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Rethinking in the Intersectional Scene of the Ph.D. Supervision

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**Abstract**: Supervision of doctoral students is challenging because it is a complex process in which the relationship between doctoral students and supervisors is formed. A good supervision program involves a relationship that depends on certain circumstances, frameworks, prior experiences of supervisors, personalities of supervisors and doctoral students, etc. The supervision relationship requires a holistic approach that needs to be rethought from the perspective of intersectionality, as the perception of supervision tasks by supervisors and doctoral students is generally inadequate. This study aims to examine intersectionality in doctoral supervision in terms of the interrelatedness of inequalities based on identities such as gender, epistemology, culture, class, and sexual orientation from the perspective of supervisors. The goal is to provide an objective look at the complex scene of doctoral supervision today. A conceptual framework is presented to demonstrate the intersectional perspective in relationship of inequalities in the process of doctoral supervision.

Keywords: Intersectional scene, Gender, Epistemology, Culture, Sexual orientation, Class

# Introduction

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The supervisory relationship between doctoral students and supervisors is a critical success factor for earning a doctoral degree, which involves a complex process (Sambrook et al., 2008; Zhao et al., 2007). Relationships are based on supervisor choice, academic and interpersonal compatibility, and both parties are provided with the necessary tools and communication skills to ensure success (Bastalich, 2017). The term intersectionality comes from the English intersection, which can mean crossing or intersection. It is used to describe how different systems of power and grounds of discrimination influence and sometimes reinforce each other; a single system of power cannot be understood independently of others. Intersection is often used to resolve social inequalities. However, practitioners or theorists do not have a single definition of intersectionality, leading to the problem of intersectionality's definitional dilemma. Intersectionality is part of a longstanding and ongoing global history of feminist thinking and organizing by Black and other women of color that began as early as the 1830s (Bailey et al., 2019). Intersectionality is a theoretical framework for understanding discrimination and oppression that arise

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from the combination of multiple individual identities (Carastathis, 2014). These intertwined and intersecting social identities can be both empowering and oppressive. Intersectionality is about not marginalizing particularly marginalized people in society by recognizing that there is discrimination that does not occur in independent countries when two or more discriminations intersect.

Today, the concept of intersectionality encompasses understanding how gender, epistemology, culture, class, and sexual orientation do not function as single, necessarily unique entities, but as mutually creating realities and shaping complex social inequalities (Collins, 2015). Intersectionality theory and practice offer useful visions for achieving "equality" across a range of issues. Despite current ambiguities in defining intersectionality, researchers have created a wealth of new knowledge about intersectionality as a methodological approach. A truly intersectional study of identity would indicate that gender, epistemology, culture, sexual orientation, and class cannot be separated from one another (Cole, 2008), but should be examined for their simultaneous effects on each of the affected constructs.

The main goal of this study is to present an intersectional analysis of gender, epistemology, culture, class, and sexual orientation in relation to the interrelatedness of inequalities in doctoral education. Consistent with the purpose of the study, two primary research questions are posed:

- ✓ How do intersectionality aspects that affect the interrelatedness of inequalities impact doctoral supervision?
- ✓ How can intersectionality aspects that affect the interrelatedness of inequalities be conceptualized within a doctoral supervision framework from the supervisors' perspective?

The following sections focus on answering these research questions by introducing the intersectional lens on doctoral supervision, proposing a conceptual framework for intersectionality aspects related to the interrelatedness of inequalities in doctoral supervision, and then discussing the potentially significant interrelatedness of inequalities that supervisors should consider during doctoral supervision.

# **Intersectional Scene in Doctoral Supervision**

Abrams et al. (2020) describe intersectionality as an individual's connection to the power that coincides with his or her self-identity. Intersectionality faces a particular definitional dilemma-it participates in the very power relations it studies, and thus must pay particular attention to the conditions that make its knowledge claims comprehensible (Collins, 2015). The term "intersectionality" refers to the important view that race, class, gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, ability, and age do not occur as single, mutually exclusive entities, but as mutually constructed phenomena. There are few unifying, distinct categories. Some view intersectionality as a theory, others as a heuristic concept or analytical strategy, and still others as a form of critical practice. But how to use it? This approach becomes a conundrum. If intersectionality is viewed as a theoretical approach, how can one use intersectionality to explain the intertwining of power and the specific mechanisms that shape



subjectivity, and if intersectionality is viewed as an analytical strategy, how can it be used methodologically (Hankivsky et al., 2014). The role of intersectionality creates more creativity. If intersectionality is viewed as a form of critical practice, how do practitioners use intersectionality to analyze various social phenomena, institutions, and problems. Many PhD supervisors may be unsure of how to use intersectionality effectively. Doctoral supervision is an ideal environment to learn about intersectionality and develop appropriate skills (Tarhis and Baird, 2021). The intersectional perspective is a large area of research, and this study focuses on five factors including gender, epistemology, culture, class, and sexual orientation.

#### **Intern Aspects**

#### Intersectional Scene: Gender

The modern age is characterized by high levels of human activity, increased communication, and contact, and thus draws increased attention to the dynamics and nature of these relationships themselves. The basic concept of "gender" came into circulation in the second half of the 20th century. It was introduced in the late nineteenth century by the American psychoanalyst R. Stoller to denote social sex, as opposed to the concept of "biological sex," which reflects the actual biological differences between women and men (anatomical, genetic, physiological) (Sanchez et al., 2019). To define gender and understand how it differs from sex, it is necessary to consider these two concepts. Gender refers to the universal biological differences between women and men. Gender is a system of values, norms, and characteristics of male and female behavioral models, lifestyles, roles, and relationships of women and men that is modeled by society, supported by social institutions, and acquired by them as individuals in the process of socialization, which is determined by social, political, economic, and cultural contexts. Intersectional gender takes into account the relationships in society between different subjects of law, including from the point of view of gender equality, which is on the agenda of the college Crenshaw, 1991). In this situation, everything that is connected in one way or another with a person, his relations resulting from his biological nature, his essence, as well as his social life, must be expressed in legal language, have its own conceptual theory, be set out not only lexically with understandable semantics, but be fixed in the form of legal norms, as well as be understandable for the whole society (Chomsky, 1995). Through intersectional gender analysis, we see how different factors are perceived differently by different groups of men/women and people in all their diversity. This includes individuals with non-binary identities and where these differences may be the result of inequalities (WHO, 2020).

Intersectional gender analysis in doctoral supervision is about analyzing how gendered power relations intersect with other social strata to affect the lives of supervisors and doctoral students and produce different demands and practices. It also explores how policies, services, and procedures can support addressing these differences. Female doctoral students supervised by female supervisors performed better in terms of self-confidence, ability to contribute, professional commitment, and career goals than women supervised by male supervisors (Gilbert et al., 1983). Female doctoral students were excluded from informal discussions, not asked for their opinions, and received less encouraging advice from male supervisors compared to female supervisors (Kurtz-Costes et al.,



2006). In a large survey of doctoral students, women showed less professional commitment and confidence in programs where most faculty members were male (Bagilhole and Goode, 1998; Uelkue-Steiner et al., 2000). Female doctoral students had more difficulty than their male counterparts in balancing their personal lives and the daily demands of doctoral study in terms of time (Leonard, 2001; Wall, 2008), which led to unresolved issues during the supervision process Conrad (2017). The main gender difference is that female doctoral students are more concerned about their personal well-being and career goals than males (Raddon, 2002). In contrast, male students only think about this issue when they are parents. Therefore, it is critical to increase caregivers' awareness of gender norms and structures, as well as hidden discrimination in academia, in order to increase their knowledge of how to care for both women and men in a gender-sensitive manner. This required a deep understanding of this topic, where supervisors' prior knowledge depends on their areas of expertise, different perceptions of the global significance of the topic, and difficulties in connecting gender issues to their own supervision practices (Schnaas, 2014).

#### Intersectional Perspective: Sexual Orientation

Many disagreements and debates have taken place throughout the history of psychopathology (and its main classification systems) with regards to sexual orientation and gender identity (Molero and Pinto, 20215). Sexual orientation is understood as the ability of a person to have a deep emotional, affectionate and sexual attachment to persons of the opposite sex or the same sex or both sexes, as well as to enter into intimate and sexual relations with such persons (Bailey et al., 2016). English and Fenby-Hulse (2019) recommend a thorough investigation would be useful to comprehend the relationship between doctoral studies, gender identity and sexual orientation. Wisker (2012) contends that research focuses, theoretical methodologies and interpersonal behaviors could be influenced by heterosexual, homosexual or lesbian positions of view. Lovitts (2002) explored the diverse causes of doctoral students leaving academia might be due to discrimination based on sexual orientation. English and Fenby-Hulse (2019) in their study, found that any solitude derived from the character of doctoral research was raised due to concerns connected to gender identity or sexual orientation. Given the importance of the supervisor in the academic life of a doctorate student, some studies focusing on LGBTQ and gender identity inside academic environment, explored the significance whether students could be upfront concerning their gender identity or sexual orientation and what the influence were supposed to be on their consequent practices (Kosciw et al., 2015; LaSala et al., 2008; Wickens and Sandlin, 2010). English and Fenby-Hulse (2019) indicated that most of the doctoral students stated their gender identity or sexual orientation had insignificant or no influence on their relationship with the supervisors, and with a handful reporting a positive impact. Others, on the other hand, were still concerned that disclosing their identity or orientation to their supervisor(s) might have an adverse effect on their practice or forthcoming occupation, and as a result, they felt unable to behave or speak openly about various qualities of their life. Consequently, since sexual desire is localized within people and does not always correspond to externally perceived behavior, sexual orientations should not be easily ascribed to people, and not to be reflected on supervising process and considered as a negative factor related to intercommunications on the vertical connections between (supervisor - student) or the horizontal connections



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(student-student).

#### **Extern Aspects**

Intersectional Scene: Epistemology

The learning and knowledge of supervisors on doctoral supervision are mainly related with supervisors' engagement in their university's social and political environment (Halse, 2011). This is involved in supervisors' understanding themselves and their doctoral students, and how the pedagogical relationships built by the supervisors are influenced by the current framework of supervision. No matter what the supervisor's field, academic position, or supervisory experience, the study reveals that learning experiences of supervisors influence their prejudices and characteristics, and supervision involves a continuous ontological progression of 'becoming a supervisor'. Berman and Smyth (2015) provide a model that expresses the requirement for congruence between the ontology, methodology and epistemology of doctoral research, with particular declaration of facets of each aspect. Doctoral becoming concerns how students see themselves in connection to the process of becoming a researcher (ontology), how they connect to various aspects of knowledge (epistemology), how they know to acquire and produce such knowledge (methodology), and how they characterize their focus inside the field regarding principles and ethics involving the discipline (axiology) (Frick, 2010).

Pedagogical practice is improved only by those who do it, based on their life experience and reference knowledge, experience, and aspirations", because "it is in practice and reflecting on it, the supervisors consolidate or revises actions, finds new foundations and discovers new knowledge." (Rodrigez, 20213). In the practice of higher education, dialectical action is based on the tensions faced in the university every day by expanding knowledge at the expense of expanding the university, it functions through the "dialectical practice of critical knowledge production/reproduction") (Kromydas, 2017). The changes are becoming clearer now in terms of the role of supervisor and its relationship to doctoral students. The beginning to play a more active, dynamic, and constructive role, where the epistemological foundations of supervising methodology work together mainly to streamline the supervising process (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020). This is due to the fact that the methodology of a Doctoral student supervising should be understood at the university as "practice, which is a certain set of scientific knowledge, with specific characteristics of teaching and research, with mechanisms and methods of intellectual activity."

Regarding the supervising process, it occurs through interpersonal skill, through the way the supervisor provides students with the means to interact with the object of knowledge (Min et al., 2020). In this context, it is very important that the supervisor understands his function of mediation because this will be the kind of behavior that will allow "more or less margin for the self-destruction of the doctoral student's activity." However, the supervisor "faces problems and difficulties of a formative, epistemological and pedagogical order in his supervising practice". Such "difficulties and impasses have direct and immediate consequences in the student's

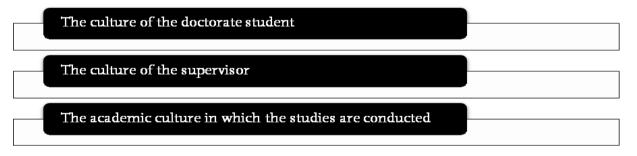


academic and intellectual formation."

Consequently, supervisors should support students to organize themselves appropriately to get a doctoral degree. Winchester-Seeto et al. (2014) pose a critical concern about the extent to which candidates from different cultural backgrounds and languages will embrace the university's dominant epistemological viewpoint, along with its accompanying values and attitudes. When pursuing doctorate studies, one not only changes one's epistemology by acquiring new knowledge and abilities as a researcher, but one also shifts one's ontology by developing a new habitus as a researcher.

#### Intersectional Scene: Culture

The culture of relations in the scientific and pedagogical sphere does not develop spontaneously but is developed through the joint efforts of scientific supervisors, opponents, members of dissertation councils, doctoral students, graduate students, and those who have already defended candidate or doctoral dissertations (Qureshi and Vazir, 20216). In addition to knowing certain rules of communication accepted in society, this area has its own norms, following which helps to strengthen mutual understanding and trust both in the scientific and pedagogical team and in the student audience. A favorable psychological atmosphere in the university stimulates the initiative of graduate students and students, and the mistakes and failures that inevitably accompany such initiatives are seen as a step forward in the team's striving to achieve excellence and increase the scientific value of research (van den Bogerd, 20218). It should be an atmosphere of trust that stimulates the birth of productive partnerships in which each participant can bring their knowledge and talents. People are judged by their behavior in society.



#### Figure 1. Culture Exists in a Scholarly Research Setting

The host culture influences the doctorate student's culture, involving the student's expectation of the supervisor and enthusiasm for studies, and shapes communication and collaboration with others, including the supervisor, colleagues, and other students, (see Figure 1). The supervisor's culture will determine the doctorate student's and colleagues' patterns of communication and interaction. The supervisor's culture influences his or her views toward the student and coworkers, as well as his or her comprehension of the student's issues and coping. Communication issues that might lead to poor supervision emerge when the doctoral students and supervisor's cultures inspire distinct understandings (Buttery et al., 2005; Watts 2008) (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. The Intersectional Perspective according to Healthy Cultural Community

When building relationships with a supervisor in real modern conditions, Ph.D. students should not wait until she/he proposes something interesting and organizes joint activities. The supervisor, of course, must take the "first step", but not all of them are ready to do this, and then the Ph.D. student herself/himself should gradually take the initiative in this matter (Wooldering et al., 2015) The intensity of communication, the level of interaction, and the efficacy of consultation between the student and the supervisor are crucial (Malan et al., 2012). To summarize, a doctoral student's culture becomes crucial in supervision because it offers meaning and context for both parties and impacts all human being's expectations and views. The status and role characteristics of the supervisor have a huge impact on the scientific career of a Ph.D. student. The Supervisor's well-known name, high status, and reputation help his students get a job, publish scientific papers, more often and earlier chosen to various scientific organizations, etc. (Belavy et al., 2020). The Supervisors popularity provides her/his students with the opportunity for broad scientific contacts, which is an important prerequisite for a quick and successful scientific career. This necessitates the requirement for supervisors to be culturally competent to avoid probable cultural misunderstandings that may arise (Ekblad, 2007). These interferences target communication, planning, and empathy in the context of supervised practice for supporting doctoral students from different cultures (Watts, 2008), forming self-help assemblies amongst students from various cultural backgrounds (Wisker et al., 2007) and recognizing the issues related with emotion and psychology that arise as a result of cultural diversity (Buttery et al., 2005).

### Intersectional Perspective: Class

Ostrove et al. (2011) state that social class is interrelated with race and gender to envision academic selfconcept. Female graduate students believe they are less valued than male graduate students (Margolis and Romero, 1998; Kurtz-Costes et al., 2006) As a result, for women's sense of belonging in graduate school, class backgrounds may be more important than men. Conversely, possibly women's gender is s more significant than men's, and, men's class background is more relevant since their gender has distinct consequences regarding their class (Ostrove et al., 2011). Manathunga (2019) applies Bennett and Burke (2017)'s research on time in higher education to doctoral studies to demonstrate how time is practiced in a different way by doctoral students



of different classes and is deeply influenced by their unequal power interrelations. The influence of current doctoral times capes on native, migrant, refugee, international and women doctoral students introduces equity matters due to the variety of obligations expected of students within a relatively short timeline. Doctoral students are supposed to have ordinary, stable, and foreseeable time however most of these students don't have (Bennett and Burke, 2017). Doctoral students whose cultural understanding is undervalued, former scholar and practiced background are overlooked or seen in insufficient conditions and supervisors implement an extremely remote, research-focused attitude, may experience a loss of self-esteem and motivation to continue their education (Manathunga, 2014).

The conceptual framework for intersectionality aspects that involve the interdependence of inequities in doctoral supervision is presented in Figure 3.

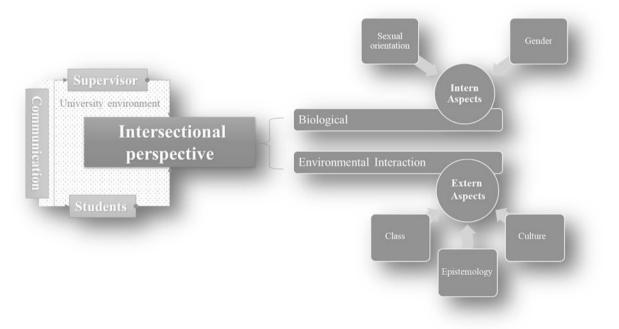


Figure 3. Conceptual Framework of Intersectional Perspective in Doctoral Supervision

Many people believe that homosexuality is sexual contact between people of the same gender. However, it is incomplete. It does not consider two important aspects - the context in which the sexual interaction takes place, and the feelings and sensations of the participants. Nor does the definition cover all meanings of the word homosexuality, which can refer to erotic attraction, sexual behavior, emotional attachment, and self-determination (Eliason & Morgan, 1998).

# Discussion

Regarding the interrelationship of gender inequalities, supervisors should consider less professional commitment and self-confidence among women in programs where most faculty members are male. Women Ph.D. students may face more difficulties than their male colleagues in managing time to balance their personal

life and day-to-day requirements of doctoral study. Regarding the epistemology related interrelationship of inequalities, supervisors should consider learning experiences may influence their prejudices and characteristics, and supervision involves a continuous ontological progression of 'becoming a supervisor'. Supervisors should help students connect with various kinds of knowledge and acquire new knowledge and skills as researchers. Regarding the culture related interrelationship of inequalities, supervisors need to be culturally competent to avoid probable cultural misunderstandings and recognize the emotional and psychological issues that may arise because of cultural diversity.

Regarding the interdependence of class inequalities, supervisors should be concerned about the fact that graduate students may believe they are less valued than men. For women's sense of belonging in graduate school, class backgrounds may be more important than men's, and equity matters due to the variety of obligations expected of students from different classes within a relatively short timeline. PhD students are expected to have an ordinary, stable and predictable time, but most of these students may not. Regarding the sexual orientation related interrelationship of inequalities, supervisors should consider that research focuses, theoretical methodologies and interpersonal behaviors could be influenced by heterosexual, homosexual or lesbian positions of view, doctoral students may leave academia due to discrimination, and any solitude derived from the character of doctoral research may be raised. Supervisors should take into account the importance of knowing if students can be candid about their gender identity or sexual orientation and how they are expected to influence their practices. Table 1 presents potential important links between inequalities that supervisors should consider during doctoral supervision.

| Interrelationship of inequalities | Gender | Epistemology | Culture | Class | Sexual Orientation |
|-----------------------------------|--------|--------------|---------|-------|--------------------|
| Career commitment                 |        |              |         |       |                    |
| Self-confidence                   | •      |              |         |       |                    |
| Managing time to balance          |        |              |         |       |                    |
| Personal well-being               |        |              |         |       |                    |
| Learning experiences of           |        | -            |         |       |                    |
| Connect to various types of       |        | -            |         |       |                    |
| Acquiring new knowledge and       |        | -            |         |       |                    |
| Culturally competent              |        |              |         |       |                    |
| Cultural misunderstandings        |        |              | -       |       |                    |
| Emotional and psychological       |        |              | •       |       |                    |
| Feel less valued                  |        |              |         |       |                    |
| Sense of belonging                |        |              |         |       |                    |
| Times capes                       |        |              |         | -     |                    |
| Research focuses, theoretical     |        |              |         |       | -                  |
| Solitude derived from the         |        |              |         |       | -                  |
| Significance of students          |        |              |         |       |                    |

 Table 1. Potentially Significant Interrelationship of Inequalities regarding Intersectionality in Doctoral

Supervision





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# Conclusion

This study sought to understand the intersectionality of doctoral supervision with respect to the interrelationship of identity-based inequalities such as gender, epistemology, culture, classes, and sexual orientation from the point of view of supervisors. A conceptual framework is presented to demonstrate the intersectional perspective concerning the interrelation of inequalities in the doctoral supervision process. Potentially significant links between inequalities with respect to intersectionality in doctoral supervision have been identified in the literature. For future studies, an investigation of a mixed (qualitative and quantitative) approach involving interviews and questionnaire surveys with the PhD students and supervisors are suggested to validate the significant interrelationship of inequalities regarding intersectionality in doctoral supervision process.

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