

Exploring intersectionality and its deadly impact on black queer lives in Brazil

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Intersectionality, a term coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989,¹ has become a fundamental concept in understanding the complex synergy of identity and social justice. At its core, intersectionality acknowledges that individuals hold multiple identities simultaneously, and these identities intersect to shape their experiences and opportunities within society. Among the most significant intersections are that of race, sexual orientation, and gender identity/expression, profoundly influencing individuals' lived realities and social interactions.

People of colour who identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer and Questioning, Two-Spirit and additional sexual orientations and gender identities (LGBTQ2S+) face compounded discrimination and marginalisation due to the intersecting prejudices they encounter. They may face discrimination not only based on their sexual orientation and/or gender identity/expression but also on their race or ethnicity, leading to increased vulnerability to various forms of oppression.²

Highlighting this complex problem, Dr. Lucilene Freitas and colleagues present compelling findings from a large-scale study involving over 8000 LGBTQ2S + individuals from Brazil.³ Their research highlights the stark disparities in discrimination faced by Black LGBTQ2S + individuals compared to their white counterparts. Their study is particularly significant given Brazil's unique socio-cultural landscape. An estimated 112 million Brazilians are of African ancestry, representing 55.5% of the Brazilian population—the largest population of African descent outside Africa.⁴ Yet, Black Brazilians represent 75% of murder victims and 75% of those killed by police, showing deep-rooted racial inequalities.⁵ Moreover, Brazil has gained notoriety as one of the most dangerous countries for LGBTQ2S + individuals, with an alarming estimate indicating that over 65% of reported murders occur within the Black and mixed-race LGBTQ2S + community.⁶

Historically, both racial minorities and LGBTQ2S + individuals have fought for recognition, rights, and equality in societies that often marginalise them. However, the experiences of individuals at the intersection of these identities are not simply additive; they are qualitatively different and shaped by the complex interplay of racism,

gender oppression, homo and transphobia, among other forms of discrimination. For example, LGBTQ2S + people of colour may find themselves excluded from both LGBTQ2S + communities that prioritize whiteness and racial minority communities that may be less accepting of non-heteronormative identities.⁷

Moreover, systemic inequalities based on race, sexual orientation and gender identity/expression intersect to create disparities in areas such as healthcare, employment, housing, and education. Therefore, LGBTQ2S + people of colour are more likely to experience poverty, homelessness, and violence compared to their white counterparts or heterosexual and cisgender people of colour. They may also encounter unique barriers to accessing culturally competent and affirming support services due to the scarcity of resources tailored to their intersecting identities.⁸

Intersectionality also highlights the importance of recognising the diversity within communities. Not all experiences at the intersection of race and sexual orientation are the same, as individuals' experiences are shaped by additional factors such as gender identity/expression, socioeconomic status, immigration status, and ability. Understanding these complexities is essential for creating inclusive and equitable policies and practices that address the needs of all individuals, particularly those who hold marginalized identities.

The minority stress theory summarises another component that adds to this complex scenario.⁹ For LGBTQ2S + persons of colour, minority stress manifests in various forms, including internalised homophobia or transphobia, perceived discrimination, and concealment of identities to avoid backlash. They may grapple with the pressure to conform to societal norms within both LGBTQ2S+ and racial communities, leading to heightened psychological distress and compromised well-being. Moreover, the lack of culturally competent support exacerbates their stressors, further marginalizing them within existing systems of care.¹⁰ In this sense, the study conducted by Dr. Lucilene Freitas and colleagues contributes to a better understanding of the intersectional experiences of LGBTQ2S + persons of colour living in a country with one of the highest rates of discrimination and violence towards this population.

The intersectional experiences of LGBTQ2S + persons of colour underscore the importance of adopting an inclusive approach to advocacy and support. Efforts must acknowledge and address the intersecting forms of



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oppression they face, recognizing the interconnectedness of racism, homo and transphobia, as well as gender oppression. Culturally sensitive resources and services are essential to provide tailored support that addresses the unique needs of this community. Moreover, creating spaces that validate their identities and experiences fosters resilience and empowerment, countering the detrimental effects of minority stress. Advocacy efforts must prioritize social justice, inclusivity and cultural competence to address the complex challenges faced by this community effectively. By acknowledging and validating their intersecting identities, we can foster resilience and create more equitable and supportive environments for LGBTQ2S + persons of colour.

Contributors

Monica Malta wrote the comment without any additional contribution.

Declaration of interests

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