. Tracey, maybe you can explain to our students what intersectionality is about.

TRACEY REYNOLDS: Yes. To me, intersectionality is about how different aspects of your social identity create power inequalities and the power relationships that we understand in the world. So, for example, it could mean that as a result of your racial status, your gender status, you may be positioned as having a subordinate status.

And that will impact the way in which you are treated in the world and also the sort of access that you have to resources, whether it's social resources, economic resources, and also capital, such as cultural capital as well. So, power and power relationships and power differentials is an important aspect of intersected identities.

UMUT EREL: Thank you so much. That's really, really helpful. Thank you. Would you like to add something, Ann?

ANN PHOENIX: Well, I entirely agree with that definition. To that, I would add relationality so that these power relations have an impact in individual interactions, but in the way in which people are positioned in society. And what it means is that the different social categories to which people belong, mutually constitute each other.

And what I mean by that is that they make it different for being specifically a Black woman, for example, from the middle classes, compared with being a Black woman from the working classes or a Black man from the middle classes. So, there are some discriminations, for example, that only people from the middle classes would experience, for example, in particular forms of hotels and so on. So, I think that it helps us to understand the particularities as well as the mutual constitution of different social categories and that these are dynamic.

They change over time and from context to context. And what Tracey said also brings in the notion of social justice. So, if one knows that the different categories to which people belong are multiple and they're always inextricably linked but expressing themselves differently in different contexts, then one also knows that it's important to take a social justice perspective where it's recognized that it's important to deal with discrimination of one sort or another.