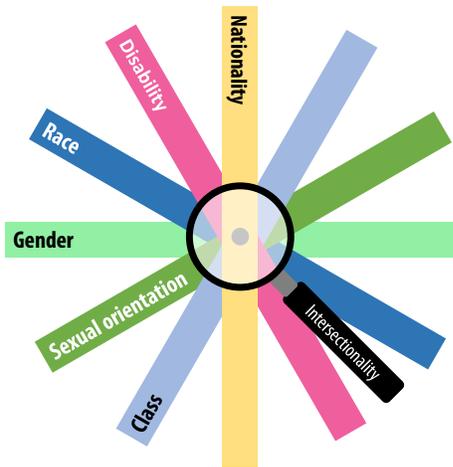


What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality refers to a social reality that some people experience when they are simultaneously subjected to several forms of discrimination in society.

It refers to the intersection or intermingling of forms of discrimination related to gender, ethnicity, nationality, social class, disability and sexual orientation.¹ Some people are subjected to several kinds of discrimination that combine to make them extremely vulnerable.

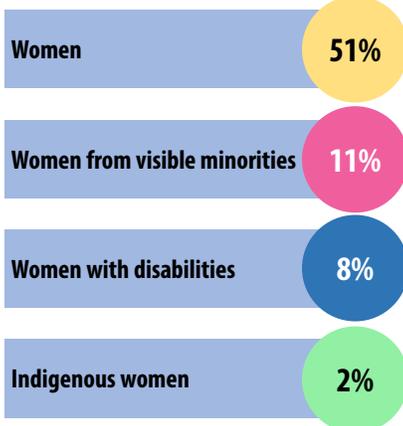
For example, a black woman may experience discrimination that results from a combination of sexism and racism.



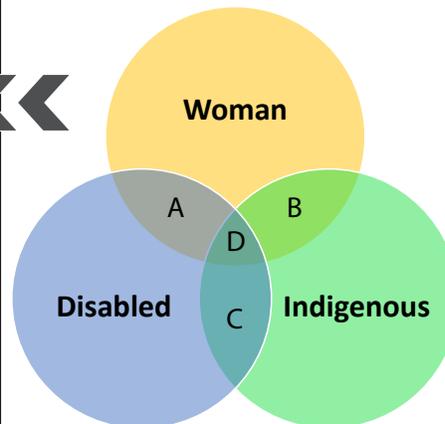
Intersectionality looks at the various forms of discrimination not separately, but in terms of the linkages that arise among them, on the principle that social differentiations such as gender, sexual orientation and social class are not compartmentalized, and that the dominance relationships among these social categories cannot be fully explained if they are analyzed separately from one another.²

Intersectionality attempts to examine the **intersections** among these various phenomena.

Percentages of intersectionality among designated groups in the Canadian population⁶



« The whole is greater than the sum of the parts »



Being at the intersection of two or more forms of discrimination produces greater effects than the sum of their effects measured separately.³

For example, the combined effects D of all the discrimination experienced by someone who is a woman, Indigenous and has a disability will be greater than the sum of the effects A, B and C attributable to discrimination on the basis of sex, Indigenous status and disabled status, respectively.

Some revealing data

1) A U.S. study⁴ reports that abandoning the goal of completing a university degree in a STEM discipline is more common among minority students and first-generation students (those who have no parent with a 4-year degree). In this study, an intervention was made to strengthen the perception of the utility of personal affirmation courses. It consisted in questions and exercises in which students thought about the relevance of the courses and their own values. The results showed that intersectionality had a significant impact on the effectiveness of the intervention among students who were members of minority groups and came from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds.

2) A Quebec study⁵ revealed the role that the intersection of several categories (such as gender, foreign origin, belonging to a visible minority, and civil status) had on the deskilling* of immigrants who had earned degrees outside of Canada and then settled in Quebec.

*What happens when a worker moves from a skilled job to an unskilled job.

Taking an intersectional perspective...

... means recognizing that several sources of inequality may simultaneously influence the experience of people who are members of marginalized groups.⁴

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Recommended readings

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About CWSE

The goal of the Chair for Women in Science and Engineering in Québec is to increase the participation of women in science and engineering, and to provide role models for women active in, and considering careers in these fields. It also aims to tear down the barriers that are limiting girls and women from having happy and successful careers in STEM. In addition, the Chair communicates the most effective strategies and programs at the regional and national levels.

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