

## **Race, gender, social class and intersectionality**

*How can social research identify and help to address inequalities based on social divisions?*

### **Umut Erel, Tracey Reynolds and Ann Phoenix:**

UMUT EREL: How can social research identify and help to address inequalities that are based on these social divisions of gender, race, class, and the intersection of these? Could you give examples from your own research projects, please?

ANN PHOENIX: We need to understand the differences within and between groups. So, within a white or a Black group as well as across the groups. So that I think that intersectionality really alerts us to looking for difference and commonality. And the way I think that in my own research, I've been able to look at inequalities to do with intersectionality is, for example, if I give an example of a piece of work that I've done on one very small segment of something on YouTube, a Black girl aged about four years old talking to her mother about 12 lines of transcript and basically saying that she does not want to wear her hair, which at the moment as we see it is open in an afro.

She doesn't want to wear it like that because people will laugh at her. And even though her mother says, I think it looks cute, well, she says to her mother that she can go out looking like that then and that she wants her hair twisted. Now, one can simply say, oh, a cute, cute child and so innocent and it's just an individual matter of choice.

But I actually think if one takes an intersectional perspective, one sees that there's a whole history-- and this is it from the United States of America-- of black afro hair being seen as deficient, as not neat, as not tidy. Only in 2017 did New York, for example, change its laws so that afro hair discrimination was no longer allowed, and people could wear afro hair to work.

So, one of the things I would argue is that this child, who's on YouTube and therefore has resources, as a middle-class child has also learned what it is to be racialized as Black in society in rudimentary ways. Gender also matters because if she were a boy, it's much more likely that she would have shorter hair, not be so involved in thinking about styles, not be thinking about how to wear her hair, and that twists are preferable to an afro.

So, all these things are present and something that one can take for granted just as yet another YouTube example of a sweet child. Once you unpack it in research, you can see that there's a whole intersectional histories that are impacting on just that small piece of interaction in the home and that therefore that intersections are both part of macro-processes and also micro-processes within the home.

TRACEY REYNOLDS: And for me, race, gender, and class in social research has been really pivotal to the work I've been doing with Black families, particularly Black mothers as well. So, I initially started off just looking at the experiences for mothers in general. And what was really interesting as a common sort of theme was that the mothers were saying that they want the best for their children, and they worry about-- as a parent, you worry about raising your children.

But what I realized because of the way that Black people are racialized in this society, because there is inequality and discrimination, worries that some of the Black women were having were very different. And that was almost the starting point for me. So, it was worries about knowing that their children would experience or more likely to experience racism at a very early age. So, for example, Ann gave the example of hair type. Children as young as three or four became very aware of their skin colour and then going through school, the sorts of experiences that they may experience by teachers and others which were discriminatory or unequal or unjust.

So, for Black women and Black parents, a lot of that was around, a lot of parenting and wanting their best for their children was around developing strategies to help their children overcome and challenge racist practices. It was about giving them the self-confidence and the self-belief so that when society's telling them that they are less than because of the way that the structures and systems in this country do racialize and do pathologize and do problematize Black people, to be able to resist a lot of those stereotypes which are there about them.