

Call for Abstracts

sozialer sinn. Journal for Hermeneutic Social Research 1/2025

Special Issue on:

Intersectionality in Interpretative Social Research: A Methodological Approach

Guest Editors:

Gwendolyn Gilliéron, Annette Hilscher and Andreea Racleş

Although intersectionality has enjoyed growing popularity in the German-speaking scholarly debates since the 2000s, systematic links with interpretative methods have so far only been drawn sporadically.¹ Intersectionality seems to be a “free-floating signifier” (Lutz 2014, p. 1) that attracts various disciplines dealing with social inequality and identity and is employed by them without concretely investigating how this perspective can be implemented empirically. To date, it is still disputed whether intersectionality constitutes a method, a theory, or an analytical tool (cf. McCall 2005; Winker/Degele 2009; Walgenbach 2016) as well as which categories of difference should be analyzed within its framework (Lutz/Wenning 2001; Phoenix 2006).

Given the theoretical location of the intersectionality concept in feminist and postcolonial theoretical traditions (Davis 1981; Combahee River Collective 1983 [1977], Crenshaw 1989), methodological questions are usually approached separately within the different disciplines. Connecting intersectionality to various interpretive methods²– such as biographical research, documentary method, discourse analysis, ethnography, ethnomethodology, (reflexive) grounded theory, objective hermeneutics, situational analysis, and depth hermeneutics – allows us to adopt a critical perspective on power dynamics embedded in social phenomena, thus aiming to do justice to both the research topics and the actors that constitute the research field.³ Furthermore, connecting intersectionality to interpretative methods allows us to (self-)critically reflect on the positionality of researchers and the asymmetries inherent in the process of (re)producing knowledge and representing research participants, as well as to methodically integrate the later into the analysis.

The potential of combining interpretative methods with intersectional analyses emerges in relation to the following dimensions. Firstly, one dimension is the multidimensionality of social inequality which invites us to consider the interaction of different categories of inequality (cf. Lutz/Davis 2005; Lutz 2014 and 2018). Secondly, the intersectional perspective allows for a methodological reflection on power relations in research practice, on the researchers’ point of view (Davis 2014), as well as on gained knowledge as situated partial knowledge (cf. Haraway 1988). Thirdly, given its genesis in *Black Feminism*, intersectionality has a political dimension (Lutz 2014). Decolonizing methodologies projects have sought to develop approaches that

¹ Anthias 2008; Lutz/Davis 2005; Carstensen-Egwuom 2014; Köttig 2015; Inowlocki 2018; Lutz 2018; Miranda 2022; Riegel 2014; Springsgut 2021; Sircar 2022.

² Methods of the interpretive paradigm are united by their abductive approach (Peirce 1976) with the goal of generating theories rather than testing hypotheses. Therefore, they take an open-ended research standpoint and bracket meaning contents from the beginning to avoid stereotypes and prejudices.

³ This applies both in terms of material analyses and research ethics.

purposefully seek to produce transformation in the lives of participants in the direction of more just social and humane living conditions (Smith 2012; Thambinathan/Kinsella 2021).

In interpretative research methods, intersectionality has so far been treated with varying levels of intensity. In biographical research, for example, despite the increasing connection with the intersectional approach since the early 2000s, there is no elaborated method of intersectional biographical research yet (Lutz 2018; Dierckx et al. 2018). The engagement remains rather fragmented and limited to fields such as social inequality, migration, and gender studies. Most biographical-empirical analyses understand intersectionality as a heuristic tool that brings together social positionality and identity (Gilliéron 2022; Huxel 2014; Lutz/Davis 2005; Spies 2010; Tuidier 2009).

The documentary method has a longstanding antiracist and antidiscrimination research tradition in the analysis of social inequality and in particular of its multidimensional character (Scherschel 2006; Weiß 2013; Schittenhelm 2017; Pfaff 2018). Debates that address specifically the concept of intersectionality (Springsgut 2021; Hilscher 2023 [forthcoming]) from the perspective of power relations in research practice (Hametner 2013; Otten/Hempel 2022) have intensified in recent years.⁴

Questions about power asymmetries in the process of researching, writing, and representing have been discussed in relation to ethnography for more than three decades. However, explicit, and systematic engagement with intersectional frameworks has been rather scarce (but see Carstensen-Egwuom 2014; Miranda 2022; Sircar 2022). The critical ethnography approach (Castagno 2012; Madison 2012; see also Racleş 2021) provides a good basis for developing a more systematic engagement with intersectional frameworks in the process of designing ethnographic research.

Content focus of the main issue

The aim of this special issue is to bring together the various strands of discussion from the three aforementioned and other methods of interpretative social research and to set them in relation to each other. The contributions should reflect concerns from the various disciplines in which interpretative methods of qualitative social research are used - i.e., especially from but not limited to the educational sciences, social and cultural anthropology, sociology, and social work.

The individual contributions should include meta-level reflections based on the example of concrete empirical and theoretical analyses and show how the incorporation of the intersectionality framework in the respective method can be fruitful. Particularly interesting for this special issue are perspectives that focus primarily on the practical steps in the research process, i.e., finding the research question, sampling, the (sometimes participatory) data collection process and the analysis phase. The following questions should guide this critical examination:

⁴ One discussion about potentials and challenges of the connection between intersectionality and the documentary method was carried out, in the framework of the ces e.V. yearbook 2020 (Hilscher/Springsgut/Theuerl 2020; response of Cremers 2020). This discussion was followed-up in a workshop in March 2022 ([Salons \(ces-forschung.de\)](https://salons.ces-forschung.de)) by interested researchers from German-speaking contexts.

- In what ways can the intersectionality perspective be incorporated in the research design of interpretative methods and what does its implementation involve in the case of concrete objects of investigation?
- What is the status of intersectionality in the respective interpretative methods? Does intersectionality serve as a heuristic or sensitizing concept, as a theoretical framework, or rather as a method in itself?
- What potentials and limitations of interpretive methods are revealed by the incorporation of the intersectional perspective?

Hence, this special issue aims to forge the exchange between the methods discussed in the individual contributions from the different disciplines and to promote that what intersectionality precisely calls for: looking beyond "one's own nose" in order to learn from each other.

Editors and contact:

Dr.ⁱⁿ Gwendolyn Gilliéron, Université de Strasbourg, ggillieron@unistra.fr

Dr.ⁱⁿ Annette Hilscher, Goethe University Frankfurt, hilscher@em.uni-frankfurt.de

Dr.ⁱⁿ Andreea Racles, Goethe University Frankfurt, Racles@soz.uni-frankfurt.de

Timetable and deadlines: Submissions can be made in English or German.

Deadline for abstract submissions:

Abstracts for contributions with a maximum length of **300 words** and short information about the authors can be submitted to the editors until **1st November 2023**. Feedback on the submitted abstracts will be provided by **15th November 2023**.

Deadline for completed submissions:

Finished contributions should be submitted to the editors until **31st March 2024**. The contributions must not exceed a maximum length of 50,000 characters (including title, literature, endnotes, and spaces). The final contribution should additionally include an abstract of about 1,000 characters and 3 to 5 keywords. It should follow the manuscript instructions for authors provided by *sozialer sinn* (<http://sozialer-sinn.de/manuskripte.htm>).

The papers will undergo a double-blind peer review process.

Peer review: **until 30th June 2024**

Submission of revised contributions: **by 31st August 2024**.

We look forward to receiving your abstracts!

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