

Illuminating intersectionality for tourism researchers

The aim of this research note is to advocate an intersectional approach for tourism researchers. Intersectionality exposes how individuals experience the effects of their social roles (founded on mutually intersecting identities) not as separate or cumulative, but as linked and simultaneous intersections (Holvino, 2010). To explore one aspect of diversity is to see merely one piece of the complex puzzle – the other pieces may be missing. Intersectional research has been the focus of considerable academic interest over the last few years; for example, in the United States, it has assisted in tailoring public health interventions for specific populations (Bowleg, 2012). However, the adoption of an intersectional approach by tourism researchers has been relatively limited. Figueroa-Domecq, Pritchard, Segovia-Pérez, Morgan and Villacé-Molinero (2015) argue that the tourism academy needs to remove its Western-centric focus and adopt more critical perspectives when exploring demographic differences, such as race, gender and other aspects of identity, in diverse tourism contexts. As intersectionality draws from critical race and feminist framings, its recognition of ‘intergroup’ differences between members of groups presumed to be homogeneous, for example, ‘women’, enables researchers to move beyond many Western-centric tourism studies with their positivist assumptions of universality and generalisability.

The term ‘intersectionality’ was first introduced by black civil rights activist and lawyer Kimberlé Crenshaw (2011), in 1989, when speaking about the marginalisation of black women in the United States. Since then, intersectionality has evolved into a critical analytical paradigm to explore the multifaceted relationships between social groups and structures, beyond the limits of women of colour. Its complex methodological challenges led employment relations researchers McBride, Hebson and Holgate (2015) to suggest the paradigm may be too difficult for ‘non-intersectionality experts’. However, Anthias (2013) considers that intersectionality is a useful tool for exploring social relations and inequality in diverse groups: its reflection of local, temporal and organisational contexts reveals the nuanced and shifting effects of individual difference.

Intersectionality has been used in hospitality studies, albeit to a limited extent. Adib and Guerrier’s (2003) research into the intersections of nationality, race, gender and class in hotel work is a seminal study. Their interviews indicated that the combined “double whammy” of a “woman’s immigrant status with gender” (p. 429) left her vulnerable to sexual harassment from male co-workers. In Hawaii, sociologists Adler and Adler’s (2004) ethnographical research detailed how age, gender, ethnicity and class profoundly influenced the working lives of resort workers. Other researchers studied hospitality work peripherally; for example, Simpson, Slutskaya, Lewis and Höpfl (2012) highlighted age, gender and class intersections in the embodiment of labour, suggesting that for working-class young men in

the United Kingdom, donning a fast-food uniform represented a denigrated identity they were reluctant to assume. In the United States, Alberti's (2014) study revealed how nationality intersected with class/migrant status, influencing hotel unionisation rates.

However, generally in tourism, separate dimensions of identity are researched in isolation; few studies examine how intersections convey simultaneous advantage and disadvantage, depending on the context. Yet an intersectional approach to gender studies is integral to meaningful tourism research, as evidenced by Chambers' keynote address at the Critical Tourism Studies 2017 conference in Spain, when she suggested that intersectionality enables "a more critical unpacking of its [gender's] ability to produce and re(produce) power relationships in tourism and travel" (Chambers, 2017). Other exceptions include Khoo-Lattimore and Mura's (2016) edited book, *Asian Genders in Tourism*, and Cole's (2017) study on how water rights in an Indonesian tourism destination privileged or penalised locals, according to their ethnicity, class and gender. Her study gives sobering insights into the severe effects of water deprivation on the poorest girls.

In leisure studies, intersectionality remains underutilised (Watson, 2018), although Henderson and Gibson (2013) interpreted the increasing use of feminist theories as encouraging signs of progress. When promoting how intersectionality "underlines how social justice can be furthered through the recognition of identity categories as they relate to oppression and power" (p. 129), they reprise warnings about intersectionality's epistemological challenges. Likewise, as Watson (2018) details the ways 'thinking intersectionally' can usefully inform leisure scholarship, she wisely advises that she is unable to proffer a "neatly defined and described" intersectional methodology (p. 315).

This brief overview illustrates the benefits of an intersectional lens in tourism. Intersectionality is sensitive to context; it is capable of registering the nuances of national culture, sectoral and organisational characteristics, employment patterns, economic theory, power-relations and sociological embeddedness, which contribute to tourism knowledge. If research methods do not consider *context* as a primary mechanism that significantly affects data and results, then research conclusions that claim to be universal should be suspect when drawn from big data sets and quantitative data collection methods alone.

Nonetheless, a limitation of intersectionality is its undeniable complexity, leading Crenshaw (2011, p. 230) to observe, "it is easier to call for intersectional analysis rather than perform it". In spite of the contentious debates, there is lack of agreement among critical race and gender scholars about how studies should be designed. This is problematic, as even 'thinking intersectionally' (Watson, 2018) will flounder in the absence of a clear intersectional research design process. Therefore, viewing intersectionality for what it achieves rather than trying to standardise the 'doing' of intersectional research, indicates the

future research direction for tourism researchers. Taking this pragmatic perspective, Rodriguez, Holvino, Fletcher and Nkomo (2016) suggest that Mooney's (2016) 'nimble' intersectional approach offers a practical response to methodological challenges. The approach asks researchers to resolve four key theoretical questions before the study -whether it is intersectional; which intersectional framing will be used; if it will be identity or process based; and how 'difference' will be conceptualised- as these decisions profoundly influence research design.

The aim of the research note was to explain the benefits of adopting an intersectional approach in tourism. Intersectionality is a tool to help researchers explore the dynamic effects of 'difference' in more than one dimension across a variety of contexts. Intersectional studies such as Cole's (2017) investigation into water resources shed light on areas of tourism development where the disadvantages experienced by the non-dominant members of society, for example, indigenous peoples, the disabled, women and children, remain invisible and unacknowledged. As researchers, we are charged with illuminating neglected areas of tourism research and a practical approach to intersectional studies can help us achieve this goal.

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