Psychology of Women Quarterly
2019, Vol. 43(4) 445-456

DOI: 10.1177/0361684319866430
journals.sagepub.com/home/pwq
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What If Psychology Took Intersectionality Seriously? Changing How Psychologists Think About Participants

Kaitlin McCormick-Huhn[1], Leah R. Warner[2], Isis H. Settles[3,4], and Stephanie A. Shields[5]

Abstract

Using intersectionality to change how psychologists think about the demographic profile of their participants is one readily available change that psychologists across the discipline can implement to improve psychological science. In this article, we aim to provide a guide for psychologists who are not already engaged with feminist practices and/or are unsure of how an intersectional approach to participants applies to their research. We argue that by engaging with four perspective shifts of intersectional thinking: multidimensionality, dynamic construction, structural power, and outcomes of systemic disadvantage and advantage, psychologists can more accurately represent the "person" that psychology, as a discipline, seeks to understand. We suggest changes at the researcher, journal, and grant-making agency levels to support an intersectional reconceptualization of participants. As psychology continues to change, in order to foster reproducible science practices and research with relevance to real-world problems, there is opportunity to promote discipline-level change that would take intersectionality seriously.

Keywords

intersectionality, social group membership, research participants, psychology, power

"Buy experiences, not things." Lifestyle experts and popular media widely circulate this catch-phrase advice, based on research (e.g., Carter & Gilovich, 2010; Dunn, Gilbert, & Wilson, 2011; Gilovich, Kumar, & Jampol, 2015; Van Boven & Gilovich, 2003) that has shown that long-term happiness was greater when people spent money on experiences, rather than on material items. However, findings from Lee, Hall, and Wood (2018) added a caveat to the happiness-experience link: The pattern only applies to high-income people. As this example illustrates, psychologists often have an incomplete understanding of human phenomena when they do not check their assumptions about the groups to which participants belong.

Intersectionality theory has the potential to further reveal researchers' blind spots and assumptions about the demographic profile of their research participants by making the invisible (about who participants are) visible (e.g., Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Intersectionality has gained traction in psychology largely through one component of the theory, namely, that we cannot understand the individual's experience of one social group membership (e.g., gender) without reference to their other social group memberships (e.g., race, class, sexual orientation). Psychology has been slower to come to terms with another key piece of intersectionality theory, namely concern with the interdependence of systems of inequality. People experience "identity" as a feature of the individual self but, as intersectionality theory reminds us, social group memberships also reflect power relations among groups. By drawing attention to the collected social groups a person belongs to (i.e., their intersectional position), intersectionality makes visible categories that typically are ignored (e.g., White as a racial social group membership) or totalized (e.g., heteronormativity). By bringing to light these invisible aspects of social group membership, intersectionality reveals the systemic inequalities that create and sustain disparities, showing that intersectional positions are constituted of structural relations of power reflected in

[1] William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, NV, USA
[2] School of Social Science and Human Services, Ramapo College of New Jersey, Mahwah, NJ, USA
[3] Department of Psychology, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA
[4] Department of Afroamerican and African Studies, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI, USA
[5] Department of Psychology, The Pennsylvania State University, State College, PA, USA

Corresponding Author:
Kaitlin McCormick-Huhn, William S. Boyd School of Law, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, 4505 S. Maryland Parkway, Box 451003, Las Vegas, NV, USA.
Email: kaitlin.mccormick-huhn@unlv.edu

tensions between domination/privilege/advantage and subordination/oppression/disadvantage.

In her Hilgard address, Shields (2018) considered the ways in which research practices would be transformed if intersectionality theory were to be taken seriously by psychologists. Shields' address served as a springboard for this article, highlighting for us one readily available change psychologists across the discipline can implement: how they think about the demographic profile of their participants. There are, of course, various ways for psychologists to use an intersectionality framework to further psychology (e.g., using intersectionality to orient psychological research toward social change). As Fine and Torre (2019) illustrate, psychologists can pursue social justice by changing their relationships with participants through critical participatory action research. In this article, we aim to provide a guide for psychologists who are not already engaged with feminist practices and/or are unsure of how an intersectional approach to participants applies to their research. The time is ripe for psychology, as a field, to support psychologists' engagement in intersectional thinking about the demographic profile of participants, and we suggest changes in conceptualization and support mechanisms, such as journal requirements, to aid in this endeavor.

We begin with a brief historical overview of psychology's treatment of participants' social group memberships and intersectionality's entry into psychology. Next, we highlight four intersectional perspective shifts that, if taken seriously, would transform psychology's approach to conceptualizing participants. These four shifts draw upon intersectional concepts of individuals as multidimensional, social group memberships as dynamic and changing, structural power as a feature of intersectional positions, and intersectional positions as shaping outcomes of systemic disadvantage and advantage. We then outline steps that would encourage researchers across psychology to employ an intersectional approach. We see these changes as contributing to a feminist transformation of the discipline, making our understanding of human behavior more thorough and inclusive (e.g., Bowleg, 2012; Cole, 2009).

Participants in Psychological Research

Titchener (1916), an early, influential, and prolific researcher, famously declared psychology to be the study of "the normal, human, adult mind" (p. 2, as cited in Shanteau & Hall, 2001). Titchener explicitly excluded all research on children, animals, and "the insane." As we now know, the study of these omitted populations has given us much insight into the workings of "the normal, human, adult mind," as well as these groups in their own right. As illustrated by Titchener's dictum, the history of experimental psychology involves excluding "outliers" with the ostensible goal of understanding phenomena that apply to all people. That approach assumes that when you remove those who are different from others in a sample, those who remain represent the "true" experience, as if the choice of who to study was a value-neutral decision. Intersecting scientific racism, sexism, and classism historically affected researchers' practices of inclusion and interpretation through, for instance, beliefs about how social groups are related to each other (e.g., different yet complementary abilities, superiority and inferiority of certain groups; Shields, 2016). Without reference to participants' social group memberships (privileged or not), psychology represented the privileged few.

The perception of the "proper" person to study within the discipline of psychology, has changed since its beginnings as a distinct discipline in the late 19th century. Hacking (1986, as cited in Johnson & Johnston, 2015) observed that psychology often "changes the space of possibilities of personhood" (p. 229). Within the last decade, psychology has evolved to recognize a bias toward the sampling of Western (and overwhelmingly White), Educated, Industrialized, Rich, and Democratic (WEIRD) societies (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). Rather than reflecting the universal human experience, WEIRD societies were found to be frequent outliers and the group least generalizable to the general population across a number of foundational domains (e.g., visual perception, moral reasoning, heritability of IQ; Henrich et al., 2010). A review of psychological research in American Psychological Association journals in particular revealed 96% of participants were from WEIRD societies, although WEIRD societies represent only 12% of the world's population (Arnett, 2008). Such findings challenge the field's assumptions about the generalizability of our research. We argue that using intersectionality theory as a springboard has similar transformative potential to once more change how psychology conceptualizes participants.

Throughout our article, when we refer to "psychology," we specifically refer to dominant approaches to scientific psychology—practices that privilege particular research endeavors as central to the field and as worthy of attention (e.g., Gonzales, 2018). Marecek (2019) critically examines the discipline as a social institution, offering feminist challenges to a number of thought styles that pervade dominant U.S. psychology. In dominant approaches to conceptualizing participants, psychologists emphasize parsimonious examinations of single-axis social group memberships (Cole, 2009), explanations of phenomena as universally generalizable to people across social groups and time periods (Magnusson & Marecek, 2017), and internalism or a decontextualized focus on people's inner traits and drives (Magnusson & Marecek, 2017). These emphases conflict with intersectional approaches to participants, which examine multidimensional people in context and consider power as inseparable from intersectional positions.

Intersectionality in Psychology: Where We Are, What It Is, and What It Is Not

The origin of intersectionality theory is identified with 19th century African American feminists, such as Sojourner Truth

(Truth, 1851) and Anna Julia Cooper (Cooper, 1892), who wrote that neither women's suffrage nor movements for racial equality adequately reflected the concerns and experiences of African American women. By the 1970s and 1980s, an intersectionality perspective can be found in the writings of feminist scholars of color and bisexual, lesbian, and transgender women scholars (e.g., Anthias & Yuval-Davis, 1983; Combahee River Collective, 1977/2005; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982; Moraga & Anzaldúa, 1981; Nieto-Gómez, 1974; see Carastathis, 2016 for more on origins of intersectionality and connections to women of color organizing). Subsequently, the legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) named the perspective *intersectionality* in the late 1980s (see May, 2015 for more on the history of intersectionality). Since its beginnings, many fields of study have imported intersectionality as a perspective, including psychology (see Grzanka, 2019 for more on intersectionality's interdisciplinary travel).

Since the arrival of the term intersectionality in psychology (Henderson, 1997), the concept has continued to gain popularity in the field (see Warner, Settles, & Shields, 2018). However, Shin and colleagues (2017) found that researchers were far more likely to simply use intersectionality as an approach that concerns relations between multiple social group memberships, rather than as an approach that also analyzes interlocking forms of power and privilege, and calls for social justice activism to dismantle these systems of oppression. Further, disciplinary norms (e.g., parsimony, objectivity) and perceptions of intersectionality as "not psychology" (Shields, 2008, p. 305) have created barriers to the uptake of this theory. Nevertheless, scholars across a number of subareas, including clinical psychology (e.g., Kohn & Hudson, 2002), developmental psychology (e.g., Syed, Santos, Yoo, & Juang, 2018), social psychology (e.g., Bowleg, 2017), personality psychology (e.g., Sabik, 2016), and industrial and organizational psychology (e.g., Sanchez-Hucles & Davis, 2010), have called for the necessity of intersectional perspectives within their subfields.[1]

Research that has examined the effects of power-relevant features of group membership on even basic cognitive processes suggests the importance of intersectional thinking across psychology. For instance, young women participants who experienced benevolent sexism during a reading span test displayed activation in brain regions associated with intrusive thought suppression (Dardenne et al., 2013); the math performance of primarily White heterosexual college women who were looked at in an objectifying manner by a male confederate was worse than that of their peers who did not experience an objectifying gaze (Gervais, Vescio, & Allen, 2011); and young, African American women and men participants who reported high levels of perceived race/ethnicity-based discrimination had poorer cognitive processing speed when tested by a White woman examiner than when tested by an African American woman examiner (Thames et al., 2013). These examples suggest that even in studies not explicitly about social group membership, the social group memberships of participants and experimenters can affect basic outcomes, which may be better understood if researchers used an intersectional framework.

Other scholars have suggested ways in which engaging with intersectionality could transform psychology (e.g., Bowleg & Bauer, 2016; Cole, 2009; Del Toro & Yoshikawa, 2016; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016a, 2016b; Marecek, 2016; Rosenthal, 2016; Warner, 2016; Warner, Settles, & Shields, 2016). Here, we build on these efforts to focus specifically on four ways psychologists can deploy an intersectional perspective in research to understand participants. Psychologists might consider that (1) participants are multidimensional, (2) participants' social group memberships are dynamic, (3) power is a feature of participants' intersectional positions, and (4) participants' intersectional positions create outcomes of systemic advantage and disadvantage.

Intersectional Perspective Shifts for Rethinking Participants in Psychology

Perspective Shift 1: Participants Are Multidimensional

One perspective shift psychologists need to make, in order to engage in an intersectional approach, is to conceptualize people as multidimensional (e.g., Crenshaw, 1989). When imagining a group (e.g., men), our default cognition is to imagine individuals in that group as belonging to other privileged social groups (e.g., men are imagined as White, able-bodied, middle-class, heterosexual, and young) but without explicitly acknowledging these group memberships. For instance, when people are asked to imagine the typical person or a "true American," they are more likely to imagine a man than a woman (Hamilton, 1991; Van Berkel, Molina, & Mukherjee, 2017). Relatedly, when people are asked about stereotypes of women, their responses are more similar to stereotypes about White women than women of other groups (Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). Indeed, belonging to multiple marginalized social groups (e.g., being a Black woman) that are neither prototypical for race (e.g., Black *man* is prototypical when people think of the category "Black") nor gender (e.g., *White* woman is prototypical when people think of the category "woman") can result in erasure of one's group in the minds of others (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008; Sesko & Biernat, 2016), a phenomenon Purdie-Vaughns and Eibach termed "intersectional invisibility." Understanding participants as multidimensional reduces these default tendencies and reminds psychologists that no social group membership exists in isolation, even when the researcher is focused on a single dimension (e.g., age).

People can and do conceptualize others in multidimensional terms but only when they are asked to apply an intersectional framing. For instance, Donovan (2011) asked White college students to report their stereotypes of two groups' intersectional positions, Black women and White women,

rather than asking students to report stereotypes of single-axis group memberships of gender or race alone. The students reported beliefs that White women are affective and communal, yet Black women are strong and domineering, indicating unique stereotypes based on specific intersections of race and gender. Default reasoning about social categories as unidimensional is interrupted when people explicitly focus on intersectional positions.

Furthermore, these multidimensional positions co-constitute one another. For instance, gender expression and sexual orientation together uniquely constitute genders such as butch, femme, bear, and drag queen (Levitt, 2019). To ensure their approach is multidimensional, psychologists can explicitly acknowledge the unstated social group memberships of their participants' intersectional positions (e.g., which women they are studying) or explicitly consider who their participants imagine in research on perceptions of other groups (e.g., which women their participants are reporting on).

Perspective Shift 2: Participants' Social Group Memberships Are Dynamic

Another shift entails thinking of participants' social group memberships as dynamically constructed across situational, historical, and geographical contexts (e.g., Cho, Crenshaw, & McCall, 2013; Diamond & Butterworth, 2008; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Dominant approaches to psychology often implicitly assume that social groups and social group memberships are stable and fixed (Yoder & Kahn, 2003). Overlooking the effects of experimental setting, history, geography, or other contexts on participants' social group memberships can inadvertently limit psychologists' understanding of participants' lived realities (Magnusson & Marecek, 2017).

Crenshaw's (1989) original explanation of intersectionality depicts social group membership, not as a fixed set of attributes, but as a process that shifts and changes in response to structural and contextual factors. Such an understanding makes room in psychological study for ways in which individuals conceptualize, create, and strategically deploy their own intersectional positions. For instance, Bowleg (2013) found through her qualitative interviews that Black gay and bisexual men consider power dynamics in construing their intersectional positions. For participants, identifying as Black primarily or as inseparably Black gay men depended on the situation and the salient power dynamics at play within that situation. Similarly, in a study of qualitative interviews with transgender youth of color (Singh, 2013), participants recounted that they strategically changed their self-definitions of gender and race/ethnicity to cope with transgender prejudice.

Historical context can also contribute to the dynamic nature of intersectional positions by affecting both people's experiences as members of a particular group and connections between group membership and structural power. For instance, Weststrate and McLean (2010) asked gay and lesbian people between the ages of 18 and 74 to provide memories of events that were relevant to their sexual orientation. Participants in the older age cohorts reported memories that tended to focus on historical, political, or other external events, such as the Stonewall riots. Participants from the younger cohorts, in contrast, reported more memories involving personal events, such as coming out experiences. Weststrate and McLean concluded that personal experiences with sexual orientation may have become less externally-defined and more personally defined over time. Thus, historical context can affect people's experiences in a group, and the power of the group may change over time (e.g., marriage equality law for sexual minorities).

Geographical context also can make salient or change the meaning of one's social group membership. A decolonial intersectionality approach (Kurtiş & Adams, 2017) draws attention to perspectives that Western psychology typically overlooks or misrepresents. In particular, decolonial intersectionality challenges Western portrayals that homogenize and pathologize majority-world (i.e., people from the so-called developing world that make up the numerical majority) women as victims of oppressive conditions. For example, Wagner, Sen, Permanadeli, and Howarth (2012) conducted a comparative, qualitative study of Muslim women's views of wearing veils in Indonesia and in India. Muslim women in Indonesia, where Islam is a majority religion, described wearing veils for convenience, fashion, and modesty. However, in India, where Islam is a minority religion, Muslim women also described wearing veils to affirm their cultural identity, for religious reasons, and to oppose stereotypes of their group. The authors root their understanding of Muslim women's veils within specified geographical contexts, rather than using a Western lens that portrays these veils solely as oppressive toward women (Gianettoni & Roux, 2010). Thus, psychologists can consider whether their findings reflect aspects of the human experience that may vary contextually, geographically, temporally, and sociopolitically. For example, by considering cultural norms within neoliberal societies, such as appearance norms, psychologists can examine how such norms are internalized and become part of people's subjectivities (Gill, 2008; Rutherford, 2018). To complement individual-focused explanations, psychologists can explicitly identify contextual factors and engage with how such factors may affect the variability of participants' social group memberships.

Perspective Shift 3: Power Is Part of Participants' Intersectional Positions

A third perspective shift is a consideration of individual-level group memberships and structural inequalities as interdependent. Using an intersectional perspective requires thinking about intersectional positions as "interlocking systems of oppression" (Collins, 1990, p. 552) that vary in their access

to power (e.g., Collins, 1990, 2000; Dhamoon, 2011; May, 2015). Differences in power have consequences for people's individual-, cultural-, and structural-level experiences (Collins, 1990). To illustrate, in Hurtado and Sinha's (2008) qualitative study of Latino men, a participant captured this connection between intersectional position and structural realities, recounting:

> Let's not forget we're Latinos. I am not a White male . . . if I was a White man I could say 'Hey, I have certain privileges' in terms of societies I could get into or a certain door you can open a little bit easier . . . I am a Latino male. (p. 343)

As evidenced by the participant's comment, his intersectional position of "Latino male" is understood through structural power relations relative to other intersectional positions, in this case "White man."

To date, psychology has been slow to embrace intersectionality's emphasis on power and systems of inequality as important factors that shape individuals' lived experiences. The erasure of the structural power element of intersectionality results in misunderstandings and common misapplications of the framework. Researchers misuse the framework when they refer to persons who belong to multiple underrepresented groups as intersectional (e.g., referring to Black women as intersectional). Doing so also overlooks power and conveys the idea that intersectionality only applies to individuals from marginalized groups. Ignoring privileged social group memberships such as White and man, and privileged intersectional positions such as White man, diverts attention away from structural advantages that individuals receive from these memberships and positions (Knowles & Marshburn, 2010). Intersectional thinking directly challenges this misconception by emphasizing the matrix of domination (Collins, 1990), whereby dominant, invisible social group memberships *and* marginalized group memberships intersect to produce one's intersectional position. Researchers can become more attentive to this type of thinking by naming and empirically examining dominant dimensions of participants' intersectional positions, in addition to their marginalized dimensions.

Another misconception in psychology occurs when scholars equate intersectionality with multiculturalism, an ideology that promotes recognizing and celebrating group differences (e.g., Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009). Like intersectionality, multiculturalism attends to social group differences. However, multiculturalism treats social groups equally without challenging the structural power relations that create disparities between them (e.g., Burman, 2005; Grzanka & Miles, 2016). As Bilge (2013) writes, studying marginalized groups without considering power, which she calls "ornamental intersectionality" (p. 408), allows people to appear to be addressing inequality without challenging the power structures necessary to move toward social group equality.

Psychological researchers who use an intersectional approach to connect people's group memberships to structural power expand our understanding of intersectional positions, from a study of group differences to a study that incorporates structural forces. For instance, Rosenthal and Lobel (2011) examined the role of power-laden issues in obstetrics that contribute to Black American women's experiences with racial disparities in birth outcomes. Similarly, Brown (2018) examined health over the life-course of U.S.-born and immigrant Black, White, and Mexican Americans. He found that White immigrants possess a health advantage relative to U.S.-born White people, but such advantage does not exist for Black and Mexican American immigrants, possibly due to exposure to racialized immigrant assimilation dynamics.

Even brain structure and cognitive performance can be affected by power-relevant aspects of individuals' intersectional positions. Instead of simply focusing on the effects of group differences, an intersectionality perspective encourages researchers to consider the effects of structural forces that are inseparable from intersectional positions. For instance, Thames and colleagues (2018) examined the interactive role of experiences of racism and experiences of classism and found that the interaction of the systems of oppression, in combination with being HIV positive, was associated with both changes in shape of surface areas of the hippocampus and amygdala and with poor learning and memory performance. Similarly, Barnes and colleagues (2012) found that for African American older adults, perceived discrimination and depressive symptoms were associated with poor cognitive test performance, assessed by outcomes such as episodic memory and perceptual speed tests. Intersectionality's emphasis on the connection between intersectional positions and power relations pushes psychology beyond considering simply group differences to consider the influence of social forces, such as ableism, racism, heterosexism, ageism, and sexism, on the human mind. For psychologists, finding differences based on social group membership should signal the possible role of power-relevant intersectional forces. Psychologists studying phenomena that have been historically treated as separable from context can leverage social psychological perspectives, informed by intersectionality theory. For instance, by considering social processes such as discrimination and stigma in interpretations, or including measures of such social processes in studies, psychologists can examine the role of power-relevant processes in producing and sustaining outcomes for participants occupying particular intersectional positions.

Considering power-relevant aspects of social group memberships can also deepen our understanding of basic research findings that do not explicitly relate to structures of inequality. For instance, the inversion effect in cognitive psychology demonstrates that participants find it more difficult to recognize people presented upside down than upright, but that such a distinction does not occur for object recognition (e.g., Reed,

Stone, Bozova, & Tanaka, 2003). Considering power-relevant dynamics of "woman," Bernard, Gervais, Allen, Campomizzi, and Klein (2012) found the inversion effect for college women and men participants' recognition of sexualized men, but not for sexualized women. These findings suggest that, on a basic recognition-level, sexualized men are perceived as persons, but sexualized women are perceived as objects. Bernard and colleagues' findings thus explain human objectification by connecting power-relevant features of gender to basic perceptual outcomes. Similarly, researchers reported that White college student participants seeing Black male inverted faces responded more slowly to human-related words than those seeing White male inverted faces, suggesting such perceptual effects are related to processes of racial dehumanization (Cassidy et al., 2017). Further, research comparing White women and men participants' associations between objects and animals with Black women and White women suggests processes of objectification are exacerbated for Black women, relative to White women (Anderson, Holland, Heldreth, & Johnson, 2018). Researchers can use intersectional thinking to reveal other basic research findings that may be affected by power-relevant features of intersectional positions. Psychologists can also take these research investigations further by using intersectional thinking to examine within-group variability, in addition to between-group variability. For instance, extending the above research, psychologists could examine within-group variability by comparing associations of inverted faces of Black men who differ in skin tone or who differ in age.

Further, psychological approaches to understanding causal mechanisms often focus on factors within the individual, rather than within the broader context of power, even though structural explanations may better fit certain phenomena. For example, reading selections from Sheryl Sandberg's *Lean In* about the internal qualities of women that hold them back in leadership led participants to endorse statements that women are responsible for creating and solving gender equity issues at work (Kim, Fitzsimons, & Kay, 2018). Psychologists can avoid such blind spots by centering the role of structural forces in perpetuating inequity. For instance, psychologists can question whether a proposed intervention or experimental manipulation simply seeks to "fix the person," or whether it considers how structural power dynamics or organizational-level features create and sustain inequality for people occupying particular intersectional positions.

Perspective Shift 4: Participants' Systemic Advantage and Disadvantage

A fourth perspective shift acknowledges that intersectional positions create unique outcomes of systemic disadvantage and advantage for people (Baca Zinn & Thornton Dill, 1996). For example, for White men, being tall is associated with outcomes such as higher status and workplace success (e.g., Blaker et al., 2013); however, for Black men, being tall results in negative attention from the police and perceptions that one is especially threatening (Hester & Gray, 2018). Employing intersectional thinking also reveals that people may experience similar, even identical, outcomes of disadvantage and advantage, but the mechanisms explaining such outcomes may differ depending on their intersectional positions (e.g., Cole, 2009; McCormick, MacArthur, Shields, & Dicicco, 2016). As Cole (2009) argues, looking for similarity across differences shifts psychologists away from the default assumption that individuals within a homogenous group share essential group characteristics (which differ from the essential characteristics of individuals in other groups), and toward explanatory variables that identify common ground across communities.

To illustrate, Livingston, Rosette, and Washington (2012) found Black women leaders who enacted agentic behaviors or behaviors of dominance and assertiveness were perceived similarly to White men who enacted such behaviors. However, White women and Black men leaders who acted assertively and dominantly were judged similarly to each other, but more negatively than White men and Black women. Rather than simply equating groups who have similar outcomes, an intersectional perspective requires interrogating potential causal mechanisms for each intersectional position. For instance, participants may have perceived White men's agentic behaviors positively because they are congruent with proscriptive and descriptive stereotypes for this group (e.g., Heilman, 2001). Participants may have judged Black women positively due to congruence with the stereotype that Black women are strong (e.g., Donovan, 2011), or Black women may have escaped negative judgment because of their intersectional invisibility (Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). White women may have been judged negatively for assertive behavior due to incongruence with stereotypes that White women should be communal and nurturing (e.g., Donovan, 2011). Black men, on the other hand, may have been perceived negatively for behaving in agentic ways due to negative stereotypes about their group as aggressive (e.g., Ghavami & Peplau, 2013). Although White women's and Black men's intersectional positions resulted in the same disadvantaged outcome and White men's and Black women's intersectional positions resulted in the same advantaged outcome, an intersectional perspective encourages psychologists to explore whether distinct or shared mechanisms explain experiences of disadvantage or advantage. To better address unearned disadvantage and advantage, psychologists should question and measure possible mechanisms that are relevant to individuals with specific intersectional positions.

In sum, intersectional thinking challenges psychologists' understanding of the demographic profile of their participants by construing participants as multidimensional, social group memberships as dynamic in construction and across context, intersectional positions as intertwined with structural power, and intersectional positions as creating outcomes of systemic advantage and disadvantage. Through this conceptualization

of participants, an intersectional perspective more accurately captures the "person" that psychology, as a discipline, seeks to understand.

Putting It All Together: Using the Four Perspective Shifts in Research

Riggs' (2013) work investigating anti-Asian prejudice in an online gay community in Australia illustrates use of the four perspective shifts that we have highlighted. Using an intersectionality framework, Riggs considered how dimensions, such as race, might be relevant in gay masculinity (Perspective Shift 1—multidimensional). Further, he examined gay men's dynamic construction of masculinity through their online postings about their romantic preferences in Australia (Perspective Shift 2—dynamic). In his analysis, Riggs found that gay men who made anti-Asian comments cast all Asian men as emasculated and feminine, relative to gay men of other racial groups (Perspective Shift 1—multidimensional). Riggs' analysis also revealed the role of structural power dimensions in these men's portrayal of Asian gay men as feminine and as an "other." Specifically, by distancing themselves in this way from Asian gay men, White gay men from this group portrayed themselves as ideally masculine and prototypical in contrast (Perspective Shifts 1 and 3—multidimensional and power). Riggs' analysis of the relations between intersectional positions and structural power in this case, highlights that prejudice and distancing along one social group membership may be used by some members of a group to maintain an outcome of advantage relative to other members of a group (Perspective Shift 4—outcomes of (dis)advantage). Intersectionality encourages us to think of social group memberships, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, as partial, provisional, and negotiated. Thus, individuals' intersectional positions are dependent on the multiple groups they belong to and are dynamically constructed, contextually bound, and must be understood through the lens of access to structural power. Engaging with these four perspective shifts has the potential to transform psychologists' approach to studying the human mind and behavior.

Making Serious Engagement a Reality: A Culture Shift for Psychologists

A question that remains is how psychology, as a field, can embrace the challenge to take seriously these perspective shifts toward intersectional thinking. In this section, we suggest ways in which the four perspective shifts could be used in participant-related aspects of research design, analysis, and reporting.

In the Method section of empirical reports, for example, researchers should report *why* they are studying their particular population, rather than, for example, a nationally or cross-culturally representative sample (Warner, 2008; Warner & Shields, 2013). This justification should include considerations of participants as multidimensional and intersectional positions as dynamic, power-relevant, and as creating possible outcomes of systemic advantage and disadvantage. Further, using intersectional thinking to inform the design and analysis of a study is inconsistent with considering social group memberships independently from one another, as is typical in Analysis of variance, regression, moderation, and other additive statistical analyses common in psychology. Instead, intersectional research conceptualizes social group memberships as interdependent and involves testing theoretically grounded questions about specific intersectional positions and their unique outcomes (Warner et al., 2016).

Researchers should also justify their choice of measures and ensure that the measures they selected for their study adequately captured the experience of people in their study (e.g., Warner, 2008). Using intersectional thinking, researchers can probe unmarked assumptions about measures, questioning, for instance, which women a measure validated on "women" was actually validated on. Was it a predominantly White sample of young women in college or a community sample of women who work in the tech industry in California? Rather than assuming that measures validated with particular samples will operate the same way for people at different intersections, or will operate similarly across situations, historical contexts, and geographic locations, researchers need to engage with intersectional thinking when selecting measures and designing study protocols. In addition, in many experimental studies, such as those commonly conducted in social psychology, participants evaluate vignettes, videos, or other depictions of people that serve as stimuli. Given that participants will imagine people who serve as stimuli as belonging to dominant social groups unless there are cues (visual or verbal) to the contrary, researchers should also specify *why* they selected the intersectional positions they did for people who serve as stimuli and consider how their findings might differ if their stimulus people occupied different intersectional positions.

In the Discussion section, psychologists' interpretations of their findings could similarly benefit from an engagement with the perspective shifts of intersectional thinking. To do so, researchers would need to consider the implications of their findings, if any, for individuals at other intersectional positions, acknowledging the unnamed, dominant social group memberships of their participants. This would encourage researchers to confront the values and limitations attached to their choices about who they include in their studies and how they conceptualize the demographic profile of these participants. The goal of this intersectional interpretation should be for researchers to think more deeply about how *and* why participants at various intersections may differ from one other, not to merely uncritically offer that future studies should examine individuals with other possible intersectional positions. In such an interpretation, researchers should attend to the dynamic nature of social group

memberships and intersectional positions, particularly as situated within structures of inequality, that produce systemic advantage and disadvantage. Interpreting findings about participants using intersectional thinking has the ability to deepen our understanding of human phenomena, while being precise about generalizability.

Implications for Practice

Changes in journal practices, grant-making agency guidelines, and disciplinary norms could support psychologists' engagement in intersectional thinking about participants. Adopting journal-level change is compatible with changes happening within the reproducible science movement. As illustrated in the opening example, psychologists are beginning to reexamine which findings are replicable and under which circumstances. There is also already a precedent for journals to shift publication standards to accommodate changes in research norms and practices. For instance, standards have changed for statistical reporting (e.g., Cumming, 2014) and to promote reproducible science practices (e.g., Munafò et al., 2017). With increased interest in replication, the time is right to examine how psychological findings may—or may not—hold if replicated with an intersectional framing.

A related change could occur through requirements set by grant-making agencies. Grant proposal guidelines often require researchers to justify demographic exclusions in their proposals. This consideration is in place to ensure that researchers do not replicate Titchener's (1916) omission of certain groups in their examination of health phenomena. Nevertheless, psychologists could improve their consideration of participants' intersectional positions in health and psychological phenomena by (1) engaging with participants as multidimensional instead of framing them as single-axis (i.e., thinking about participants as belonging to multiple groups rather than only one group); (2) considering the dynamic construction of social group memberships across situation, history, and geography instead of approaching demographics as stable variables; (3) questioning how phenomena relevant to intersectional positions are related to power; and (4) considering the role of intersectional positions and relevant social processes in creating various possible outcomes of systemic advantage and disadvantage. Rethinking how psychology typically construes participant demographics can thus move us away from concluding the presence of biologically based differences without a critical examination of alternative explanations for patterns of difference, particularly those related to power and inequality.

Lasting change in our scientific practice will also require a commitment from psychologists to learn about intersectional approaches and to infuse this thinking into their teaching of research methods and other course content (e.g., Case, 2016). Intersectionality-focused conferences, or a greater presence of intersectionality-related research symposia in existing conferences, could support psychologists in working collaboratively to integrate this type of thinking into psychology at large.

We note that within particular subfields of psychology, there may be other ways to engage with the perspective shifts of intersectional thinking. We present our suggestions to start a conversation around the claim that we can improve our science by thinking about participants through an intersectional framing, across all of psychology. Other scholars might extend the transformative potential of intersectionality, and of other feminist approaches, beyond reconceptualizing the demographic profile of participants (see Mootz, Stabb, & Mollen, 2017, for an empirical example). For instance, as Fine and Torre (2019) call us to do, we can challenge notions of participants as subjects to be defined; we can instead consider participants as co-researchers in knowledge construction, rethink definitions of representativeness in sampling to intentionally include those occupying intersectional positions often ignored, and question the limits of demographic categories. As Marecek (2019) argues, psychologists can embrace critical feminist engagement with the discipline. Doing so will involve psychologists in recognizing that the field has been shaped by cultural, political, and historical values that dictate what forms of research, which researchers, and which theories are considered legitimate (e.g., quantitative research stripped of context but not qualitative research embedded in context) in the production of scientific knowledge (see, e.g., Settles, Buchanan, & Dotson, 2018).

Conclusions

In line with previous arguments to integrate intersectionality with psychology, we suggest that rethinking how participants are construed would result in a more inclusive, thorough, and precise study of human behavior that is less susceptible to researchers' blind spots (e.g., Cole, 2009; Purdie-Vaughns & Eibach, 2008). Conceptualizing participants through the four perspective shifts of intersectional thinking would lead to new research questions for psychological investigation. Subsequently, strengthening the study of human behavior has implications for improving the application of psychology to social problems, such as resulting in interventions that are effective for more groups of people when designed with an intersectional framing (e.g., Bowleg, 2012; Todd & Simpson, 2017). Rethinking participants through an intersectional framework could have additional downstream effects that complement others' suggestions to transform psychology. For instance, considering participants as multidimensional and intersectional positions as dynamic and intertwined with structural power could help to encourage a better embrace of qualitative and mixed methods. Because qualitative methods emphasize the experiences of individuals in their own words, they can provide especially rich insight into the dynamic nature of identity, social location, multidimensional lived realities, and power-relevant social processes, such as

experiences of discrimination (e.g., Marecek, Fine, & Kidder, 1997; Settles, 2006). Intersectional thinking about participants could also lead researchers to engage more with interdisciplinary perspectives in the research process (e.g., Moradi & Grzanka, 2017) and to attend more to *how* research is conducted (e.g., Peplau & Conrad, 1989).

Using an intersectionality framework to understand research participants in psychology is both an imperative and timely issue for the field. Intersectionality is imperative because it gives us deeper insight into how power and resultant outcomes of advantage or disadvantage are structured for people, depending on their intersectional position in a particular context. Such insight deepens knowledge central to our discipline: understanding who we study, what we study, and how we study. Intersectionality is timely because there has been an upsurge in interest to apply psychology to real-world problems, both through the development of specific psychologically informed interventions and through a broader willingness to "give psychology away" (Warner & Shields, 2018, p. 31) to address a variety of social issues. Psychological science, both within and outside the United States, is also in a period of transition, as the field strives to improve the quality of scientific practices and data management. As psychology continues to change to foster reproducible science practices and research with relevance to real-world problems, there is opportunity to promote discipline-level change that would take intersectionality seriously.

Authors' Note

The 2018 Ernest R. Hilgard Lifetime Achievement Award address by S.A.S. served as the springboard for this article.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to thank John McCormick-Huhn for feedback on an early draft of the article and Lizbeth Kim and Heather MacArthur for comments on a preliminary version of the talk.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Kaitlin McCormick-Huhn https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3156-336X

Note

1. Although we consider intersectionality's growth in psychology encouraging, it is common to hear it referred to as a "buzzword" (e.g., Davis, 2008; Else-Quest & Hyde, 2016a). Characterizing intersectionality as a buzzword achieves two ends. First, labeling intersectionality as a buzzword dismisses it as a fad, rather than as an academically rigorous theory. Second, "buzzword" encourages people to get on the bandwagon and lay claim to this perspective, whether their work actually reflects an intersectionality perspective or not.

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