

Intersectionality and Detrimental Agency in Nigeria's Researchscape

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Abstract

This study presents Nigeria's researchscape as an archetype of sites where intersections of multiple identities of gender, race, and class are performed. Despite the acclaimed strength of intersectionality to unearth hidden oppressions, its commitment to addressing the oppressions it uncovers requires scholarly scrutiny.

The study takes a historical approach regarding intersectionality to probe into what comprises any intersectional focus in academia and how much the researchscape has benefitted from intersectional methodological thinking. Using methods of critical analysis and deconstructive argumentation, 'Detrimental Agency' is introduced to highlight how positionality and reflexivity influence multiple layers of oppression in academia, depending on who possesses the 'intersectional wand'.

Keywords: detrimental agency; intersectionality; intersectional wand; researchscape; higher education

Introduction

A sunny afternoon in November 2022, at a Nigerian Federal University offered itself to a gathering of people from all walks of life to listen to a lecture titled 'Exploring the Impact of Intersectionality in Academia and Research.' As is the new-normal culture, non-Nigerian audiences also joined the hybrid event online from their various countries. Delivering a public lecture on the campus of a Nigerian Public University is no mere feat, particularly as a woman, one who is not an alumnus of the 'first generation' public university and just approaching professorial cadre. The subject would generate much controversy among University Management, academic staff, students, and the general university public. The academic environment consisting of such diverse stakeholders and players is what this study describes as a 'researchscape'- an academic landscape with varying expertise, experience, and power-play. It could also be described as the campus ecosystem. The public lecture audience mix is expectedly diverse (now with global audiences in virtual attendance), not only in gender, race, and class, but also in interests, consequently requiring the speaker's depth of wit, knowledge, and charisma. Post-lecture interests requiring transcription of the lecture led to the invitation of a doctoral student from the Federal University where the event was hosted. Having bagged her Bachelors from outside Nigeria, she is often described as 'privileged'; an identity marker which predisposes her to discrimination. This presents us at intersections of class, gender and ethnicity on the researchscape, and reflexively accentuates the site of our intersectional journey in this study.

Kimberlé Crenshaw popularised the idea of intersectionality in 1989. As a legal theorist, she uncovered the compound discrimination at play when black women brought forth a case for employment discrimination based on their race and gender. Still, their allegations were denied due to a lack of complaints from black men and white women respectively (**DeGraffenreid v. G.M. Assembly: 1976**). Crenshaw's concept of intersectionality highlighted how the intersection of race and gender in this case produced a unique type of discrimination that black men and white women were not privy to. Therefore, she exposed how intersectional subordination is frequently 'the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with pre-existing vulnerabilities to create yet another dimension of dis-empowerment' (**Crenshaw 1991: 1249**). The concept of 'intersectionality' arose during a period in which states and governing bodies began paying increasing attention to women's affairs globally. For instance, the United Nations dedicated 1975-85 as the UN Decade for Women ushering world conferences on women in Mexico, in 1975, Copenhagen, in 1980, and Nairobi, in 1985. In 1979, the UN General Assembly adopted the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms

of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW). In Nigeria, the pursuit of the tenets of CEDAW and other related international protocols spurred the establishment of Women's Research and Documentation Center (WORDOC) in 1987, at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan. By 1988, WORDOC midwifed the National Commission of Women now known as the Federal Ministry for Women's Affairs (**WORDOC Newsletter, 1988**), and as women's studies progressed, this brought with it, the need to recognise and respect women's particulars amidst universals, just as the waves of women's studies also began to spread across campuses.

Stemming from concerns such as the individual's sense of self, conformity to social stereotypes, sexual preference, and political ideology and activism, women's studies have grappled with debates on whether human identities are predetermined or subject to self-determination, whether they are fluid, under threat, and what futures exist for identities. Such questions perhaps informed Kathy Davis' assertion that learning the ropes of feminist scholarship means attending to multiple identities and experiences of subordination (**2008**). Accordingly, divergent conceptions concerning how feminism is conceived, defined, practiced, theorised, and communicated have produced various types of feminism including white feminism, black feminism, third-world feminism, and African feminism(s). The urgency of distinguishing women's lived experiences within the varying conceptions and theorisation also arose. Despite the controversy that surrounds feminism as both a concept and ideology, feminist scholarship has remained at the forefront of theorising around social exclusion, justice, equity, and space-making. Thus, intersectionality can be said to have been borne out of this 'crisis of difference' across feminist scholarship as it addressed the most central theoretical and normative concern within feminist scholarship: the acknowledgment of differences among women.

Intersectionality is multifaceted; as a theory (**Mohammed, 2022**), a concept or heuristic device (**May, 2015**), a reading strategy for doing feminist analysis (**Collins, 2015**), a mechanism to understand individual experiences, and a means to theorise identity, as well as a property of social structures and cultural discourses (**UN Women, 2020**). Despite these numerous angles, Crenshaw's work in intersectionality provided a pathway to identify immediate challenges of overlooked experiences and struggles of women of color. It captured multiple jeopardy, specifically the 'triple jeopardy' of class, race, and gender (**King, 1988**). Observing the unique interactions of these identity markers and their resultant consequences highlights the notion that all oppressions are connected. One can barely succeed in doing feminist research without proper acknowledgment of differences, and how each new category of inequality, renders people more vulnerable, more marginalised, and more

subordinate (**Davis, 2008**). For instance, a group of women in a classroom may all experience marginalisation on some level in society due to their gender, but differences among them in terms of ethnic background, marital status, age, and childbearing status may produce a varied set of challenges and lived experiences that their other female counterparts may not relate to. Even if the room were to be narrowed down to only pregnant women, the women's experiences of pregnancy may differ starkly.

Arguably, underlying assumptions of intersectionality embody a two-pronged analytical approach. First, it requires thinking across categories (**Yuval-Davis, 2006**) and examining how categories such as gender, race, and class intersect. Secondly, it suggests the need to identify and focus on 'sites' where multiple identities are performed (**Staunæs, 2003**). In this instance, academia serves as one such site in which multiple identities are performed and subsequently, a space in which intersections exist. Still, the question may be posed, why academia?

Academia is a fast-moving, dynamic space where all stakeholders are expected to keep up with the cycle of trends in research and development. The academic cycle consists of professors (teaching and research), upcoming middle-level researchers, university administrators, students and various support service providers. It is within this cycle that university management is organised. The cycle is saddled with research, teaching, mentoring, and community service, and each plays a significant role in the lives of stakeholders. The community of practice comprising such diverse stakeholders and players is what this study describes as a 'researchscape'; an academic landscape with varying expertise, experience, and power-play. The academia has nursed what some scholars have termed 'traditional equity research' or a process of 'dissolving people's identities into broad, unchanging classifications' which aligns with a data-driven performance culture in universities, such as disaggregating populations according to designated categories (gender, ethnicity, social class, first language, first-in-family status) (**Naylor, Coates & Kelly 2016**).

Mari Matsuda's manner of asking 'the other question' can serve to illustrate what intersectionality could look like in academia and research. Matsuda claims that when she sees something racist she asks, 'Where is the patriarchy in this?' When she sees something sexist, she asks, 'Where is the heterosexism in this?' And when she sees something that looks homophobic, she asks 'Where are the class interests in this?' (**Matsuda 1991: 1189**). Matsuda's words reflect Crenshaw's notion of intersectional subordination and the idea that multiple forms of oppression may take place concurrently.

Given intersectionality's origins within the US and its unique racial history, one wonders whether intersectionality fits within diverse contexts. On

this, studies have provided varied responses to similar questions concerning the applicability of intersectional frameworks amidst regional variations. Some scholars have suggested that in the United Kingdom, social class has been a key focus, particularly concerning gender (**Archer, Pratt & Phillips 2001; Burke 2009**). More generally, John (**2012**) points out that in Europe and Asia, ethnicity, religion, and migration status are more salient than race. Despite the academic grounding present within these assessments, they remain subject to the perspectives and identities of the scholars themselves. Drawing on an intersectionality lens requires the recognition that even in a European context, Black Europeans or Europeans from minority backgrounds may have very different notions of the degree which race factors into daily life. So, while some have suggested that the question of race may not be pertinent when discussing intersectionality on the African soil (**Nnaemeka, 2022**), like the analysis above, the question must be asked, 'which African soil'? In countries like South Africa, for instance, with white settler populations, and in many cases, whose societies are organised according to racial hierarchies, the question of race becomes extremely important. If one recognises sexism and classism within the Nigerian context, how much does racism play a visible role? In a predominantly black context like Nigeria, race would likely feature less in an intersectional lens but rather encompass categories like age, ethnicity, ability, class, and gender which create a disadvantage to individual groups much more than race. Still, even in Nigeria, while race may be of limited concern in the day-to-day, practices such as skin bleaching, colorism, or the elevated place of foreigners in certain segments of society, may still speak to the existence of a racial lens, that may perhaps manifest itself in the form of proximity to whiteness or Western contributions. Thus, the question of race in Africa is an intersectional analysis of itself and requires an examination of the specific context, the meaning of 'race' and the positionality of the researcher.

As social, economic, and political activities within this space continue to define identities while popular generalisation of stakeholders in the space continues to shortchange a wide range of actors, especially women (**Omotoso, 2020a**), research that solely relies on a gender lens can no longer be viewed as comprehensive if it is not equipped to recognise and account for other identity intersections. By implication, understanding intersectionality's impact within academia and research cannot be complete without a full grasp of its conceptual roots within feminist studies, women studies, gender studies, and critical race theory collectively. Three questions can guide discussions regarding intersectionality in academia;

- 1) What comprises any intersectional focus in academia

- 2) What methodologies are engaged and how do these contribute to the production of knowledge?
- 3) Does intersectional thinking always address the multi-layered oppression it uncovers?

To answer these questions, this conceptual paper problematises current issues in Nigeria's researchscape with an aim to assess the effectiveness of intersectional frameworks, while also identifying areas within the Nigerian researchscape that could benefit from intersectional methodological thinking. In illuminating these areas, it introduces the concept of detrimental agency and complacent positionality to discuss instances in which intersectionality may produce adverse or detrimental outcomes, particularly as it pertains to curbing women marginalisation. We have refrained from using any institution as case study because the intention of this article is to offer conceptual frameworks and critical reflections for future empirical studies on Nigeria's (Africa's) academia.

The remaining part of this work provides a general analysis of intersectionality's nuances within academia, drawing specifically from examples within Nigeria. Furthermore, we argue that agency is often downplayed in intersectional discourses. We consider women's agency in the academia on one hand, and the agency of the systems, which often earn them the 'intersectional wand' on the other hand. We further interrogate how agency in intersectional thinking can be detrimental, before we proceed to discuss how players in the academia utilise their intersectional wand to generate and sustain detrimental agency. Subsequently, we discuss emerging issues from Nigeria's researchscape followed by the concluding section.

Intersectionality in Nigeria's Researchscape

Nigeria has 274 universities as of 2024- (63 state universities, 62 federal universities and 149 private universities (Statistica.com, 2025). The entire researchscape engage in stakeholder recycling, with management, academic staff, administrative staff and students drawn from the same pool emanating from across federal, state and private institutions. To understand what comprises any intersectional focus in Nigeria's academia, the Federal Character framework must be interrogated. Described as an integrative mechanism for inclusive representation (**Ojo, 2009**), the practice of inclusive representation through affirmative action policies covering consideration of categories such as age, sex, gender and ethnicity (**Okoye et. al 2021**). It calls for reckoning with the country's plurality in recruitment, distribution of administrative and political offices and power as well as the resources of the country (**Obiyan & Akindede, 2002**). While the federal character constituents are more pronounced in the federal

institutions, state and private entities also have similar frameworks covering indigeneity, faith-based and class-based considerations. Additional considerations also include institutional generations- whether first generation, second generation and so on (Olabode 2015); and new capitalist trends exemplified in internal revenue generation among federal and state institutions, as well as tuition and infrastructure issues within the private university systems.

In a country of over 200 million population and more than 250 ethnic groups (**Worldrometer, 2025**), Federal Character aims to promote fairness and equity in representation and resource allocation to protect interest of minority groups and ensure that the many ethnic groups, vulnerable populations and religious inclinations are protected. However, Nigeria's researchscape feigns intersectional thinking in composition and operations. Complications arising from such intersectional thinking continues to toxify the researchscape. Key identified areas affirming feigned intersectional thinking are examined below:

Admission

University admission methods frequently disaggregate student populations to make admission available to students whose makeup satisfies established qualities of student body diversity. In the particular context of the United States of America, this disaggregation has often led to tensions among groups, especially within the affirmative action space. The large amounts of black immigrant populations in the USA that have benefited from affirmative action policies that favor 'Black students' as a homogenous group, has drawn criticism from groups of African Americans (**Rimer & Arenson, 2004**). Similar challenges occur within the Nigerian context as it pertains to the use of quotas to align with the nation's principle of Federal Character. Agbaire (**2022: 8**) notes that 'gender is not considered in Nigeria's national quota-based policy for equitable higher education admissions even though there are strong indications that this is an important domain of inequalities'.

The admission process at universities demonstrates some of the problems that may arise in light of feigned intersectional thinking within academia. The admission quota system introduced in 2000 allows for 45% candidates to be admitted based on merit, 35% based on locality and 25% to cater for the educationally less-developed (**Salim, 2003**). For example, the quota system is expected to be applied to rectify recognisable imbalance in education opportunities between the southern and northern parts of Nigeria. While this is admirable, there can also be concerns about which type of Northern Nigerians? Does this type of disaggregation consider the differences between a Yoruba student from Kwara state and a Hausa student from Sokoto despite both being from Northern Nigeria? When

gender is considered, what happens when for instance male northerner cannot fill their quota while there is excess demand from female northerners? Also, if religion is a criterion, how will the crises of more muslim northerners be balanced against minority Christian northerners? Often time, nepotism creeps in to dislocate intersectional thinking. This contributes to reasons why agitations against marginalisation in admission processes continue to ravage the country. A case in point arises with the recent crisis of the Joint Admissions Matriculations Board (JAMB) in the Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) 2025 examinations, where 'what began as a technical glitch has spiralled into a crisis of accountability, ethnic distrust, and tragic consequences, raising urgent questions about Nigeria's education system, governance, and the culture of impunity that shields public officials from repercussion' (**The Cable News, May 15, 2025**). Intersectional considerations in higher education admission is still an area of concern for women applicants 'because the admission system does not explicitly address process challenges nor recognise gender differences and discrimination' (**Agbaire, 2022: 24**).

Classrooms, Curriculum, Appointment and Promotion

These contexts are also important aspects of intersectional thinking in Academia. In terms of curriculum, there exists an intersectional angle to the exercise of producing knowledge in general and decolonising knowledge in particular. As an instructor, understanding the various backgrounds of students within the classroom space in terms of family background, economic access, ethnicity, and so on, can aid in teaching and curriculum development to ensure that contents meet the unique needs of students as well as the needs of the communities they will be serving after the academic programme. Further for consideration could be how intersectionality is factored into the development of graduate and professional programmes vis-a-vis makeup of students admitted for professional programmes such that they make provisions for groups including nursing mothers, mature students, politicians, and public office holders to build capacity and augment their skills while still on the job. At a multi-disciplinary roundtable session for young female academics (**WORDOC, 2024**), attention was called to how women's individual agency has aided their admission of into undergraduate programs across Nigerian universities in the last decade but finds an insignificant number of women returning for graduate programs. Innovations such as Distance Learning Programs and Open University options reflect intersectional thinking which has permitted hitherto marginalised or excluded groups to education. Still, many Nigerian universities' classrooms do not provide sufficiently for people with disabilities, nursing mothers among other facilities that attest to such an intersectional thinking.

Outside of the classroom, staff appointment and promotion are often downplayed angles of intersectional thinking. Women are susceptible to career gaps created by nurturing roles including maternity and childcare. The various stages of promotion exercises- departmental-faculty, internal and external assessments among others often predispose women to misogynistic and discriminatory practices. For instance, studies have engaged with role entrapment and spatial entrapment (**Omotoso, 2020b**), revealing how women are often kept at the middle level and lower echelons in higher education leadership (**Odejide, Akanji and Odekunle 2006**). Regular staff audits should not only reveal ages, number of years in service, and achievements, but also 'who' is recruited, how are they promoted, and how well the system balances the staff mix. Researchscapes' intersectional thinking must be both holistic and forward looking in terms of human resource, training and capacity strengthening.

Universities' Public Events and Students' Activities

The academic environment frequently plays host to events that engage students, the larger university, and the public. Often, these types of events are held in galleries on the top floors of buildings, which attendees can only access via staircases. Adopting an intersectional approach in the planning of such events would seek to address the challenges of inaccessibility for people with disabilities (PWDs) at these events. One can also ask to what extent campus infrastructure, and student halls of residences make such provisions for those with similar physical restrictions.

As researchscape lend itself to intellectual activities, it is also a unique space for organised agitations. University campuses often serve as the nexus for activist organisations and student organising. The recent #EndSARS movement in Nigeria in 2020, for instance, took place across Nigeria and garnered wide support from student populations. Even within this movement, intersectional considerations played an important role as protestors soon asked questions about who is qualified to protest, particularly as queer Nigerians met outcry as they highlighted their negative encounters with the police due to their sexuality (**Omotoso & Opeade, 2025**). They were promptly informed not to bring 'sex matters' into the struggle, even when it was obviously inevitable. In cases like this, intersectionality unearths hidden, yet important nuances which connect gown with town. These reflections attest to the importance of intersectional thinking in curriculum development, project management, recruitment and promotion, knowledge production, and students' research.

Overall, as Nigeria's researchscape remains a practical site to interrogate intersectionality, priority must be given to intersectional research; a venture which must commence with clarity of methodologies for intersectional thinking and planning. The next section presents a brief discussion on methodologies in intersectional research.

Methodologies in Intersectional Research

Beyond classroom and administrative matters, it is noteworthy that values surrounding multidisciplinarity, interdisciplinarity, and transdisciplinarity make room for an appreciation of diverse subjects, thoughts, and ideas. These arise from research questions that ask, 'Who is not in the room,' or 'What were the other people doing?', as research methods are engaged within a given study. This implies the need to incorporate intersectionality at the conception stage of any research. This is needed in light of the increasing demands of grant funders for research proposals prepared with a Gender Diversity Statement to describe the identity backgrounds of the research team and beneficiaries, particularly according to gender and racial lines among others. Such process recognises that 'different methodologies produce different kinds of knowledge' (McCall, 2005: 1772) and research benefits from a multiplicity of perspectives and positionalities.

Peer review is another area of the research process in which intersectional thinking can offer many advantages. Despite widespread blind review culture, it offers an opportunity for self-reflexivity and the awareness that the reviewer cannot superimpose personal views into scholarly articles. In the last few decades, professions and disciplines are increasingly no longer associated with a particular gender, allowing for diversity in knowledge production. As research from scholars begins to incorporate intersectional principles, so too does it begin to influence student projects to follow suit. The culture of internal and external examiner interventions allows for graduate students to probe the space for intersectional thinking within their works. They are also challenged to consider the diversity within the so-called homogenous groups under study.

There are several ways to do intersectional research. These methods are not limited to the humanities or even the social sciences, rather they apply across the board. Intersectionality can feature conveniently in qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods of research drawn from interpretative, phenomenological, auto-ethnography, case studies, and statistical analysis among others. Within statistical analysis, for instance, an intersectional lens may prompt the researcher to not just consider women as a homogenous group but also to consider their educational attainment, marital status, and physical (dis)abilities, and probe how these additional identity categories may also impact findings.

Discussions in the sections above have presented the limitlessness of intersectional thinking, describing how it can serve as an analytical resource and identity marker to understand varying approaches to leadership, crisis management, teaching, and physical planning in higher institutions. At this point, it is pertinent to examine whether intersectional thinking always addresses the multi-layered oppression it uncovers. The next section of this study will focus on possibilities and scenarios that expound the limits of intersectionality.

Agency and Intersectional Wand in Researchscape

Suffice to say that discourses on intersectionality emerged from women's experiences and realities, an intersectional approach in researchscape introduces a new dimension for inclusive leadership and administration. To commence this section, attention must be paid to agency- a less-hyped feature of intersectional thinking.

Agency depicts a conscious awareness and display of capability for the decisive pursuit of specified goals without fear of discrimination, disadvantage and violence. Agency for women involves taking risks and responsibilities across spaces. It features women's ability to influence decisions, root for collective action, and inspire positive change. Just as Sen (1999) prescribes an inevitable intersection between women's agency and women's well-being, 'women's agency is operative when it results in a fundamental shift in perceptions so that women can define self-interest and choice' (Mishra and Tripathi 2011: 59). Agbaire (2022) notes how dimensions of agency contribute to understanding conflicts between women's personal goals in higher education, and societal expectation especially with regards to mapping mainstream equity policy directions.

With regards to academia (which is the foci of this study), agency plays out in intersectionality, as women feature in each of the subjects earlier discussed- taking researchers', scholars', and administrators' ample amount of agency to incorporate intersectional thinking into systems, be it recruitment, admission, promotion, research, and campus economics. Inferentially, agency implies access to a wand that can find and fix problems. Here, a wand is taken as a symbol of office, often connected with authority, power and intelligence possessed by persons and often affording them ability to find solution to difficult problems. An intersectional wand is a tool composed of a conscious ability to influence systems, the authority to determine organisational directions and the courage to take responsibility for consequences of ones' actions. An intersectional wand signifies well-rounded problem-solving strategies while keeping in mind the diversity of persons and circumstances within systems. Bearing in mind that no one must be left behind, agentic persons in the academia are constant users of the intersectional wand.

While researchscape have kept its problem-solving nature, intersectional thinking has opened new areas of concern for which any leadership can be recognised as inclusive. Nigeria has witnessed significant representation of women at top university management levels. Since Prof Grace Alele-Williams who was first female Vice-Chancellor in Nigeria (1985), over 30 women have also been appointed as Vice-Chancellors across the country. Also significant are the women Deputy Vice-Chancellors and University Librarians. Although, this figure is low compared to their male counterparts, Omotoso (2020b: 81) acknowledges 'structured interventions developed to encourage more women to enter leadership positions in universities'. Importantly, women's resilience in deploying their agencies have paved way for the progressive success recorded. Again, that these agentic moves are mostly not in solidarity slows down the pace of achieving the desired space making goals. Yet, it is dangerous to ignore possibilities that intersectional wands are held and used, not only by women but also by other structures and systems of the academe, and their actions or inaction affects the campus ecosystem. When intersectional wand is held by male-centric administration, gender may be downplayed for other constituents to thrive.

Also, when women who do not have gender agenda are in leadership, other categories of the intersections may take precedence over gender. This is seen in some women leaders in researchscape who describe themselves as feminine and not feminist. It begs the question- what would a gender mainstreamed researchscape offer to Nigerian education or to any educational system at all? This is examined in the next section under detrimental agency.

Can Agency in Intersectional Thinking be Detrimental?

Studies have questioned the multifacetedness of agency (Hays, 1994), having recognised how women's agency is 'differently ...exercised in various socio-political contexts' (Eduards, 1994: 182). They decry how agency is often embedded in social structures (Giddens, 2008); how social structures, institutions, cultures, and groups undermine women's agency (Collins, 2008); and how agentic women are autonomous yet subverted (Davis, 1991). Intersectionality is widely understood as a framework used to spotlight hidden oppressions. Howbeit, beyond acting as a pointer to multiple oppression, does intersectionality help in unravelling the puzzle it has found? Such an analysis foregrounds problematic outcomes that may arise with the adoption of an intersectional approach in academia. On this, McCall, (2005: 1772) expresses that 'intersectionality has introduced new methodological problems and, partly as an unintended consequence'.

A situation wherein what is supposed to be a measure of strength becomes weaponised to promote weakness and foster oppression has been described by Omotoso & Ogbebor as ‘detrimental agency’ (2023). Detrimental agency depicts ‘the trivialization of women’s resilience, an undermining of women’s voice and autonomy, and its upturn into an instrument of subversion’ (Omotoso & Akanni, 2024: 130). Oftentimes, the agentic woman, variously described as the ‘empowered’ (Dosekun, 2023), ‘upwardly mobile’ (Gqola, 2016), and ‘hairy’ (Omotoso, 2020c) become a victim of detrimental agency as ‘her very empowerment becomes the putative sign that she might be morally disreputable’ (Dosekun, 2023: 1438) resulting in new forms of delegitimation. For instance, having a supportive family background could be considered a positive attribute that could aid a woman to progress in her career and add strength to her academic productivity. Nonetheless, her agency at the family level could become detrimental perhaps, if she is considered for a promotion or a grant, and the grantmakers decide that she does not deserve institutional support since she has a supportive family structure. What leads to detrimental agency in most contexts are qualities and attributes which could have qualified a person, but weaponised by systems to discredit or disqualify women. Here lies the intersectionality of detrimental agency itself. When women wield their intersectional wand, they may be accused of promoting pro-feminist policies and subverting men in the system. Alternatively, patriarchal decision-makers could choose to capitalise on a woman’s seemingly flourishing career to create artificial obstacles at the institutional level. In another example, a female academic staff should be entitled to all benefits offered by the university and pertaining to her status (this is agency), however, her agency becomes detrimental when she is denied access to housing allowance because her spouse works within the same system who already has access to the benefits. While these examples serve only hypothetical, they highlight how agency depends on the cultural nuances and norms of a given site and socio-economic contexts consequently becoming disadvantageous.

Crenshaw proceed to spotlight ‘intersectional subordination’, which showcases how ‘the consequence of the imposition of one burden that interacts with preexisting vulnerabilities...create yet another dimension of disempowerment’ (1991: 1249). For example, a woman may be denied headship of her department on grounds of i) being a foreigner married to a Nigerian, ii) being at child-rearing stage, iii) having a spouse who is from a minority ethnic group iv) living with disability. It is possible for a woman to combine some or all these vulnerabilities. When for example, being the only woman in a department interacts with disability and being at child-rearing stage, new dimensions of disempowerment are created. This case showcases intersections of gender, race and class.

While Crenshaw's intersectional subordination is about how various vulnerabilities reinforce each other, detrimental agency emphasises not on vulnerabilities, but on agency- how the voice, autonomy, and resilience built by women turn around and becomes an instrument of subversion in the hands of oppressors. This places detrimental agency at a converse to intersectional subordination. In intersectional thinking, detrimental agency is characterised by its capacity to show how a person's food is another person's poison; how strength in one context can become weakness in another; and how roleplays and role reversals impact on the lives and livelihoods of women and men across spaces. Just as Fraser calls for 'a coherent, integrated, balanced conception of agency, ...that can accommodate both the power of social constraints and the capacity to act situated against them' (Fraser 1992: 17), detrimental agency may be addressed by offering critical analytic platforms to identify it and determine how a person's combination of attributes are in due course understood, evaluated and galvanised. Ultimately, the perpetuation of detrimental agency in intersectional thinking rests largely with the person(s) handling and wielding the 'intersectional wand'; it ensues when agency is weaponised to render women vulnerable.

Emerging Issues in Intersectional Discourses from Nigeria

Having established that intersectional thinking may be marred by detrimental agency, the Nigerian researchscape provides a tangible platform to observe how stakeholders use their intersectional wands. Suffice it to say that anyone who displays a level of awareness of the existence of intersections has an intersectional wand that serves to identify and point out unobserved or overlooked intersections in the forms of strengths and weaknesses, agencies, and subversions. This same may be wielded for either beneficial or damaging ends. The use of an intersectional wand depends largely on positionality and reflexivity.

Positionality traditionally describes a methodology that requires researchers to identify their degree of privilege through factors of race, class, educational attainment, income, ability, gender, and citizenship among others (Duarte, 2017). It affords people the opportunity to consider their origins, ideologies, 'epistemological assumptions (an individual's beliefs about the nature of knowledge) and assumptions about human nature and agency (individual's assumptions about the way we interact with our environment and relate to it)' (Holmes, 2020: 1-2). Positionality suggests a consciousness that researchers' bias may creep into studies, in administration personal ideals and experiences may foster bigotry and redtapism. Positionality may then become complacent when the recognition of one's degree of privilege, (or in some cases the lack of it) becomes a tool for fostering the oppression of others. It is possible that

intersectional thinking within academia can create an environment in which complacent positionality proliferates. For instance, complacent positionality of the oppressor could occur when someone in the dominant group deliberately retains an idea and continues with existent discriminatory patterns even amidst resistance. The dominant group may occasionally make small accommodations such as hiring from the minority group, not to create any systemic change, but rather to appease or pander to the oppressed and shut down further protests. This occurrence affirms tokenism (**Omotoso & Akanni, 2024**), since, amid any protests for representation, the dominant group can point to the token minority member on the team or concession, as evidence of the institution's progressiveness despite remaining unwaveringly loyal to existing power dynamics. Complacent positionality can also reveal itself within the oppressed group, - a person in the minority group, who uses the assurance of intersectional consideration to retain personal gain while discountenancing the need to end specific forms of oppression is using their intersectional wand in detrimental contexts. As an example, the sole woman in an academic department could refuse to engage in efforts to tackle systemic oppression by failing to mentor and bring in more women. She may leverage her minority status for her gain and use it to retain herself as the only woman in the department.

Thus, complacent positionality enables haphazard use of an intersectional wand. Possible outcomes of haphazard use of intersectional wand are as follows:

- it could afford researchers the luxury of robust fieldwork which would only result in inconsequential conclusions for their study population. This is exemplified in instances where university selects a community as an outreach zone where data is gathered but no significant impact of the research conducted can be seen in such communities.
- It could be used to entrench dominant, yet unfamiliar research methods across faculties of an institution. In response to multidisciplinary and transdisciplinary, there is a possibility of an imposition of certain research methodologies, particularly on graduate students as perpetuated by a dominant class in university leadership. Intersectional thinking in research should afford a recognition of, and regard for multiple research methodologies, giving room for faculties to compare notes, to widen their methodological horizons and thrive.

- It could, by feigning inclusion perpetuate a certain class, gender, ethnic and religious group at the expense of others. This situation may be likened to how, in mainstreaming gender, women in higher education leadership are often trapped in role and spaces (Omotoso, 2020b)

These all point at how detrimental agency as failure to critically address intersections in researchscape does not produce expected results of sustainable development. With just a few of many possible scenarios, the intersectional wand is a requirement for the researchscape, but it must be wielded without complacent positionality if it will address incessant policy somersaults and other forms of oppression in higher education.

Conclusion

The study began with an appreciation of intersectionality as a concept, theory, and framework which have succeeded in spotlighting multiple layers of oppression across spaces in the last few decades. Using Nigeria's researchscape as an example, evidence was drawn to show how intersectional thinking could work across sectors of higher education such as admissions, appointment and promotion, research, mentoring, and so on. It calls for researchers to ask who is included or excluded in social research and to consider how findings are affected by this oversight. Regarding methodology, intersectional approach was examined to prompt deeper scrutiny of the researchscape. We also established how agency is under-emphasised in intersectionality and how agency could become detrimental in intersectional thinking.

The concepts of detrimental agency and complacent positionality further call for reflections concerning the effect that an intersectional approach has on study populations and the entire researchscape. Namely, does adopting intersectional approaches merely empower a few while retaining existing power structures or does it produce structural change? So too does this analysis prompt the researcher to consider who holds the 'intersectional wand' or decision-making authority to determine how certain identity markers are perceived and how social change would be achieved.

Notwithstanding, as intersectionality continues to aid in revealing hidden oppressions, attempts to appraise its impacts and envisage inclusive thinking and actions within academia emphasise an urgent need for critical diversity literacy aimed at the transformation of societies as led by academia. Ultimately, as shown through the above discussions, intersectionality serves to establish that 'there are several routes to the market square' and research cannot be a 'one-size-fits-all' endeavor. How laudable intersectional thinking would be in a system depends largely on

who wields the intersectional wand and how well intersectional analyses lead to action research and the desired change.

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