

## Intersectionality and Sexualities: Multiple trajectories, empowered selves

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### Abstract

Intersectionality theory provides a range of tools with which to understand identities. It allows us to think beyond social categories such as 'race' and 'sexuality', towards an understanding of how social forces around characteristics such as ethnicity, sexuality, gender, socio-economic class, ability and others (such as relationship status) together shape a person's identity and well-being. Intersectionality theory does not only help us to think about the ways in which we may be marginalised, but also the ways in which we access privilege. For example, someone may be from a sexual minority but be middle class, and they may use class privilege strategically to enhance their quality of life. This talk outlines some of the approaches to intersectionality theory, and looks at some of the underlying conceptual issues concerning categorisation. How 'real' are the labels that we use for ourselves (for example heterosexual, or lesbian)? Is it sometimes useful, strategically (for activism, or simply for survival) to use particular labels? In what ways can labels trap us, and how are they used to stigmatise us? How do global, and multi-cultural, dimensions impact on our discussion of labels? The talk draws on research data from a number of empirical studies.

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