

# Intersectional Childhoods and Inequalities

Children's Rights, Social Justice and Social Identities in  
Scotland: Intersections in Research, Policy and Practice

## Seminar Series Briefing

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## About this briefing

This briefing paper summarises key information from the recent Scottish Universities Insight Institute Seminar series on Children's Rights, Social Justice and Social Identities in Scotland: Intersections in Research, Policy and Practice (2013-2014). The aim of this briefing is to introduce the concept of intersectionality and to understand its meanings and purposes in relation to childhood identities and inequalities. It summarises some of the debates about intersectionality by participants, discusses the implications for research, policy and practice, and concludes with details about the next steps for the project.

## The aims of the seminar series were to

- create meaningful knowledge exchange opportunities
- generate new knowledge and identify priorities for action in the field of childhood identities and inequalities, children's rights, social justice, childhood/family studies and intersectionality
- disseminate innovative research, policy and practice
- firmly put children and young people's inequalities on the agenda in research, policy and practice

## The outcomes of the seminar series were to create

- a greater awareness of childhood inequalities and equitable practice
- a fuller understanding of the importance of intersectionality
- a critical appreciation of the connections between current policy, legislation and practice
- an understanding of ways of addressing childhood inequalities and promoting a fair society in policy and practice by identifying strengths, potential gaps and ways forward



# Intersectional Childhoods and Inequalities

## What is intersectionality?

For the purposes of this seminar series, we have defined intersectionality as 'the interaction between gender, race and other categories of difference...and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power' (Davis 2008: 68). In other words, intersectionality is about understanding the different and unequal social and economic outcomes for particular groups based on interactions between race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, age and ethnicity. Embedded within the concept of intersectionality is the insistence on recognising the diversity of experiences among seemingly 'homogenous' groups and a critique of how the actions of social movements and policy makers oftentimes minimize the importance of differences within and between groups.

**'Intersectionality is used to describe how people are treated because of their sexuality, age, race, disability, class and how they connect and stop people from doing the things that they want to do in life'**

Young People from Investing in Children  
20th March 2014



Intersectionality is not a new concept but is rooted in the liberation struggles of African American women since the 19th century (Crenshaw 1991; Hill Collins 2000; Yuval-Davis 2011; Bassel and Emejulu 2014). However, what is new is the way in which this concept has sparked popular discussions about equality and justice particularly within feminist and anti-racist groups (for example see: NPR 2013 and Channel 4 News 2013).



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## Intersectionality and childhood inequalities: Making the connections

A growing amount of research has focused on childhood identities and inequalities in Scotland and beyond (see e.g. Konstantoni 2011, 2012; Kustatscher 2014). Such research has contributed significantly to our understanding of the complexity of childhood identities in relation to gender and sexuality (Renold 2005), disability (Davis and Watson 2001; Tisdall 2012), ethnicity (Connolly 1998; Sime and Fox 2014 a, b), race (Van Ausdale and Feagin 2001), class (Reay et al. 2011) and age (Mayall 2002; Hockey and James 2003). Even though scholars are working on a diverse range of issues to do with children's identity work and inequalities, they do not necessarily use intersectionality as a framework for their work and differ considerably in the ways in which they explore issues of identities and inequalities. Consequently, there is a considerable theoretical and methodological gap in our understandings of how to use intersectionality to effectively explore and understand children's social identities and multiple inequalities. Our seminar series was designed to bridge this gap and support children, scholars and practitioners to use intersectionality as a resource for understanding their work and their everyday lives.



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## The Seminars

The seminar series involved four whole day seminars that combined presentations, group discussions and workshops:

### Seminar 1 (2nd December 2013)

introduced the concept of intersectionality, its purposes for understanding childhood identities and inequalities and the implications it might have for practitioners, policymakers and researchers.

### Seminar 2 (20th March 2014)

was an opportunity to work directly with children and young people from three third sector organisations—Investing in Children, the Children’s Parliament and LGBT Youth Scotland. Children and young people shared their views on the intersectional dimensions of their identities and how intersectionality can help them understand and take action on their experiences of disadvantage, marginalisation and exclusion.

### Seminar 3 (23rd June 2014)

explored methodological challenges of developing effective research projects exploring intersecting identities and inequalities. Intersectionality is not linked to one methodology but there are a range of approaches through which it can be applied in research, from large data sets which draw attention to specific categories, to small-scale studies which explore lived experiences or narratives in particular contexts.

### Seminar 4 (2nd October 2014)

brought together the debates from the previous seminars in order to explore the practical applications of intersectionality in research design, policy formation and participatory practice with children and young people. Article 12 worked with the entire group to demonstrate how they use intersectionality to understand the everyday lives of young Gypsy/Traveler women.

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## What we learned



Intersectionality is a term with complex historical weight and meaning. In choosing to use this framework we are able to:

1

- open up discussions about the nature of identities and inequalities, and the language we use to talk about them
- question simplistic distinctions about different social groups
- draw attention to dynamics of power within and between groups and institutions

Our discussions about intersectionality re-enforced our belief in children and young people as competent agents and experts on their own lives. Throughout our seminar series we witnessed how children and young people are able to use the term intersectionality in order to:

2

- engage in complex discussions about their everyday lives and analyse what it is like, for example, to live with hearing loss, to be a LGBT young person in care or be marginalised due to social class and geography. These children and young people's narratives reveal the complex ways in which they construct their identities and experience particular inequalities.



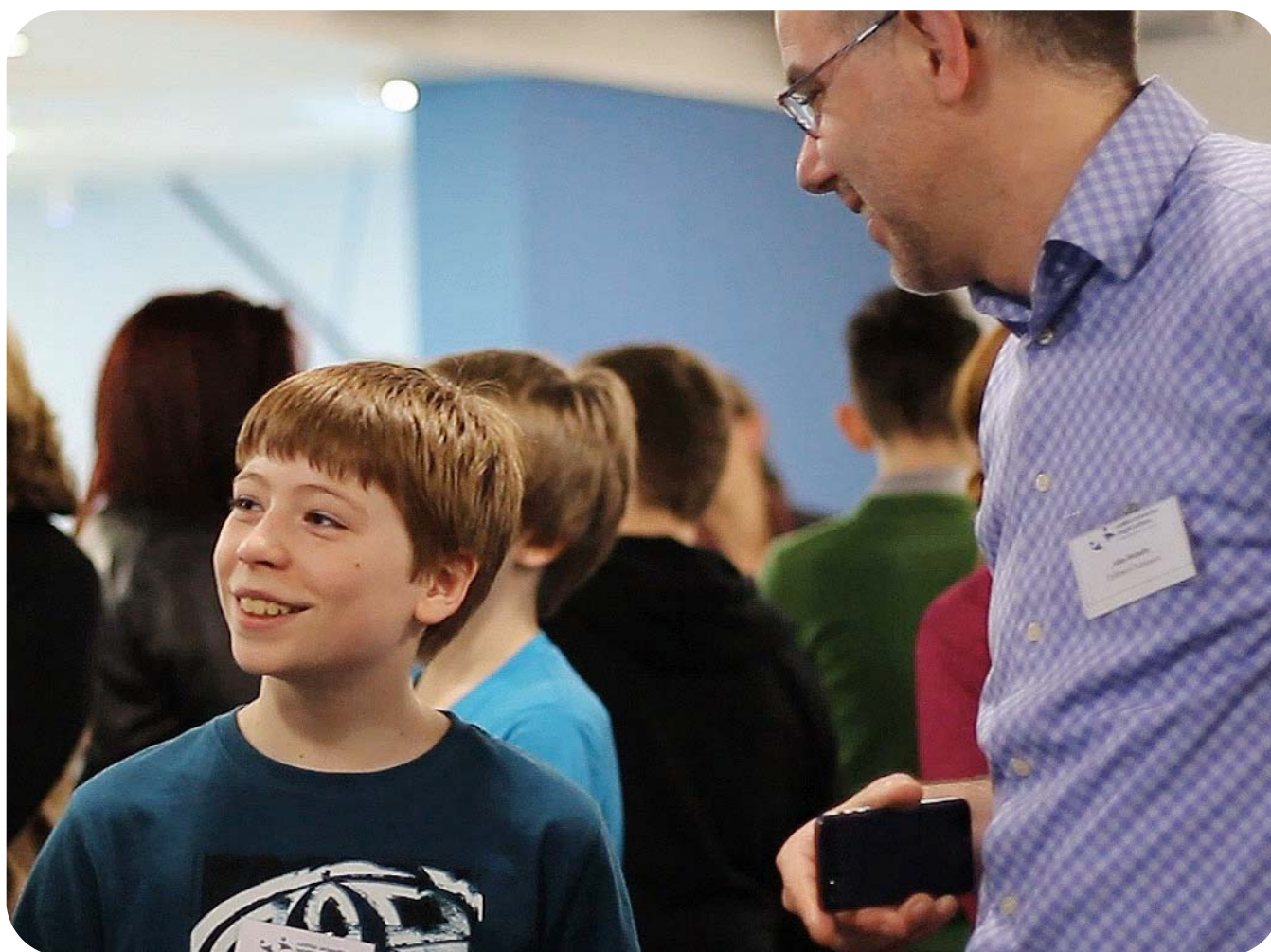
# Intersectional Childhoods and Inequalities

3

Our debates about intersectionality highlighted the importance of locality, mobility, time, place and space for understanding childhood intersecting identities and inequalities. In other words, where children and young people are, the historical moment in which they live and the public and private spaces they occupy are of central importance to understanding their complex experiences.

4

Despite landmark legislation and innovative policy and practice in relation to children and young people, significant gaps remain in recognising the complexity of children's and young people's experiences.



# Intersectional Childhoods and Inequalities

## Applying intersectionality in your work

This seminar series has helped us think about how intersectionality might be applied in a range of settings across research, policy and practice. Here are some key questions to consider for the practical application of intersectionality in your work.

- Which 'children' count in the mainstream practices and campaigns in the children's rights field? Which children are left out and why?
- How do the dynamics of race/class/gender/sexuality/disability shape children's lives?
- How do these dynamics serve as resources for children?
- What kinds of alliances need to be built across different groups to effectively address children's intersectional inequalities?

## Resources for intersectionality

Check out our website for videos, podcasts and speakers' presentations:

<http://www.scottishinsight.ac.uk/Programmes/Programmes201314/ChildrensRights.aspx>

Follow us on Twitter [@Children\\_SUII](https://twitter.com/Children_SUII) for updates on intersectionality and children's rights

Join our JISC-mail list [intersectional-childhoods-youths@jiscmail.ac.uk](mailto:intersectional-childhoods-youths@jiscmail.ac.uk) for debate and discussion about intersectionality, children's rights and more

Stay tuned for our special journal issue and book on intersectionality and children's rights

For further information on the seminar series, please contact:

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