

Addressing the diversity principle–practice gap in Western higher education institutions: A systematic review on intersectionality

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Abstract

Extant research has focused on the barriers faced by minority faculty in academia. Despite outward notions of commitment to diversity, higher education institutions remain largely exclusive to anyone who does not prescribe to the 'ideal' faculty. Recently, more attention has been given to minority faculty who possess intersectional identities, highlighting their increased marginalisation. Equality, diversity and inclusivity (EDI) initiatives have been identified as a primary enabler of supporting minority groups, yet research on intersectionality and its operationalisation into practice is relatively scattered across disciplines. To provide an evidence-based analysis and integration, this article systematically reviews the literature on intersectionality in the context of higher education using common intersectional categories. We systematically reviewed and thematically summarised key findings of 38 empirical studies conducted from 1990 to 2022, in which key recommendations related to EDI were identified. Recommendations were categorised into three levels based on where the onus for action lay: individual, organisational and institutional. Through an intersectional lens, our paper provides theoretical insights into the problematic nature of power and critiques of EDI initiatives. While we provide practitioners with tangible recommendations to redress intersectional inequality in academia, we heed caution on being overly reductionist and

The articles that are included in the review are noted with an asterisk (*).

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contend there is no single solution, delineating the importance of context in applying recommendations. Future research is needed to empirically evaluate the operationalisation of intersectionality vis-à-vis adopting a praxis lens.

KEYWORDS

diversity and inclusion, equality, higher education, intersectionality, policy and practice recommendations, power

Key insights

What Is the Main Issue that the Paper Addresses?

We explore equality, diversity and inclusion recommendations in higher education that focus on intersectional characteristics of minority faculty based on a systematic literature review in a Western context. As higher education institutions strive to be more inclusive across their faculty, understanding how these recommendations support faculty with intersectional identities is important.

What Are the Main Insights that the Paper Provides?

Our findings identified recommendations prevalent at the individual, organisational and institutional level. Importantly, we highlight the importance of considering power dynamics in intersectionality research as well as practical and policy recommendations. Our findings also question the extent to which these recommendations are bound by the bureaucratic nature of higher education institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are terms, referring to identity-based advantages and barriers (Gagnon et al., 2021), that are now widely understood in both research and practice (e.g. Janssens & Steyaert, 2019; Nkomo et al., 2019). Scholars have recognised that these identity-based characteristics can be intersectional and intertwined with power (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991). Which can lead to experiences of marginalisation and inequality. further perpetuating oppression for individuals in their personal (e.g. Hunting et al., 2015) and organisational lives (Einola et al., 2021; Thatcher et al., 2023). Thus highlighting how intersectional identities possessed by individuals render visible the experiences of inequality and injustices within existential and oppressive power structures (Atewologun, 2018,2016; Crenshaw, 1991). Consequently, the EDI literature has made great progress in demonstrating the organisational impacts of diverse workforces (Aghazadeh, 2004; Ali et al., 2015), the experiences of oppressed minority groups and individuals (Fletcher & Marvell, 2023; Sang et al., 2022) and the role of power relations and hierarchical structures (Chauhan et al., 2023; Kornau et al., 2023; Thatcher et al., 2023) in organisations for minority groups.

Within the context of higher education, it is recognised that minority group segregations in academia persist. These include disproportionate experiences of: women (Casad et al., 2021;

Harris et al., 2024); individuals from ethnic minority backgrounds (Fang et al., 2000); social class differences (Chiappa & Perez Mejias, 2019); and various types of disabilities (Brown & Leigh, 2018). These minority groups often face difficulties within academia such as with their career progression, imposter syndrome or inequitable distribution of service work (Domingo et al., 2022; Menges & Exum, 1983; Muradoglu et al., 2022; Vaughn et al., 2020), which are often reinforced by the longstanding racialised and sexist practices that are embedded within institutional academic settings (Bell et al., 2021; Mandalaki & Prasad, 2024; Scott, 2020; Śliwa et al., 2022). As a result, researchers and activists have attempted to address the issue of diversity by exposing the barriers facing minority groups across various spheres of academia (Casad et al., 2021; Soria & Stebleton, 2012).

Unfortunately, there is an underlying assumption that identifying such barriers and providing theoretical solutions may redress these challenges. However, these solutions often fail to translate into practice (Gagnon et al., 2021), meaning that very few go beyond diversity to create inclusive spaces for diverse individuals to succeed. This may be attributed to an inherent focus on the strategic intent of EDI initiatives. For example, when high-ranked women of colour are given leadership opportunities, they may be deemed incompetent (Niemann et al., 2020) or have their voices rendered invisible (Settles et al., 2019). As such, and as the current academic literature has begun to recognise, there is a need to focus on the praxis of strategy rather than strategic intent (e.g. Carew et al., 2024; Hayes et al., 2021). Praxis enables us to reflect, take action and produce transformation (Freire, 1978). Emphasis, then, is placed on exploring the flow of activity in which strategy is accomplished, that is, the doing of strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2007, 2009). In turn, this can be important for moving towards tangible practices for achieving equity in higher education (Burke & Lumb, 2024), beyond tokenism that fails to address structural issues in the system (e.g. Turner et al., 2011).

More recently, the EDI literature has started to explore the notion of intersectionality (Hwang & Beauregard, 2022; Shepherd et al., 2022; Umeh et al., 2023; Otake-Ebede & Shaffakat, 2024) as a useful framework for understanding the experiences and outcomes of marginalisation and inequality for individuals who belong to multiple social identity categories: race, sex, ethnicity, gender identity, disability, class, sexuality and age (Collins, 2015; McCall, 2005; Rosette et al., 2018; Watkins et al., 2019). In our paper, we define intersectionality as 'overlapping social categories that are relevant to a specified individual or group's identity and create a unique experience that is separate and apart from its originating categories' (Rosette et al., 2018: 30), with some intersecting identities experiencing more exacerbated forms of discrimination in organisations than others (Settles & Buchanan, 2014). Yet we acknowledge that these experiences and identities cannot be ranked or separated (Bowleg & Bauer, 2016), recognising that intersecting identities are co-constituted and embedded in systems of power (Cronin & King, 2010). We, therefore, align our operationalisation of intersectionality with Crenshaw's assertion that 'dominant social patterns and systematic inequalities affect the lived experiences of groups and individuals who embody multiple targeted identities and that such patterns and inequalities often produce intersectional disempowerment' (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245).

Importantly, we consider intersectional identities as part of a broader macro-level context, in which individuals' identities are tied to their social group membership and the larger socially constructed systems of their lives, interactions, and institutional and social contexts (Crenshaw, 1989, 1991; Dill & Zambrana, 2020). This brings about recognition of the power and privilege that influence how identities develop, evolve and are understood (Crenshaw, 2010; Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2014). Where power and privilege interact with individual identities and the larger social system, we are able to view the constitutional elements of power that reinforce inequalities, such as in education, justice and healthcare systems (e.g. Bhopal, 2022; Mafi et al., 2024; Rucker & Richeson, 2021), creating instances of privilege and oppression (Rodriguez et al., 2024). One context that has gained significant

attention in terms of diversity is that of academia, owing to the institutionalised milieu that proliferates gendered and racialised practices (Bell et al., 2021; Mandalaki & Prasad, 2024; Scott, 2020; Settles et al., 2021; Śliwa et al., 2022). Even as practices have attempted to remedy these challenges, they often fall short in addressing the extensiveness of the problem. For example, Blell et al. (2023) found that while policies and practices exist within higher education institutions, they tend to treat all staff equally, without necessarily assessing the intersectional impacts of such practices. Thus efforts at diversifying institutions often reproduce intersectional inequalities (Grier & Poole, 2020). Within academia, faculty members who fall under intersectionality are significantly underrepresented (Nichols & Stahl, 2019; Rosette et al., 2018). For example, the Higher Education Statistics Authority (HESA) (2022) reports that fewer than 1% of British professors are women of colour, highlighting how being both Black and female within academia presents greater marginalisation compared with being a White woman or Black man.

Despite intersectionality literature exposing the voices and experiences of those at the very margins of minority (Otake-Ebede & Shaffakat, 2024), it fails to translate these experiences into policy and practice, particularly to create more inclusive work environments (Christoffersen, 2021). Thus, most EDI practices are only representative of singly marginalised groups (Montoya, 2021). Additionally, translating EDI practices into organisations often falls to human resource management (HRM) to address the workforce challenges that employees face, (Steffensen et al., 2019; Umeh et al., 2023), particularly where diverse social identities and national contexts exist (e.g. Ciuk et al., 2023; Umeh et al., 2023). Studies have identified how HRM practices and policies are adopted and subsequently implemented at individual; unit (e.g. productivity); organisational and multi-levels of analysis (e.g. Malik & Sanders, 2021; Shipton et al., 2017). In turn, these practices may help redress the intersectional challenges that arise within organisations, supporting the benefits of a diverse workforce (Cox, 1991; Van Knippenberg et al., 2020).

Consequently, given the benefits that EDI presents, and the largely untapped potential of minoritised faculty who possess intersectional identities, this study aims to explore how HRM can use intersectionality as a lens to inform policy and practice towards making higher education institutions more inclusive. To capture this in our paper, we use the term 'intersectional identities of minoritised faculty' to emphasise the importance of capturing minoritised staff with multiple intersectional identities. Our intention is not to create an additional label attributed towards individuals or groups, but rather to explicate the core focus of our paper i.e., to explore intersectional identities of minoritised staff, beyond singly marginalised groups. More specifically, the purpose of this study, therefore, is twofold. First, it aims to lend greater visibility to often overlooked inequality experiences of individuals with intersectional identities in higher education institutions by collating and synthesising existing research. Second, it aims to explore ways of making higher education institutions more inclusive to minoritised faculty by using an intersectional lens to examine the recommendations provided by means of a systematic literature review. Based on the literature reviewed, the following research questions have been proposed: *What are the common recommendations and/or practices provided by literature on intersectionality in academia?* Second, related to the recommendations, we theoretically propose: *How can intersectionality provide a lens for creating more inclusive practices in academia?*

By addressing these research questions, the study makes several theoretical contributions. First, we connect the intersectionality literature with power (Collins, 2019b), where we argue that some recommendations identified from our review may counter-intuitively exacerbate oppression for minoritised faculty and continue to privilege those who possess power and status. We therefore move beyond a focus on prevailing power structures and argue that a critical reconsideration of how intersectionality and power interact to perpetuate (or not) inequality among minoritised faculty is needed. In other

words, we use an intersectional lens to understand the complexity of power hierarchies and their deployment in the context of work and employment (Rodriguez et al., 2024). In our paper, we offer an initial insight into the process by which power acts as an enabler to the re(constitution) of privilege and disadvantage experienced by minoritised faculty, in a context of higher education which is shaped by historical conditions that perpetuate injustices for these individuals, which Ahmed refers to as a form of ‘institutional whiteness’ (Ahmed, 2012, p. 33).

Second, we consider the boundaries of how inclusivity in the context of intersectionality can truly work—laying the foundations for intersectionality scholars to empirically examine the extent to which these recommendations can be successfully implemented. We therefore move the EDI discourse from being only strategy focused to be more praxis focused, that is, the doing of strategy (Jarzabkowski et al., 2009). In doing so, we consider the nature of EDI work, as conceptualised by Ahmed (2012) as a goal that is oriented towards institutionalising diversity, as a practice approach. Consequently, we outline common recommendations as a guide for praxis, with implementation recommendations and practical recommendations for practitioners, policy makers and higher education institutions, who need to engage with multiple diverse stakeholders to create inclusive environments for both its students and faculty.

Theoretical lens: Intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to the overlapping of social and identity categories, for example, gender, race, ability, ethnicity, sexuality, religion and age (Collins, 2015, 2019a). It captures the multiplicative, rather than additive, interactions of social identity categories (Crenshaw, 1989; Hancock, 2007), such that being both Black *and* female, for example, creates greater marginalisation than the sum of being either Black *or* female. Crenshaw (1989) used intersectionality to critique the single-axis approach (i.e. only accounting for Black men and White women respectively). Instead, she argued that we can only understand one’s membership in one category (e.g. Black) if we consider the membership in another category (e.g. woman). Thus, using an intersectional framework lends greater visibility to the often-overlooked experiences of individuals at the crossroads of multiple identity categories (Collins, 2015; McCall, 2005; Rosette et al., 2018; Weber, 2010), highlighting the need for greater considerations of redressing the disadvantages and challenges minority individuals face.

As the concept of intersectionality has evolved, scholars have attempted to establish its conceptual boundaries (Anthias, 2013a, 2013b; Jordan-Zachery, 2007) and methodological scope (Hancock, 2007; McCall, 2005; Walby et al., 2012). Among these different conceptualisations, Cho et al. (2013) argued that intersectionality should not be defined by what it *is*, but rather by what it *does*. As such, the aim of intersectionality is ultimately to expose and challenge inequality and systemic power dynamics. Indeed, within the organisational literature, intersectionality can be used to better understand these nuanced experiences of inequality and marginalisation to work towards creating more inclusive work environments that acknowledge the entirety of a person’s identity (Rodriguez et al., 2016). However, given the numerous ways in which different social categories can interact and the differential effects of personal and organisational contexts, intersectionality remains largely under-researched. Moreover, intersectionality literature often fails to move from conceptualisation and investigation to implication and implementation (Rodriguez et al., 2016), remaining relatively dormant in narratives of EDI. This is particularly prevalent among higher education institutions, where minoritised faculty continue to be overlooked, such as through lack of awards and career advancements alongside the burden of service and teaching (Corneille et al., 2019).

EDI in higher education

Diversity literature has shown the benefits of EDI on organisational performance (Fischer, 2007; Guillaume et al., 2017). In academic contexts it contributes to creativity and innovation of new knowledge production (Hofstra et al., 2020; Swartz et al., 2019), incentivising higher education institutions to diversify their faculty. Nevertheless, despite the recent attention that EDI has received in research, higher education institutions still struggle to recruit and retain diverse faculty (Kaplan et al., 2018), with significant under-representation of staff occupying senior positions (Ahmed, 2012; Arday, 2018). The reasons for this have been attributed to lack of leadership support (Moshiri & Cardon, 2016; Thompson, 2008), hostile campus climates (Stanley, 2006), lack of diversity intentions and bias in hiring processes (Turner et al., 2008). The bureaucratic nature of higher education institutions (Weick, 1976) often reinforces structural racism and sexism (Blell et al., 2023), meaning that minority academic staff continue to be under-represented within these institutions (Bhopal, 2020a, 2020b, 2022), especially when 'diversity' is not considered to be an institutional goal (Ahmed, 2012).

Additionally, the 'pipeline problem' in academia rests upon the notion that inequality will decline once there are sufficient numbers of qualified individuals in the hiring pool (Monroe & Chiu, 2010). Nevertheless, increasing the pool of candidates does not necessarily lead to more diverse representation, especially when it comes to representing substantial and top positions in academia (Gibson, 2024; Monroe & Chiu, 2010, 2012; Sethna, 2011). Other explanations given by scholars for this diversity gap relate to a lack of required skills and qualifications among underrepresented minority faculty (Gasman et al., 2015). However, women and people of colour are well represented in junior roles (HESA, 2022), suggesting that they do have the necessary qualifications and skills for success.

If minority faculty are hired and remain in academia, they may experience significant marginalisation, including higher levels of harassment and discrimination (Täuber, 2022; Wellcome Trust, 2020), slower promotion and tenure tracks, lower salaries (Renzulli et al., 2006), and higher chances of publication rejections, despite the double-blind peer review process (Dewidar et al., 2022; Fox & Paine, 2019). For example, studies have shown how childcare and caring responsibilities are stereotypically posited to women, impacting their academic opportunities such as publications, networking and conferences (Gaudet et al., 2022; Henderson & Moreau, 2020; Moreau & Robertson, 2019; Morgan et al., 2021). This was exemplified during the pandemic (Gabster et al., 2020; Parlak et al., 2021; Thorpe et al., 2024), yet still remains under-addressed in both policy and practice. Nazar et al. (2022) attribute this to an academic stratification process that legitimates a non-Hispanic White male set of practices that reside in academia. While some of these findings have been challenged, for example, Squazzoni et al. (2021) found that referees and editors favoured articles written by and co-authored by women, the overarching narrative from literature emphasises the significant marginalisation of minority faculty, highlighting a need to improve inclusivity in academia.

Intersectionality in higher education

Recently, the voices and experiences of intersectional minoritised faculty have become more prevalent. These experiences of marginalisation echo that of singularly minoritised faculty, showcasing slower career progression (Wanelik et al., 2020), lack of quality mentoring and poor networks (Wong et al., 2022), increased level of harassment (Fernando & Prasad, 2019; Täuber et al., 2022) and greater expectation to engage in service responsibilities (Ghosh & Barber, 2021). Again, reasons for these experiences include the academic culture (neoliberalism) (Lawless & Chen, 2017; Shaffakat et al., 2024), stereotypes

and biases of those involved in hiring and promotion processes (Lendák-Kabók, 2021) and a lack of support and allyship (Chen et al., 2019). Moreover, systemic cultures within higher education institutions, such as multicultural neoliberalism, consumerism, and the pressures of meritocracy, can perpetuate and reproduce intersectional disadvantages (Allen et al., 2021; Blell et al., 2023), even where movements are designed to incorporate social change or challenge long-standing systemic institutional practices that perpetuate inequalities (Wijeyesinghe & Jones, 2014).

While various models and frameworks have been designed to address the lack of diversity in higher education institutions (Gavino, 2021), they overlook intersectional identities, with little recognition given to how experiences within a social category may differ. This lack of intersectional consideration may be contributing to the failure or underrepresentation of EDI policies and practices in academia. For instance, where interventions have been created to promote women in academia, they are typically designed for white, cis-gendered, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class women, whereby anyone who does not fall into this narrow definition of ‘woman’ fails to reap the benefits of the intervention (e.g. Täuber, 2022). For example, despite the multiple institutional policies in place to address EDI issues to reduce discrimination and bias in hiring and promotions, ethnic minority women are still privy to the ‘leaky pipe’ phenomena, where they remain unsupported or drop out of their academic careers (e.g. Harris et al., 2024; Kulis et al., 2002; Monroe & Chiu, 2010; Monroe & Chiu, 2012; Rivera, 2017; Sethna, 2011; Wolfinger et al., 2008).

The above highlights an ongoing need for intersectional identities to be considered both in research and in designing EDI policies and practices in academic spaces. However, as is the case with broader intersectionality literature, where recommendations for practice are provided, these are often difficult to implement and remain absent from equality, diversity and inclusion narratives (Rodriguez et al., 2016). Thus, there is a need for research to investigate how intersectionality can be considered in EDI policy and practice in academia, as a transition away from single-axis minority identities. To do so, we consider recommendations from a praxis lens, in terms of the process of ‘strategising’ rather than strategy as a noun (Deken et al., 2018; Jarzabkowski & Fenton, 2006). In doing so, we explore how strategising activities are shaped by the sociohistorical contexts of higher education institutions and the boundaries of this (Jarzabkowski, 2003).

METHODOLOGY

To address the research questions, we employed a systematic literature review to synthesise and evaluate findings from an exhaustive search of relevant literature (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003), to generate an actionable knowledge base (Denyer & Tranfield, 2006). Synthesising the recommendations towards inclusivity will allow for intersectional policymaking to be conceptualised within the context of academia, upon which future researchers and practitioners can implement and evaluate their effectiveness and efficacy.

We adopted the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) in our process of article selection (Moher et al., 2009) (see Figure 1). We retrieved articles from Web of Science, Scopus and Business Source Complete using the following search string: KEY (Intersectional*) AND ABS (academi* OR higher education OR university OR faculty) AND ABS (race OR black OR minority OR gender OR female OR women OR disability OR sexuality OR age OR ethnicity OR class). The search dates 1990–2022 were used since the term intersectionality was first established in 1989 (Crenshaw, 1989). Through this process, a total of 1069 articles were identified and retrieved in EndNote.

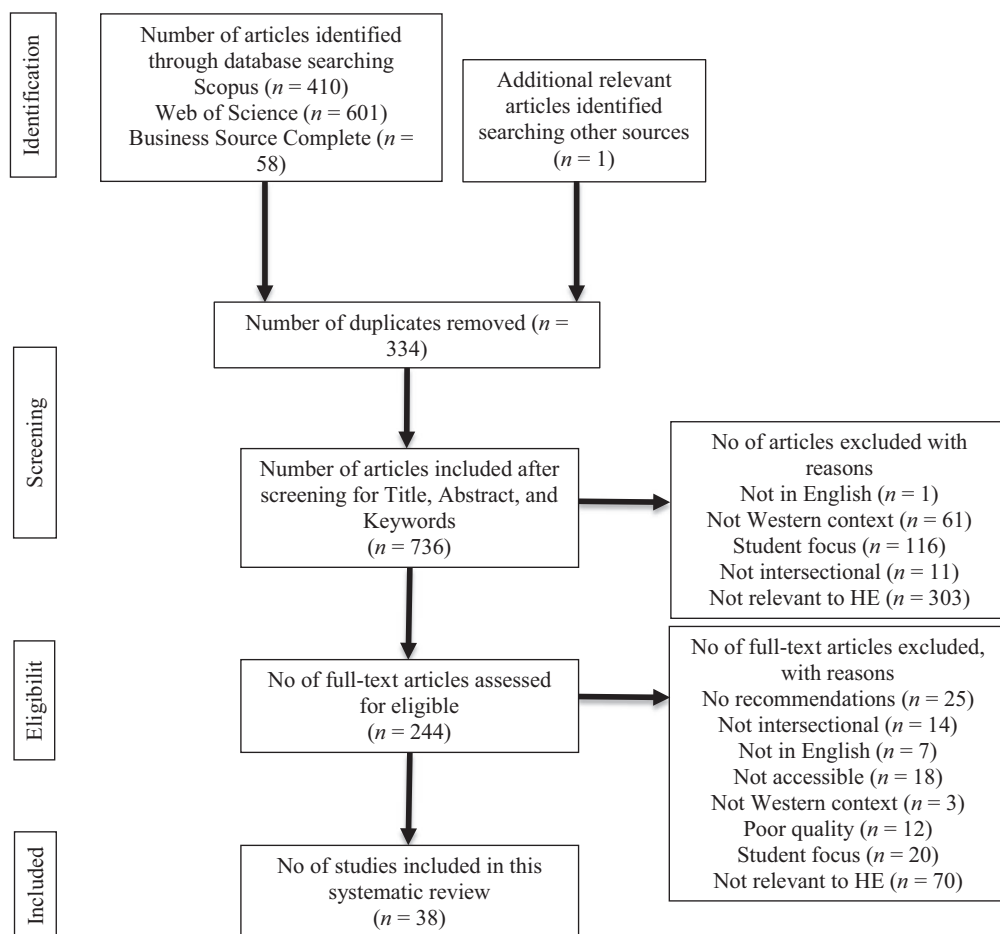


FIGURE 1 Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) diagram of selection and inclusion process for systematic literature reviews.

Screening: Inclusion and exclusion criteria

The screening process involved assessing article titles, abstracts and keywords against inclusion and exclusion criteria. Our inclusion criteria included: peer-reviewed articles published between 1990 and 2022 and articles using ‘intersectionality’ as a framework. While previous research has illustrated how intersectionality is difficult to operationalise (Christoffersen, 2021), owing to the challenges associated with applying the theory to practice with EDI research (Gagnon et al., 2021), our intersectional framework was defined by studies having at least two minority social categories.

We also set several exclusionary criteria: articles not in English and articles published outside the Western context (outside the US, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand, Europe), to minimise cultural differences, and articles investigating student experiences since the focus of study is on faculty. We acknowledge there are differences in the higher education context among our chosen countries selected: the US, Canada, UK, Australia, New Zealand and Europe. For instance, length of doctoral degrees, publication output, different specialities, world rankings and salaries (Andres et al., 2015; Harzing & Giroud, 2014; Jöns & Hoyler, 2013; Kim, 2017). However, focusing on a Western context allows our findings to be understood through a Western hegemony lens (Krause, 2016),

while acknowledging that the same findings may not apply to non-Western contexts. We also excluded book reviews, proceedings, short articles, research notes, news articles and articles with no or poor recommendations/practical implications. We applied the inclusion and exclusion criteria at both the title and abstract screening stage and the full-text reading stage.

Following the database searches, the results were imported into Endnote Library and duplicates were removed. The first two authors conducted the initial title and abstract screening using the inclusion and exclusion criteria, and where necessary discussed uncertainties with the third author. We then distributed papers for full-text reading after retrieval and assessed the full texts against the inclusion and exclusion criteria. We conducted group meetings throughout this process and debated uncertainties.

Data extraction

Following the screening process, 825 articles were excluded. Of the remaining 244 articles, full texts were scanned for eligibility. The quality assessment presented particular challenges in this study. First, a variety of methodological approaches were included in this study (including qualitative, quantitative, autoethnography, etc.), making it difficult to establish a set of assessment criteria relevant to all types of research. In these cases, journal ratings are sometimes used for quality assessment; however, intersectionality research is often published in journals with low impact factors (Joseph et al., 2021). Therefore, journal ratings were not used to assess the quality of articles in this review. Since the majority of intersectionality research uses qualitative data (Nichols & Stahl, 2019), we used similar quality criteria from other qualitative studies relating to rationality and the adequacy of detail provided by authors Majid and Vanstone (2018), including whether the study aims were reasonably derived from existing literature and whether there was adequate detailing of methodology, acknowledgement of limitations, consistency between data and findings, and embedding of reflexivity in the research process.

Furthermore, given that the focus of this study is on recommendations and practical implications, the quality of recommendations provided and whether they were reasonably derived from the findings were the main focus of the quality assessment. Finally, forward and backward searching was used (Webster & Watson, 2002), which deemed only one additional article as eligible given the strict exclusionary criteria and the general lack of intersectionality literature. Thus, 38 articles were included in the final review. Consequently, a data-extraction form was used to manually record and analyse information on the authors, journal, publication details, context of the study, methodology, key findings and recommendations in each article. Articles were also uploaded to NVivo for thematic coding and analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Coding focused on recommendations and practical implications in articles, using predefined coding (e.g. race and gender, or age and disability, etc.) to categorise recommendations into respective intersecting categories and ongoing coding to highlight any other emergent themes (e.g. support, training, recruitment, etc.). Themes were then analysed to assess commonalities across different intersections.

FINDINGS

A systematic review of the extant literature on intersectional inequalities in Western higher education institutions was conducted. Recommendations for addressing the diversity problem in academia were coded into the following themes: allyship, recruitment, mentoring,

networking, tenure/evaluation processes, support, training, accessibility, code of conduct, intersectional consideration, meritocracy, neoliberalism, consumerism and general environmental factors. Three superordinate themes emerged demonstrating where the level of action was required: (1) individual level; (2) organisational level; and (3) institutional level. While the individual experiences of minoritised faculty differ across identity intersections and organisational contexts, this section will highlight any recurring themes.

Higher education context and demographic data

The final sample consisted of 38 articles published between 2009 and 2022, with 66% published in the last 3 years. The majority of articles focussed on higher education in the US (26 studies). Other countries included the UK (three studies), Canada (two studies), Australia (two studies) and Europe (three studies), and a further two studies examined higher education across multiple countries. Although the majority of the papers identified were from the US, it has been acknowledged that higher education in the US has significantly diversified, particularly with the academic labour force consisting of foreign-born faculty (Burrelli, 2011; Gaughan, 2023). We discuss the implications of this later on in our paper. In the studies, participants were recruited from a range of academic disciplines, with Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics being the most mentioned departmental context.

Participants in the articles reviewed included early career faculty (e.g. post-doctoral candidates), professors (assistant, associate, full), administrative staff, teaching staff and other faculty members with varying intersecting identities. The primary identity vector with which other identity categories were combined was gender, with all but two of the articles mentioning gender. Race was the second most mentioned identity category, with African, Latino and Asian faculty experiences receiving the most attention. Surprisingly, only one article explicitly examined class, despite class being a relatively common point of analysis among studies exploring student experiences in higher education (Nichols & Stahl, 2019). Some articles mentioned first-generation student status among faculty, which some researchers use as an indicator of social class (Jury et al., 2015); however, these articles did not explicitly relate this to class. Religion was only included in articles considering intersectionality as a whole (McGee et al., 2021). Age and disability were the least observed categories. The intersection of gender and race accounted for 55% of articles. Table 1 provides a breakdown of the methodologies employed by reviewed articles.

TABLE 1 Methodologies adopted by reviewed papers*.

Field of study	No. articles	
Qualitative	Semi-structured interviews	13
	Case studies	3
	Open-ended surveys	1
	Autoethnography	8
Quantitative	7	
Other (inc. mixed methodology, literature review, narrative review)	7	
Total	39	

*Some studies used multiple methodology so total no. methodologies ≠ total no. articles.

Experiences within academia

Since experiences of marginalisation within academia are not the focus of this study, they will not be discussed in detail. However, awareness of which intersectional inequalities exist in higher education is necessary to address them. Experiences of marginalisation included increased harassment, hindered career progression, identity taxation, social isolation and poor quality mentoring. It is also important to acknowledge that not all narratives were negative. For example, three participants in Bourabain's (2021) paper did not experience intersectional inequalities. Likewise, Chance's (2022) participants described positive experiences of mentorship.

Recommendations

Individual level recommendations

Individual level recommendations laid the onus for change on majority faculty, particularly those in power and privilege. For example, there was a call for leaders, chairs and deans to advocate for change (Smooth, 2016), as well as broaden their understanding of the holistic experiences of individuals with intersectional identities (Porter et al., 2023), including developing an understanding of professional relationships and power (Alexander, 2022). While such suggestions related to change advocacy may ignite new conversations within higher education, individuals who occupy these positions (leaders, chairs, deans) may not possess 'grassroots knowledge' (Ahmed, 2012, p. 133) and thus change may be limited or misaligned with the needs of minority faculty. To ameliorate this, voices of ethnic minority faculty with intersectional identities should be sought in any change initiatives (Opara et al., 2020).

Christou and Janta (2019) called for more men to embrace actions of solidarity by using their voice and privilege to create a platform for others to be heard and to challenge systems of inequality. Chen et al. (2019) and Haynes et al. (2020) recommended that White male faculty be involved in teaching diversity courses incorporating critical pedagogy to normalise the importance of these courses and further limit student biases against minoritised faculty who are often expected to teach these courses. Yet, this will be contingent on how the material is taught by such faculty, and may run the risk of continuous hypervisibility of minority faculty, and in turn, fail to redress issues of power surrounding the invisibility–hypervisibility dichotomy among minority faculty.

Other studies suggested that an awareness of organisational dilemmas stemming from intersectionality should be better understood to resolve intersectional tensions (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Additionally, Lawless and Chen (2017) called for academics who are engaging in diversity discourses to reflect on whether they are doing so to enhance their sense of purpose or whether they are truly trying to confront inequality. Indeed, without necessarily laying the onus for action to confront inequality, issues of power remain unaddressed with purposeful action for change. These examples highlight the need for those in privilege and power to reflect on their biases, to actively broaden their understanding of the intersectional experiences of others and to act as allies (Mobley et al., 2020) to minimise taxation on minoritised faculty and advocate for change. Nevertheless, as noted earlier, given the structural inequalities that persist in higher education institutions, laying the onus on *individuals* to constitute change may be difficult to achieve as such systems are inherently difficult to change.

Organisational level recommendations

Organisational level recommendations involved addressing policies, structures and processes that contribute to, and perpetuate, the marginalisation of the intersectional identities of minoritised faculty. Articles mainly focussed on improving recruitment policies, evaluation/tenure processes, mentoring, training and support structures.

Regarding recruitment, recommendations involved minimising and/or removing bias from the process, for example, through critically evaluating the recruitment process (Pietilä et al., 2021), standardising recruitment protocols such as interview questions (Riner et al., 2021) and eliminating identifying characteristics from applications (Eaton et al., 2020). While including diverse faculty in recruitment panels to expose biases that may otherwise be overlooked (Eaton et al., 2020), this may only be successful if minority faculty hold some form of decision-making power, as this is often lacking for minoritised faculty (Lloyd-Jones, 2009). Other recommendations included broadening search strategies by going beyond advertisement and targeting potential diverse applicants (McGee et al., 2021). Alternatively, Zurbrügg and Miner (2016) focused on the perpetrators of misconduct against minoritised faculty and recommended conducting stricter background searches to prevent these people with a history of inappropriate behaviour from being hired.

Studies concerning tenure/evaluation processes highlighted how the reliance on student evaluations of teachings as a measure of performance in tenure decisions impeded minoritised faculties' opportunities for promotion (Gatwiri et al., 2021). Recommendations included requiring students to write a full paragraph on teaching courses and give specific examples of any deficiencies in teaching (Tetteh et al., 2023), using informal student feedback and peer teaching evaluations (Haynes et al., 2020) and for those involved in the tenure process to be aware of student biases (Black, 2021; Wong et al., 2022) to minimise the effects of student biases against minoritised faculty. Yet these alternative measures must be used cross-faculty and across the entire institution in order to promote fairness and equity. Not doing so runs the risk of creating an informalised power hierarchy across minority and non-minority faculty when considering student feedback as part of the developmental and promotion process. Smele et al. (2021) called for alternative performance evaluation methods to be designed. Other recommendations included appropriately weighing the service contribution of minoritised faculty and not relying solely on knowledge production (Griffin & Reddick, 2011; Hirshfield & Joseph, 2012) as well as increasing the acceptance of collaborative publications in tenure processes (Hernandez et al., 2015).

Training recommendations mainly involved diversity and anti-bias training to expose implicit biases against minoritised faculty, particularly concerning multiple intersectional identities, in academia (Chance, 2022; Gouger et al., 2022; Johnson & Thomas, 2012), particularly for academic leaders and those involved in the tenure process (Porter et al., 2022). While such recommendations are recognised widely in the EDI literature, they may not always redress issues of power, and such training may become tokenistic. Other recommendations included training majority faculty to teach diversity courses to both normalise their content and to minimise taxation on minority faculty from being expected to teach these courses (Haynes et al., 2020), yet this must be done in a way that does not perpetuate hypervisibility of minoritised faculty. Additionally, Zurbrügg and Miner (2016) recommended providing new employees with interpersonal skills training to minimise workplace incivility (e.g. subtle forms of discrimination, harassment, and workplace aggression) towards minority faculty. Nevertheless, interpersonal skills training to minimise the types of incivility examined in this study may downplay the severity of the offences. Specifically, we raise the question of whether such training acts as a deterrent for potential future offences or whether a more appropriate reprimand would be more apt.

Recommendations related to support were common but varied greatly. For example, Moore et al. (2021) recommended employing immigration lawyers to support foreign-born faculty in navigating residency. Providing funding was another avenue for support, for example, to create think tanks for knowledge production (Haynes et al., 2020), but caution should be taken here when considering how resources are distributed across minoritised faculty to avoid favouring those occupying privileged positions over those who are not (Christou & Janta, 2019). Where limited internal support was available, McGee et al. (2021) suggested that access to external support outside of work should be considered. Nonetheless, support should be individualised and personalised to the direct needs of minoritised faculty, treating intersectional identities fairly, to reduce the risk of asymmetrical power imbalances. McGee et al. (2021) also noted needing to create supportive environments, for example, by providing well-being classes. Likewise, organisations can create communities for professional (Johnson & Thomas, 2012; Martinez Dy, 2021) and psychological (Hernandez et al., 2015) support. Designing ongoing support programmes was deemed important by Martinez Dy (2021) as well as tailored support programmes, for example, dealing with stresses caused by workplace incivility (Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). However, the needs and requirements of what constitutes a supportive environment for minority faculty with intersectional characteristics should be greatly considered to ensure that such spaces are meeting the needs of individuals. Further, Davis et al. (2022) suggested gaining support from labour unions. As with all themes of recommendations, using intersectionality in providing support was important to consider people as a whole and tailor support to their differential intersectional needs (Bhakta, 2020; Seelman, 2014). Moreover, like with all support and training programmes, it requires commitment and support from faculty. It may also run the risk of depleting time and resources spent on working towards academic criteria for promotion and tenure.

The recommendations regarding mentoring were twofold. Some authors simply stated the need for more mentoring opportunities and facilities (Johnson & Thomas, 2012; Moore et al., 2021; Porter et al., 2022; Riner et al., 2021; Wanelik et al., 2020), whereas others provided more specific recommendations for improving the effectiveness of mentoring. For example, Griffin and Reddick (2011) recommended creating clear protocols for mentorships to minimise any damaging behaviours of either party involved in the mentoring relationship. Yet, implementing protocols may be difficult to achieve, and runs the risk of perpetuating a more rigid approach to mentoring, where such mentoring sessions should be a two-way conversation. Chance (2022) recommended more careful consideration of compatibility in the pairing process of mentoring schemes, as well as being more open-minded to cross-gender mentorship (in this case, having White male allies in senior leadership as personal allies, alongside other Black women in leadership). Others recommended assessing the individual needs of mentees to account for intersectionality and tailoring the mentorship accordingly (Carter-Sowell et al., 2019; McGee et al., 2021), yet this may be hindered if there is a lack of staff to meet the needs of different intersecting identities. Across mentoring relationships, it is also important to understand the power relations between both the mentor and the mentee, as well as recognising of the challenges associated with the institutional power structure (Chance, 2022).

Recommendations with fewer mentions included accessibility, networking and utilising codes of conduct. For accessibility, these involved improving physical facilities (Bhakta, 2020; Seelman, 2014), as well as simplifying access to support, for example, by not requiring disclosure of disability (Riach & Jack, 2021) or legal proof of name changes (Seelman, 2014). Networking recommendations were considerably vague (Wanelik et al., 2020) or related more to mentoring (Chance, 2022), with the only specific recommendation being to use conferences as a space for networking (Smooth, 2016). Recommendations on leadership were focused on the need to be inclusive and collaborative and build consensus, in order to eradicate the challenges associated with intersectional categories of race and gender in

these settings (Jean-Marie et al., 2009). However, these recommendations do not redress other intersectional identities, whereby there may be asymmetric power differences across these identities. Finally, recommendations relating to codes of conduct included stricter policies for reporting and dealing with harassment and discrimination towards minority faculty (Seelman, 2014; Täuber, 2022; Zurbrügg & Miner, 2016). Yet these recommendations also fail to take into account cultural aspects, which in turn may hinder how harassment and discrimination are reported.

Beyond these more practical recommendations, other studies commented more broadly on the approach towards creating new or changing existing practices. For example, some authors critiqued the 'one size fits all' approach to policy making and recommended providing more individualised intervention strategies to address the wide range of intervention needs (Davis et al., 2022; Smooth, 2016; Wong et al., 2022). Moreover, Lendák-Kabók (2021) discussed how policies too often only address single issues of inequality, highlighting the need to adopt an intersectional approach. Similarly, Täuber et al. (2022) argued that ensuring existing policies are working effectively replaces the need to create new policies. In any respect, it is clear that organisations can do more to make their workplaces more inclusive by considering intersectionality in evaluating existing procedures and creating new policies, specifically, more recognition of how power plays out in these recommendations and what can be done to redress the nature of power across these organisational interventions in a professionalised setting that is known for its systemic power challenges is required.

Institutional level recommendations

Articles addressing institutional level change critiqued the effectiveness of implementing new policies, challenging the foundations upon which Western higher education institutions were built. While many authors mentioned the negative implications of hegemonic institutional cultures, like neoliberalism, consumerism, sexism and racism (Bell et al., 2021; Mandalaki & Prasad, 2024; Scott, 2020; Śliwa et al., 2022), very few mentioned these in their recommendations for change. Where institutional level recommendations were given, they were very broad and simply described the need to challenge those disruptive cultures. For example, Lawless and Chen (2017) challenged institutional racism and sexism by recommending removing the unrealistic idea of an 'ideal' faculty to humanise the experiences of those who do not belong to this majority. Moreover, Smele et al. (2021) acknowledged needing to challenge neoliberalism in higher education to increase the representation of minority faculty in leadership positions. However, within these leadership positions, it is important that they are given as a positive opportunity, not as a means of demonstrating diversity at the institutional level. Faculty obtaining these positions must be allowed to wield their decision-making powers without restrictions of non-minoritised faculty. They also highlighted the need to challenge the increasing consumerism in academia to minimise the negative effects of student biases on student-evaluated teachings (Smele et al., 2021).

Common themes across different intersecting identities

Table 2 summarises the recommendations of the 38 articles included in this study across the various themes. Most articles provided multiple recommendations across different levels of action; hence, the total number of recommendations exceeded the total number of studies included in the review. The overall analysis of this table identifies some similarities in recommendations across different intersectional categories. Unsurprisingly, given the inclusion criteria of this systematic literature review requiring articles to include 'intersectionality' as

TABLE 2 Thematic clustering of recommendations across different intersectional identities in Western higher education institutions.

Intersectional identities	Allyship	Recruitment	Mentoring	Networking	Tenure/ evaluation	Support	Training	Accessibility	Code of conduct	Intersectional perspective	Meritocracy	Neoliberal multiculturalism	Consumerism	General
Race and gender	4	4	9	2	6	4	2	1		14				4
Race and disability						1		1		1				1
Race and sexuality										1				
Race, gender and sexuality	1				1	1	1			1				
Race, gender and ethnicity	1	1			3	1				3	1	1		1
Gender and sexuality		1			1	1	1		1					
Gender and ethnicity		1				1				1				
Gender, age and disability						1		1		1				
Gender, race and class										1				
Gender, race and age					1							1	1	
Multiple identities	2		1	1	1	1	1	1	2	4				1

a keyword, all but two intersectional categories noted the importance of considering intersectional perspectives, whether in policymaking or more broadly advocating for institutional change. Additionally, providing and/or improving support was recommended by 72% of the categories. Addressing tenure/evaluation processes, evaluating recruitment procedures, training, challenging more general institutional cultures and support from allies were somewhat consistently recommended.

DISCUSSION

Our systematic review of the research exploring intersectionality in higher education institutions, including recommendations for best practices, provides insight into the two questions we posed here. First, *what are the common recommendations and practices provided by literature on intersectionality in academia?* Second, *how can intersectionality provide a lens for creating more inclusive practices in academia?* The studies identified in our review acknowledge that intersectionality in higher education institutions remains problematic, yet recommendations are apparent across multiple levels (individual, organisational and institutional), but must be considered with the broader institutional dynamics including: histories, power, coloniality and the current social climate. By analysing the studies across multiple levels, we respond to recent calls for studies to acknowledge the power structures that exist at the individual, organisational and institutional levels, to capture the multilevel approach to understand inequalities from an intersectional lens (Thatcher et al., 2023).

The lens of intersectionality has predominately been applied to the pairings or trios of intersections across race, gender, disability, sexuality, ethnicity, age and class. As identified in Table 2, many of these intersections do not expand beyond more than three identities. Moreover, in the studies we identified they do not cover all possible combinations of intersections. While this reaffirms that intersectionality is a complex phenomenon, it also highlights that more work is required to understand the different experiences of these different intersections. Indeed, we also note that some of these intersections, for example, class and disability, are inherently invisible and therefore may be more problematic to study. This is particularly apt as invisible intersectional identities have gained recent traction in the literature (e.g. Dhanani et al., 2024; Smith et al., 2019) and this warrants further attention as to how these recommendations may differ across and between invisible and visible intersections.

The challenge for intersectionality researchers now is to build upon and instigate change. As we outline in our review, these are just *common recommendations* and they are yet to be empirically tested within these settings and across time. We do need more intersectionality research, but we do not need more of the same kinds of research that simply acknowledges that change is required. Rather, more apt questions include *how* such practices can tangibly improve inclusivity and how they may differ across different intersectional identities. In particular, we need to assess the sustainability of these efforts and the direct outcomes from both a HRM and a faculty perspective. In doing so, we can adopt a more praxis-focused lens to refrain from creating a list of tokenistic practices that fail to materialise in practice. One way to consider this is by viewing these recommendations as a series of transformations that require practical labour, which in turn leads to knowledge, which institutions, practitioners and EDI specialists may benefit from (Ahmed, 2012). Indeed, as we progress this research forward, empirical studies that evaluate some of these practices long term and their impact on both individuals and the wider institution are promising avenues for generating praxis-focused research (Lavarda & Bellucci, 2022).

In this section, we identify a series of critical contributions that lend themselves to intersectional theory and practice. We acknowledge that many interesting questions could be asked about intersectionality. However, we see these contributions and critical insights

as paving the way forward in the context of higher education institutions. Our focus on these critical contributions was guided by two factors. First, recommendations in their own right may lead to erroneous conclusions about what *actually* works, including establishing their effectiveness in the long and short term. Indeed, the EDI efforts have often been seen as a tick-box exercise. By this we mean whether higher education institutions are simply ticking the box with their policy rather than implementing and evaluating real change (Bhopal, 2020a), and thus, in order to truly mitigate the negative effects of intersectionality we must effectively evaluate it. Second, these critical contributions hold relative practical applications for practitioners. While we have amassed a relatively large set of studies within our context to generate recommendations that align with addressing intersectionality at the individual, organisational and institutional levels, the application of such remains ‘symptomatic’ (Jackson, 2019). We discuss four insights below.

Intersectionality and power

In considering our theoretical contributions, we consider the dynamic of power as a mechanism that is influential in how such recommendations discussed in this review are conducive to systemic forms of power. Power is a relational phenomenon (Azmanova, 2018; Roscigno, 2011) which depends on exclusive claims to knowledge (Abbott, 1988; Battilana, 2010) and comparisons against subordinate groups. Thus, different groups may try to protect their own position by failing to engage in facilitating the recommendations. Indeed, individual recommendations derived from our analysis highlighted ‘who’ has the power—and it is those with the power that need to initiate the change, e.g. White males (Chen et al., 2019; Haynes et al., 2020). It is commonly acknowledged that power and privilege are strong features of higher education institutions (Gasman et al., 2015) and this very notion can perpetuate the experiences of minority faculty.

In considering intersectionality through ‘what it does’ (Cho et al., 2013), we see here that the recommendations have a dual purpose. First, they attempt to redress the inequalities minoritised faculty face, accounting for considerations of various intersectional identities, with the aim of collating understanding and potentially offering a sense of allyship among the faculty. Second, non-minority faculty may be able to use this as a learning experience, through, for example, teaching diversity courses (Chen et al., 2019; Haynes et al., 2020) or general teaching to demonstrate a sense of collegiality among both minority and non-minority faculty (Fikri & Hudri, 2023). With regard to the latter point, it may be that those who hold multiple privileged identities can leverage this to contribute to improving experiences for minority faculty with intersectional identities. Wijeyesinghe and Jones (2014) suggest that these individuals can situate themselves within the intersectionality analysis to understand how others and the social structures perpetuate privilege and oppression within institutionalised settings.

However, in order to redress long-term issues of inequalities reinforced by the broader institutional context, altering power relations can be inherently challenging in this context (e.g. Iverson, 2007; Omodan, 2024), owing to institutions being portrayed as ‘professional bureaucracies’ (Lane & Stenlund, 1983; Mintzberg, 1979), with such systems being ‘loosely conjoined’ (Weick, 1976). Emphasis is also placed on how institutional inequalities are considered systematic rather than individual (Ahmed, 2012). As such, universities and their bureaucratic nature become deeply entwined with their oppressive histories (Cabrera, 2020; Mejia et al., 2022; Wilder, 2013), global power disparities (Bapuji et al., 2020; Gray & Kish-Gephart, 2013; Nye, 1990), the perpetuation of injustices (Bacevic, 2023; Collins, 2017), heteropatriarchal–capitalist–coloniality (Ferry, 2024; Tate & Gutiérrez Rodríguez, 2022) and the military–industrial complex (Smart, 2016), becoming enmeshed in the experiences of

minority faculty and, in turn, the students as clients of these institutions. This can also be exacerbated by sociopolitical trends that spill over into the workplace, (e.g. wars, economic trends, mass migration, far-right riots) (Nkomo et al., 2019).

We call for scholars to assess whether these recommendations are sufficient and improve experiences for minoritised faculty or whether such diversity discourses are being used as a tick-box exercise (Bhopal, 2020a). Indeed, EDI research has been critiqued for being slow to recognise the inequalities characterising the context within which EDI management initiatives are implemented (Post et al., 2021). This may be as a result of a misguided focus, where tensions between EDI logics that inform diversity initiatives can counterintuitively exacerbate biases and thus inequalities (Hellerstedt et al., 2024). This has been recognised as the diversity paradox in which organisations and individuals within them contribute to the marginalisation of individuals with intersectional identities, yet at the same time, organisations have their EDI initiatives and business cases for inclusion (Bell & Hartmann, 2007).

Thus, we contend that inclusivity recommendations to improve experiences for those with intersecting identities will always, to some extent, be bound by power and the bureaucratic nature of higher education institutions. We acknowledge that all of these recommendations identified in our review are inclusivity initiatives which are implemented to challenge longstanding organisational inequalities around intersectional identities. However, we argue that they may be simultaneously stymied and facilitated by the discursive and interpersonal practices of faculty occupying various positions across the hierarchy with systematic differences in experiences and interests. These findings highlight how diversity initiatives are impacted by longstanding inequalities associated with the very object that the initiative aims to address and the politics and competing interests of different groups in an organisation, which manifest through interpersonal and discursive practices at the micro level. In short, they may not redress the systemic issues of power for minoritised faculty, particularly for those with intersectional identities.

Recent work has begun to recognise some of the deep-rooted issues of power, such as identifying a tactic for White scholars to decolonise management and organisational knowledge, by challenging the ways in which colonialism has impacted knowledge and learning, and by leveraging White identities and academic affiliations, acknowledging the discomfort it may bring (Allen & Girei, 2024). Such emphasis has been placed on 'decolonising the curriculum' (Begum & Saini, 2019; Hoosen., 2022; Shay, 2016; Winter et al., 2024), which can support both faculty and students by raising awareness of some areas of diversity. Yet we need to go beyond raising awareness of these issues. Instead, we may need to do diversity research differently by turning the 'modality of power [embedded in diversity research] against itself' (Ahonen et al., 2014, p. 263).

What really makes inclusivity 'work' for intersectionality?

Across the studies, there were numerous recommendations across different levels. Thus, although we can conclude that intersectional scholars have identified mechanisms to increase inclusivity, we still have no way of identifying which recommendations are most important for: (i) various intersecting identities; (ii) whether some recommendations are more beneficial than others; and (iii) whether any of these recommendations perpetuate inequalities in the organisation (Hellerstedt et al., 2024). With regards to the latter, the individual-level recommendations identified rely on privileged actors in power to mobilise changes within higher education institutions. Resistance or a lack of learning from these actors may hinder EDI practices in general. This resonates with the recent work of Waldman and Sparr (2023), who contend that 'unity' is a core component that is often neglected in diversity research, which hinders the potential for EDI strategies to be successful. In terms of comparisons

across recommendations, we suggest that more systematic comparisons are needed to identify the unique value of the different recommendations for intersectionality concerning inclusivity within higher education institutions, and further translating into other organisations. The literature would also reap the benefits of more systematic evaluations of each of these particular recommendations—where different components are evaluated across both faculty and institutional levels, to evaluate the overall initiative.

Recommendations are of course voluntary in nature, and studies have shown that organisations and individual actors do not have to follow through with implementing any of these recommendations. Indeed, diversity training programmes are often found to be voluntary (Bezrukova et al., 2012) or only attended by those who belong to diverse groups, such as those with intersectional identities (Kulik et al., 2007). As a result, those who have volunteered to engage in training programmes to improve their practice may be more motivated and acknowledge that there is a need for awareness and change (Noe, 1999). We contend with Kulik and Roberson (2008) who argue, in the context of diversity education, that voluntary and involuntary diversity initiatives warrant further empirical attention to assess whether these requirements influence whether change is instilled.

Relatedly, optional recommendations may become redundant if they are depicted to be too time-consuming. For example, revising recruitment strategies across large higher education institutions may be resisted as they may be time-consuming. Similarly, some strategies may be difficult to implement in practice such as getting students to write paragraphs as part of academic evaluations (Tetteh et al., 2023), which generates excess work for both students and faculty who are required to read them. In essence, the feasibility of these recommendations needs further consideration or they will continue to be resisted.

These findings not only provide crucial insights into what can be done in organisations and with what limits, but it creates a foundational area for scholars to upend how and why diversity management results in varying outcomes (Post et al., 2021), especially when considering intersectionality. It also highlights the importance of considering how to redress the constraining effects of longstanding inequalities and politics in implementing diversity management initiatives.

Using common recommendations as a guide for praxis

Exposing narratives of intersectional inequality shows how the lack of intersectional consideration may contribute to the diversity principle–practice gap in higher education institutions (Bowman Williams & Cox, 2022; Smith & Mayorga-Gallo, 2017). One reason that policymakers generally fail to incorporate intersectionality into practice is because they feel that the heterogeneity of intersectional identities makes it impossible to meet everyone's needs (Hankivsky & Cormier, 2011). The present review provides a possible solution to this problem by condensing the wide range of recommendations for addressing intersectional inequalities in higher education into common themes. These themes consisted of providing support, evaluating recruitment and tenure processes, training, allyship and challenging institutional cultures. These themes provide policymakers and practitioners with a guide for knowing how to start addressing intersectional inequalities in higher education institutions. Nonetheless, we strongly emphasise that these are contextual solutions and may vary across different academic disciplines, contingent on the representation of minority faculty within different fields.

While using the broad themes of recommendations presented in this study may help guide policy and practice, the validity of individual recommendations within those themes should be taken with caution. For example, within the theme of training, the use of anti-bias training was highly recommended to expose biases against intersectional minority faculty (Eaton

et al., 2020); however, these types of training have received significant criticism for their ineffectiveness and in some cases have been found to perpetuate biases by exposing them (e.g. Blanton et al., 2009). In light of this, practitioners should use these common themes of recommendations to guide which areas of intersectional inequality need addressing but should critically evaluate how they implement individual recommendations. The question that remains, then, is how these recommendations can be implemented.

Implementation of recommendations

Regarding individual-level recommendations, our findings highlighted how gaining support from allies, particularly that of leaders, was crucial for effectively addressing intersectional inequalities in higher education. These findings are in line with the wider organisational literature (e.g. Martins, 2020; Ng & Sears, 2020), as well as other studies on diversity in higher education, that show how resistance to diversity is caused by a lack of leadership support (Moshiri & Cardon, 2016; Thompson, 2008). As such, policymakers and practitioners should focus on how to encourage leaders into allyship. One method to do this is by providing a clear business case for diversity (CIPD, 2018). In the context of academia, it would look like conveying the outcomes for increased novel knowledge production (Hofstra et al., 2020; Swartz et al., 2019). Moreover, allyship has individual benefits beyond that of the individual in need of allyship. For example, Erskine and Bilimoria (2019) found that engaging in allyship can produce reciprocal allyship, higher performance evaluations, increased respect and status, and a strengthened sense of purpose and meaning for the ally. Conveying these personal and organisational benefits may prove useful in gaining support from those in privilege and power. However, owing to the longstanding structural inequalities of higher education institutions, these individual-level recommendations may not incur long-term change or address the root cause of the problem. For example, Ahmed (2012) argues that removing a racist individual would still preserve the racism of the institution as it just creates an illusion that racism is being eliminated. Thus, as we move towards a praxis lens in considering EDI in this context, we heed caution on whether individual recommendations alone are enough to be considered a practice-oriented activity if they do not purposefully redress root cause issues of inequality and oppression.

Beyond implementing the individual-level recommendations, implementing organisational and institutional level recommendations are more complicated. Organisational level approaches within academia have been critiqued for addressing the symptom of intersectional inequality rather than the root cause (Jackson, 2019). As such, if higher education practitioners focus solely on these recommendations, they risk inadvertently perpetuating the marginalisation of minoritised faculty owing to the unsupportive environment in which the recommendations are implemented. On the other hand, institutional level recommendations could be critiqued based on the notion that achieving cultural change is naïve, romantic and unrealistic (Bolman & Deal, 2008). The solution to this dilemma may be simpler than it originally seems by considering the interconnectedness between the different levels of recommendations. For example, increasing the acceptance of collaborative publications as a measure of performance in tenure processes may consequently dissipate cultures of individualism through more faculty engagement in collaboration. In turn, this reduced individualism may render majority faculty more likely to engage in allyship by reducing the perception that their power is at risk. This suggests that making changes at any one level has direct impacts on the other levels. Thus, practitioners need not be so concerned about which level of change is more important to address. However, they should include a critical evaluation of policies at each level of action to minimise the possibility of unwanted outcomes and ineffective implementation, which could lead to the perpetuation of marginalisation against minoritised faculty (Täuber et al., 2022).

Finally, the overall consensus from articles reviewed in this study was that an intersectional approach is needed if higher education institutions are to be made more inclusive. However, the operationalisation of intersectionality remains largely under-researched. Recently, Christoffersen (2021) was the first to empirically address this operationalisation gap by establishing five different concepts of intersectionality that are used in practice. Through synthesising the recommendations relating to the intervention needs across various intersectional identities, this study operationalised intersectionality under what Christoffersen labels ‘pan equality’ (2021, p. 580). This approach refers to addressing issues of intersectional inequality that relate to all marginalised groups. A limitation of this approach is that it risks ignoring intersectional issues that are less common. As such, practitioners should take care not to implicitly ignore less common inequalities when using this study as a guide for praxis and be mindful that there is not a one-size-fits-all solution for redressing EDI for intersectional faculty.

Practical implications

The findings from this study highlight the need for an intersectional approach towards closing the diversity principle–practice gap in higher education institutions. The following recommendations have been collated from intersectionality studies in higher education to address inequalities experienced across various intersecting identities of minority faculty. Policymakers and practitioners should use this list as a guide for addressing intersectional inequalities within their institutions. Notably, we acknowledge that some practitioners and policymakers may be better positioned to put these into action than others. For example, higher education institutions that have EDI leads may be better equipped with resources to facilitate this, but how initiatives are enacted by policymakers may reinforce and perpetuate the privilege of non-minoritised groups (Bhopal & Pitkin, 2020). While this is not a comprehensive list of recommendations, it provides a pan-equity approach to intersectionality, whereby it aims to improve inclusivity for marginalised faculty:

- Identify critical allies, such as deans and those in positions of privilege and power, and use an evidence-based business case to gain their support.
- Develop more inclusive mechanisms of support, for example, by providing individualised interventions that account for intersectional inequalities experienced by minoritised faculty.
- Evaluate recruitment and promotion processes to minimise the risk of implicit biases, for example, by involving minoritised faculty in these processes, including a range of faculty who possess different intersectional characteristics.
- Create training programmes to increase awareness of intersectional experiences, and to expose biases against minoritised faculty.
- Make more use of cross-cultural and cross-racial mentorships, with greater consideration for compatibility and awareness of intersectionality in the pairing process.

Beyond using these recommendations as a guide for EDI policies, policymakers should also pay critical attention to the effectiveness of EDI implementation in their higher education context. Scholars have warned against intersectionality becoming a buzzword, as is the case with diversity (Adam, 2017; Bilge, 2013). Ineffective policy implementation may lead to the tokenism of minoritised faculty and may also reproduce and perpetuate systems of marginalisation, particularly for those with multiple intersectional identities (Täuber et al., 2022). This is also particularly important in the context of higher education where researchers are the focal point of creating new knowledge and ideas. Indeed, policymakers and practitioners

must do their best to support and protect those involved in knowledge production. However, they must do so with minority faculty, in order to support these practical implications to co-produce mechanisms that support minoritised faculty to prevent a reinforcement of non-minoritised faculty norms, in initiatives designed *for* minority staff. Finally, EDI policymakers and practitioners should engage in intersectional reflexivity. This refers to acknowledging one's own intersectional identities to expose the privileges and inequalities relating to those identities in the work context (Castro, 2021) and will allow policymakers and practitioners to ensure they do not perpetuate the inequalities they set out to change. While Castro (2021) proposes intersectional reflexivity as a tool that can be used in autoethnographic research contexts, it can also be applied in everyday organisational contexts. For example, individuals can consider it a mindful process in which they can attend to and critique their own intersecting identities, taking into account the dimensions of privilege and disadvantage they represent in their organisational context in both field work and general academic careers (Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2023). As such, it can offer an aid for personal meaning-making that influences power relations in organisational contexts among the workforce (Atewologun et al., 2016). Creating organisational spaces and indeed time for reflection, such as through the use of employee resource groups, could offer a shared learning community to discuss such experiences (Green, 2018; Welbourne et al., 2015).

Limitations and future research

The transparent and systematic methods used in systematic literature reviews ensure that bias is minimised, thereby enhancing the reliability of findings. However, the majority of papers included in this study used qualitative methods, the use of which in systematic literature reviews has been criticised for lacking rigour in assessing the quality and strength of findings (Xiao & Watson, 2019). Likewise, the majority of reviewed studies used phenomenological epistemologies which are often critiqued for not adhering to positivist criteria for establishing evidence (Bonache, 2021). Despite this, it was important to include them in this study given the need to lend greater visibility to the experiences of minoritised faculty.

Furthermore, considerable caution should be taken regarding the reliability and generalisability of these findings since the articles included were relatively homogenous, consisting predominantly of race and gender studies in US higher education and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics subjects, and lacked clearly defined intersectional methodologies (Nash, 2008). With the prominent focus on the US higher education system, some of these recommendations may be more aptly suited to their institutions, especially as tenure processes may vary across the Western countries we focused on. However, these US contexts provide opportunities for other countries to test the utility of these recommendations and reflect on whether they are appropriate or can be adapted in these other Western contexts. Conversely, the inherent heterogeneous nature of intersectionality highlighted by the uniqueness of individual experiences based on differences in identity and environmental context (McCall, 2005) could make the generalisability redundant. Indeed, we also acknowledge that dominant Western processes of knowledge production often perpetuate inequalities (Demeter, 2020), and more recognition of this in knowledge production processes is required.

Although our analysis did not aim to prescriptively identify the negative outcomes that minority faculty face, we acknowledge that the recommendations we identified were based on the assumption that these challenges were due to their intersecting identities. We, therefore, suggest that future studies also take into account how individuals perceive their intersectional identities as being important and influential in EDI recommendations. This also takes into account intersectional reflexivity (Castro, 2021; Rodriguez & Ridgway, 2023) beyond both the research and field work to elucidate the importance of intersectional reflexivity as a process for

faculty in higher education. Nonetheless, future research should focus on redressing inequalities across different intersectional categories and in different higher education contexts. Finally, researchers should continue attempting to close the intersectionality operationalisation gap by focusing on how power can be redressed, beyond the assumption that current EDI frameworks are appropriate, including grounding intersectional frameworks in empirical evidence.

CONCLUSION

This paper attempts to move beyond the existing intersectionality literature by providing recommendations towards operationalising intersectional theory in practice. An intersectional lens was used to understand the heightened and individualised experiences of marginalisation among minority faculty with multiple intersectional identities, within the context of the Western higher education system. A systematic literature review of extant intersectionality literature identified various themes for addressing intersectional inequality. These included improving systems of support, evaluating recruitment and tenure processes, recruiting intersectionality allies, incorporating intersectionality into training programmes and challenging hegemonic institutional cultures. While these recommendations incorporate a praxis lens to redress EDI, we advocate that there is not a single solution that will redress the challenges of intersectionality for faculty, especially with the dynamic interplay between macro- and micro-level influences. Practitioners may use these themes to begin tackling the perceived impossible work of dismantling intersectional inequalities within higher education institutions but adapt them as necessary to the context in which inequalities emerge and persist. The most important finding in this study, however, was the overwhelming need to use an intersectional approach towards policymaking and institutional change. Therefore, scholars and practitioners should be conscious of intersectionality at every stage of policymaking: in analysing and researching the cause of inequalities, designing new and implementing more inclusive policies and practices, and perhaps most importantly, evaluating the efficacy of those practices.

FUNDING INFORMATION

There are no funders to report for this submission.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Data sharing not applicable to this article as no datasets were generated or analysed during the current study.

ETHICS STATEMENT

Not applicable owing to the nature of this article—a systematic literature review.

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How to cite this article: Lukkien, T., Chauhan, T. & Otake-Ebode, L. (2025). Addressing the diversity principle–practice gap in Western higher education institutions: A systematic review on intersectionality. *British Educational Research Journal*, 51, 705–736. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.4096>