Introduction

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Introduction to the subject of the book

Discrimination – for example through (un)intentional prejudice, ignorance, thoughtlessness, (un)conscious bias, and racial stereotyping (Schouler-Ocak et al., 2021) – through societal power dynamics permeates all areas of life, including therapy rooms, counseling settings, psychological research, and education (see Afrozensus, 2020; Gold et al., 2021). Particularly in psychological and psychotherapeutic research and practice, the contradiction between good intentions and verifiable practices becomes increasingly apparent.

The theoretical paradigm of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1989), originating in the Black women's movement in the U.S. (see Combahee River Collective, 1977), enables the analysis of not only multidimensional experiences of discrimination but also privilege and their intersections in the context of social injustices. Within this framework, we understand socially (ascribed) affiliations as fluid and dependent on geopolitical contexts. Consequently, we also regard intersectionality-informed approaches as a continuous, never-completed process of engaging with intersectional analyses, conducting one's own, and consistently reorienting oneself in response to the relevant geopolitical contexts.

Beauchamp and Childress (1989/2008) identify non-maleficence, beneficence, autonomy, and justice as the four fundamental principles of medical ethics. However, these principles have not been uniformly defined, operationalized, or systematically assessed, thereby rending them difficult to verify. Consequently, there is a lack of discrimination-sensitive quality assurance tools for therapeutic services and of effective complaint mechanisms for patients and clients. In psychology and psychotherapy – both internationally and in countries like Germany – ethical principles such as social justice and human rights compliance are strongly emphasized (see APA, 2021; BPtK, 2018; Clauss-Ehlers et al., 2019; Wissenschaftsrat, 2018). This includes actively opposing racism and hate (ibid.). Nonetheless, in German-speaking regions, there are scarcely any scientific tools available

to assess compliance with these ethical principles (Linden & Strauß, 2018; Schleu, 2021). Accordingly, in therapeutic practice, there are no standardized assessment structures, only isolated external lighthouse projects (e.g., ADS, 2017; Afrozensus, 2020) that could evaluate adherence to these principles. We see the responsibility within the discipline's scientific community to develop suitable intersectionality-informed assessment tools to evaluate the discrimination sensitivity of therapeutic services. This also means creating meaning or awareness of the presentation of various forms of maleficence, non-beneficence, and lack of autonomy and justice in practice (see Beauchamp & Childress, 1989/2008). Based on this, further mixed methods research is encouraged to develop informed intersectionality assessment tools. In both qualitative and quantitative research, the concept of intersectionality needs to be theoretically operationalized. Particularly in quantitative studies, core principles of intersectionality theory have often been lost or misunderstood, as noted in Bauer et al.'s (2021) immense review of intersectionality in quantitative research, including studies from 1989 to 2020. Many also failed to define intersectionality or incorporate analyses that considered social power dynamics (Bauer et al., 2021). To strengthen intersectionality research, methodological and assessment tools should be grounded in an intersectional framework, ensuring that researchers take into account context-dependent social identity categories and select appropriate analytical tools that are aligned with their research questions (Grabe, 2020).

This call for sensitivity around discrimination is shared by intersectionality-informed counseling and psychotherapy services, which are increasingly making this need public and providing empirical evidence to support it. Therapeutic counseling centers targeting (multiply) marginalized individuals have long highlighted the necessity of such services (LesMigraS, 2012). Additionally, those affected make their discriminatory experiences in psychotherapy and counseling visible through newspapers and social media (Biixi & Bachmann, 2024). As a result, discrimination-sensitive content in therapeutic and counseling training programs is indispensable.

In addition to existing gaps in care, the fear of experiencing discrimination again in psychotherapeutic and psychiatric healthcare often leads to delays in seeking appropriate treatment or even to avoid it altogether (Afrozensus, 2020; Burgess et al., 2008). Even when these barriers are overcome, there remains the risk that discriminatory experiences may "manifest in therapeutic settings in complex, subtle, and often unintended ways" (Yeboah, 2017, p. 157).

Studies show that individuals who experience discrimination are significantly more likely to suffer from mental illnesses than those without such experiences (see Hambrock & Urlings, 2021; Kaprowski et al., 2021). For example, individuals affected by racism are more likely to experience psychosomatic disorders such as eating and sleeping disorders or migraines, as well as burnout, depression, stress, and violence (see Yeboah, 2017). Therapists are often not adequately trained to recognize the psychological consequences of discrimination within the therapeutic context and to integrate these into the treatment process (see Gold et al., 2021).

Therefore, a commitment to a discrimination-sensitive and expanded intersectionality-informed counselling, therapy, and profession of psychology itself is essential. In recent years, there has been growing attention to these topics, as evidenced by recently published works (e.g., Burgermeister et al., 2025; Mullan, 2023; Saase, 2019, 2025; Schneller, 2022; Schütteler & Slotta, 2023; Sonn et al., 2024). Numerous contributions to (multi)cultural psychotherapy have provided valuable groundwork in this regard (see Ratts et al., 2016; Sue et al., 1992). Culture, in this context, is understood as a dynamic concept that often focuses on specific identity dimensions such as origin, ethnicity/ethnicities, nationality/nationalities, or queerness. However, it increasingly aligns with a broader understanding of culture, incorporating intersectionality, social justice, and critiques of essentialism (see Ratts et al., 2016; Saase, 2025). Overall, intersectionality-informed research and practice appear more advanced in English-speaking regions than in German-speaking regions.

As editors, we found the format of an edited volume particularly suitable for exploring the complex field of intersectionality-informed therapy and counseling in depth and for highlighting the diversity of perspectives within this multifaceted discourse. This format allows concepts such as pluriversity[1] (Mbembe, 2016) as diversity in knowledge (Wekker et al., 2016) – including situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) – to be addressed. In this sense, we and the authors of this volume have come together from various contexts to contribute to this work.

The aim of this volume is to contribute to, and provide access to, this growing discourse and to offer initial steps toward an intersectionality-in-

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1 The term 'pluriversity' (Mbembe, 2016) highlights that, in addition to a diversity of identities, there is also a diversity of ways of knowing, which are shaped, among other factors, by individual social positions.

formed attitude[2] or even competence[3], for example, for: psychotherapists, psychologists, social workers, psychosocial counselors, individuals working therapeutically (e.g., art and body therapists), doctors, psychiatric nurses, trainees, students and educators, researchers, actors in the political and social sectors, as well as other interested individuals. This volume is intended as an invitation to critically reflect on and further develop one's own and collective practices. In doing so, readers, authors, and editors can collectively contribute to reducing the gap that exists in the (psycho)therapeutic care reality for (multiple) marginalized individuals. Furthermore, this approach can increase the visibility and discussion of (multiple) discrimination in its various forms and their impact on mental health.

Approach and method

This edited volume aimed to foster a privilege-conscious, collegial, and collective working process – both within the editorial and authorship team and in their exchanges. A central part of this project was, and remains, the ongoing efforts to pursue, question, and redefine this ideal, fostering intersectionality-informed communication, while also acknowledging our challenges and shortcomings along the way. This process has led to feelings of humility, curiosity, and motivation, yet also to openness to the unknown. Referring to Mecheril's (2008) concept of *competence in incompetence*, Audrey Namdiero-Walsh (2023) emphasized in our online panel that these very feelings can serve as a prerequisite for intersectionality-informed action: "We have to unlearn certain things in order to learn new things as

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2   The term 'attitude' serves as the foundation both of therapeutic work and critical discourses, as it is not clearly distinguishable from concepts such as ethical demands, opinions, or perspectives. Furthermore, attitudes are difficult to conceptualize, operationalize, and evaluate.

3   The concept of professional competence serves here as a means to assess therapeutic action-related skills. Critical discourses on the broad concept of competence include, among other things: the presumed conclusiveness, the unilateral interpretative authority and standardization, and the disregard of social antagonisms in competence acquisition. Furthermore, there is a risk of instrumentalization, as both the objects of competence (e.g., cultural differences) and those acquiring the competence are reduced to what is supposedly measurable. Particularly with regard to intersectionality-informed competencies, Mecheril's (2008) concept of 'competence in incompetence' is relevant to avoid unilateral essentializing culturalizations and a purely technical understanding of professionalism. Therefore, lifelong learning and the acceptance of one's own ignorance are crucial.

well. This is why a competency is not a constant concept, it's constantly evolving [...] it is not something that you gain by yourself, it is something that others help you gain" (00:00:00).

To live the above ideal, the editorial team worked as much as possible around each member's wishes, capacities, and abilities, and discussed all articles collectively. Furthermore, we encouraged peer-to-peer feedback among the authors so they could benefit from each other's expertise – be it through content-related suggestions, literature recommendations, or practical experiences. Overlaps in the content of the articles are referenced in the footnotes.

Given that intersectionality is shaped by societal structures and individual life experiences, this book compiled diverse research approaches. This facilitates a multifaceted examination of (multiple) discrimination considering its individual, structural, and discursive manifestations. The authors deployed various research strategies including: personal narratives, reviews, discourse analyses, qualitative and quantitative research, as well as specific therapeutic interventions, concepts, and projects. The articles cover perspectives from various therapeutic schools, ranging from cognitive behavioral therapy to systemic therapy, psychoanalysis, and creative approaches such as art, music, and body therapies. Many also combine autoethnographic research with scientific writing by describing and analyzing their own lived experience, thereby creating an understanding of their social, political, and cultural contexts.

Representing diverse cultural, academic, professional, and political backgrounds or affiliations[4], the book's authors are primarily based in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, but also in the USA – all countries with a legacy of colonial power. Many article submissions from our open call in 2023 explicitly or implicitly emphasized the relevance of ongoing postcolonial analyses and the negative impacts of racism and (cis)sexism/queerphobia. This selection highlights the origins of the concept of intersectionality in the Black feminist movement. Despite the commitment to intersectionality, some articles also focus solely on individual identity dimensions. Our edited volume does not claim to be exhaustive. Furthermore, the diversity and nuances of individual identity dimensions could not be exhaustively discussed.

Our editorial team, consisting of three *white* and one Black member, developed these reflections, made the compilation, and provided content-

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4 For details see our biographies in the book in the section Notes of Contributors.

related and emotional support for the subsequent articles. With more than half of the articles focusing on intersectional experiences of racism, we recognize the importance of explicitly acknowledging our (privileged) positionalities in supporting these texts, so we have taken our positionalities into account in the supervision of the articles.

Fundamentally, we value solidarity and (therapeutic-consultative) work that takes intersectional perspectives into account and goes beyond identity politics.

The editors – positionalities

"For feminist decolonial scholars, our positionality is the embodied pivot from which our knowledge-making materializes".
Yvonne Te Ruki-Rangi-o-Tangaroa Underhill-Sem (2020, p. 339), Cook Island, Niuean New Zealand scholar

Our biographies have shaped our life paths and the journey toward this book, but our identities are fluid and non-deterministic. Biographically, we are an editorial team aged 27 to 41, with Black and white ties to Kenya, Ireland, present-day Czech Republic, the Federal Republic of Germany, the former German Democratic Republic, and Switzerland. We share experiences of migration, both with and without experiences of racism. We identify as trans-nonbinary, nonbinary-agender, and cisgender, with queer, pansexual, and heterosexual orientations. Most of us have not experienced ableism, though some of us are familiar with mental and physical limitations. We come from both working-class backgrounds with upward mobility and academic environments, have ourselves sought counseling or therapy, and do not have children but, in some cases, take on emotional caregiving responsibilities for children.

This book has grown out of much voluntary work, activism (including human rights, climate justice, and feminism as well as anti-discrimination efforts such as against racism, anti-Semitism, and queerphobia), and our diverse academic perspectives and personal/professional encounters. The book's creation process was shaped by institutional and disciplinary resistance to topics related to discrimination, alongside a few empowering beacons of support and acts of solidarity.

Structure of the book

The book contains four overarching chapters presenting 27 articles that explore the (im)possibilities of intersectionality-informed practice, offering readers the flexibility to engage with them as individual explorations or as a cohesive sequential journey.

The first chapter introduces the topic of intersectionality-informed research in psychotherapeutic settings through a critical examination of therapies, counseling practices, therapy training, and higher education through experience reports, reviews, interviews, and discourse analyses from an intersectional perspective. The second chapter presents qualitative and quantitative research on intersectionality in therapy and counseling. The third chapter showcases specific therapeutic interventions as well as concepts for intersectionality-informed therapy and counseling. With a focus on the digital present, the fourth chapter explores the potentials and limitations of digital spaces for therapy, counseling, and networking from a social justice perspective. We hope to provoke feelings, discussions, and actions.

This book is part of a collective thought process that has emerged from interdisciplinary exchange, critical reflection, and the continual questioning of familiar perspectives. The contributors represent a variety of theoretical and practical positions – including those that reveal tensions and encourage further debate. We see the book as a contribution to an open discourse and an invitation to use its impulses for further thinking, deep diving, and further development and adaptation in different contexts.

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