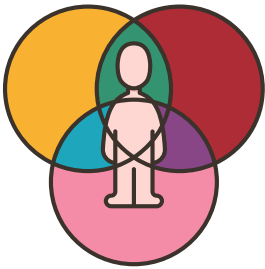


Intersectional identities and career progression in retail: The experiences of minority ethnic women

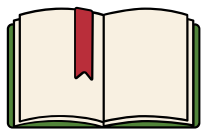


What is intersectionality?

Everyone has multiple identity characteristics. Intersectionality recognizes that socially-constructed identity categories (e.g., race, class, gender and sexual orientation) simultaneously interact with each other and with wider societal and power structures to construct experiences of oppression and/or privilege unique to each individual.

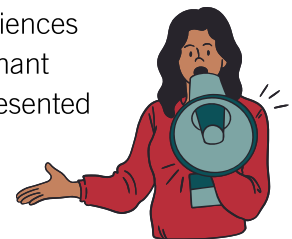
Why is it important that we adopt an intersectional lens in the workplace?

Workplaces are not neutral spaces. They are environments that create and reproduce inequalities. Organizational practices and processes can create inequalities we might not even consider in our day-to-day work e.g. wage setting, recruitment practice, informal interactions.



What does the academic research tell us?

Intersectionality is complex; the definitions and methodological application for research is really challenging. A great strength, however, is its multi-dimensional approach to inequality, so no individual identity is segregated nor individual experiences discarded. When a scholar uses an intersectional analysis, it challenges the dominant narrative (traditionally the white majority population) and gives voice to underrepresented populations.



Why is a holistic approach needed?

People have overlapping identities - focusing on sole protected characteristics can be problematic. For example:



A lot of organisations have made progress in addressing the imbalance of women on boards. However, this has not benefited women from ethnic minorities to the same extent as white women.



Organisations are required to do gender pay gap reporting, and some are now also doing race pay gap reporting, but how do these two elements fit together?

What inequalities do minority ethnic women face in retail?

Despite the feminized nature of retail, minority ethnic women face multiple career inequalities due to their intersectional positioning.

Our study found that customers made assumptions about minority ethnic female employees. They were disproportionately affected by discrimination from customers in comparison to their white counterparts.

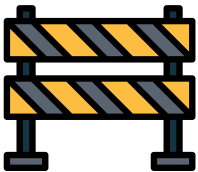
There is a power imbalance already between customers and staff members, which is increased when considering ethnicity, (religion) and gender.



How does age intersect with gender and ethnicity?



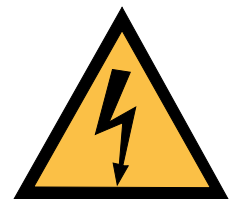
Younger minority ethnic women may be optimistic about their ability to achieve their career ambitions and may feel happy in their current role. However, when they look to the future and don't see people they feel they can relate to as role models, then they doubt their future in the organisation.



There are a number of older women who have been trying to overcome challenges throughout their whole careers. They end up in a position where they feel worn out with trying to overcome constant barriers and so get to a point where they do not try to progress their careers any more.

What do line managers and HR managers need to do about intersectionality?

- Consider the power structures in their organisations and the multiple identities of their employees.
- Amplify the voices of their employees, helping to build a culture of transparency.
- Establish staff networks and invest in continuous training (e.g. on pronouns or micro-aggressions.)
- Hold leaders accountable and demonstrate visible allyship through concrete actions and behaviours.



How can I find out more?



Listen to our podcast episode: "Intersectional identities and career progression in retail". (Search for Leeds University Business School Research and Innovation Podcast.)



Read the paper: "Intersectional identities and career progression in retail: The experiences of minority-ethnic women", Gender, Work and Organisation. J E Kele, C Cassell, J Ford, K Watson. <https://doi.org/10.1111/gwao.12830>

