

Vulnerability and Intersectionality: a Methodological Approach to Human Rights?

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Abstract

In recent years, within Gender Studies theories, the themes of vulnerability and intersectionality have emerged. Vulnerability is considered an opportunity for redemption, a redefinition of the principles on which democracy is based, or a concept with a generative character capable of rethinking social institutions and the behaviors they must adopt. This gives to vulnerability an energetic, creative connotation. By defining the ontological dimension of vulnerability as a phenomenon of a relational nature, its normative strength can find foundation, for example, when applied to economic, social, political, and cultural contexts. This would allow overcoming the tension of the so-called "vulnerable groups." The reference to vulnerable groups, in fact, reiterates the process of discrimination and stereotyping to which the subjects considered vulnerable are subjected. Intersectionality, on the other hand, highlights social hierarchies, describing the oppressions and discriminations caused by belonging to multiple categories such as sex, gender, class, ethnicity, religion, age, disability, and sexual orientation. The intersectional theoretical orientation in gender studies highlights how indicators of social difference intertwine with dominant and majority structures. At first glance, the application of the vulnerability paradigm to contexts might be useful in highlighting the discriminations – including those of an intersectional nature – to which subjects are subjected. What is the relationship between vulnerability and intersectionality? Are these two contrasting methodological principles, or does one absorb the other? The paper will attempt to answer these questions, also referring to different moments in the law.

Keywords: Vulnerability, Intersectionality, Human rights, Gender Studies, Contexts