

# OVERVIEW OF CHALLENGES FACING DESIGNATED AND MARGINALIZED GROUPS

## DID YOU KNOW?

Below are facts and concepts as well as examples of challenges facing certain groups in educational and professional contexts. They are classified according to the topics addressed in the [\*Guide to Identifying Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Challenges Experienced by the Members of a Research Team\*](#).

### Key concepts

- In Canada, the *Employment Equity Act* uses the term “designated groups” to refer to four groups that face persistent employment barriers, for example, in terms of their hiring, placement and job advancement: women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and members of visible minorities;<sup>1</sup>
- In this pamphlet, the term “marginalized groups” refers to minority groups that are discriminated against or excluded from activities and services (e.g., discussions, decision-making, access to resources, access to mentoring). This goes beyond the four groups designated in the *Employment Equity Act* and may include, for example, groups of parents, first-generation students, persons of various gender identities or sexual orientations, and persons with various religious affiliations;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- “Intersectionality,” which refers to the intersection of designated or marginalized groups, has been found to generally lead to more challenges. For example, if a person with a disability is also a member of an Indigenous community, an ethnic minority or a visible minority, they may be doubly discriminated against<sup>2</sup> (see the [intersectionality White Paper](#) for more information).

## Potential challenges

In this pamphlet, the concept of challenge is viewed collectively. In other words, it refers to the difficulties encountered collectively by a group. Comparisons between women and men, for example, reveal that collectively, women experience more difficulties in the area of employment. This being said, individually, some women may experience less difficulty than some men.

### Onboarding and integration

- It is reported that relatively few Indigenous people enter the field of research, and when they do, they may have to work in an academic context with little awareness of or receptiveness to Indigenous cultural perspectives;<sup>CG</sup>
- First-generation university students have been found to feel like they are entering a foreign country upon their arrival at university. Thérèse Bouffard, a professor with the Department of Psychology at UQAM, explains that “because [the] parents [of first-generation students] are unfamiliar with the culture of the academic world including its rules, practices and requirements, these elements are of limited assistance in guiding and advising students adequately in their academic plans [...]” (freely translated);<sup>3</sup>
- Immigrants reportedly often contend with a lack of recognition of skills acquired outside of Canada, thereby affecting their integration. In fact, 64.9% of immigrant women in Quebec have been found to be overqualified for their jobs.<sup>4</sup>



## Psychological work and study climate

- Although the situation appears to be improving according to recent research,<sup>5</sup> people belonging to LGBTQ2+ communities experience more harassment and discrimination in academia;<sup>6,7</sup>
- Microaggressions are “subtle, mundane exchanges that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to individuals based on group membership.” They have been found to be experienced regularly by women, members of the LGBTQ2+ community, visible minorities, persons with disabilities and members of underrepresented groups<sup>8,9,10</sup> (see the [Microaggression White Paper](#) for more information);
- Members of designated or marginalized groups who have been awarded a scholarship, grant, chair or position associated with diversity targets or quotas may often be subject to microaggressions over their skills;<sup>BP, CWSE</sup>
- The research community is an environment in which individuals often encounter the same people. Thus, it may be difficult for individuals who are victims of harassment or racism to bring up the subject, for fear of reprisals or the judgments of their peers. In addition, it is reportedly rarely possible to simply change employers since positions are difficult to obtain;<sup>BP</sup>
- Prejudices and stereotypes related to social, cultural, political and economic exclusion are forms of intimidation reported to be frequently directed at Indigenous people by non-Indigenous persons;<sup>11</sup>
- Minority stress (stress experienced by minorities as a result of social stigma) has been found to be detrimental to mental health and caused, in part, by the stigma attached to the minority status of persons belonging to the LGBTQ2+ group;<sup>12</sup>
- According to one study, 33.5% of students had experienced sexual harassment since their arrival at university by someone affiliated with that university. This percentage appears to break down into 54% gender minorities, 37.1% women and 22.9% men;<sup>13</sup>
- People with autism spectrum disorder (which is part of neurodiversity) reportedly experience discrimination in the labour market, as do people with disabilities.<sup>14</sup>



### Supervision and advancement

- In spite of the equity initiatives that have been in place for many years, the highest positions in Canadian universities appear to continue to be predominantly held by white men (e.g., rectorships: 66.7% white men, 33.3% white females and 0% visible minorities);<sup>15</sup>
- Motherhood has been found to often have a negative impact on career advancement (e.g., fewer publications to enhance one's resumé) whereas fatherhood generally has a positive impact (e.g., bonuses, promotions or recognition);<sup>16</sup>
- Research with 67 PhD students in biology in the United States suggests that both women and visible minorities experience inequities in the distribution of lab work, doing more low-value support work and spending less time on research;<sup>17</sup>
- People in LGBTQ2+ communities are more likely than cisgender heterosexual people to experience difficulties and prejudice in the course of networking and hiring and promotion processes.<sup>7</sup>

### Values in work and study environments

- Considering that standing out in the area of research requires coming out of the shadows, some people belonging to the LGBTQ2+ community may wish to avoid being noticed, even positively, in their field of research in order to protect themselves from the discrimination that could result;<sup>6</sup>
- A team can comprise multiple forms of diversity such as ethnocultural diversity, gender diversity and professional and generational diversity, which may generate tension and conflict;<sup>18</sup>
- Interdisciplinarity within a team is believed to foster creativity and problem solving. The potential of such a team may, however, be compromised and generate opposition if it is not properly exploited.<sup>18</sup>

### Finances and scheduling

- It is estimated that 67% of full-time students and 39% of part-time students live in financial insecurity;<sup>19</sup>
- Academic realities such as classes and group meetings held outside standard work, day care centre, child care centre and school hours<sup>20</sup> may mean that certain single-parent families must pay for an evening babysitter in addition to paying for day care during the day.<sup>21</sup>



**MICROAGGRESSIONS  
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UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS.**

### Physical work and study environment

- The lack or inadequacy of adaptations is believed to be an obstacle for persons with disabilities, preventing them from integrating into their work environment and hindering the proper performance of their duties.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the mismatch between a person's environment and personal characteristics has been found to generate situations of disability;<sup>22</sup>
- In predominantly male activity sectors, the physical environment (e.g., images, photos, furniture) may reinforce male stereotypes and deter women from pursuing these fields.<sup>23</sup>

### Policies and measures

- Policies and resources for the academic community appear to often be poorly known. Indeed, many people, if they needed something, would not know where to turn;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Some academic communities, such as engineering faculties, may have particular characteristics that result in a higher risk of harassment.<sup>24</sup> Yet policies to prevent harassment and discrimination often seem to be more of an institutional practice than a faculty practice.<sup>25</sup>

# EXAMPLES OF EDI PRACTICES

The following examples of practices to prevent and eliminate challenges that may be encountered within research teams are provided for inspiration. They are divided according to the same topics as the previous section and in accordance with the [Guide to Identifying Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Challenges Experienced by the Members of a Research Team](#).

#### Identify challenges and find solutions

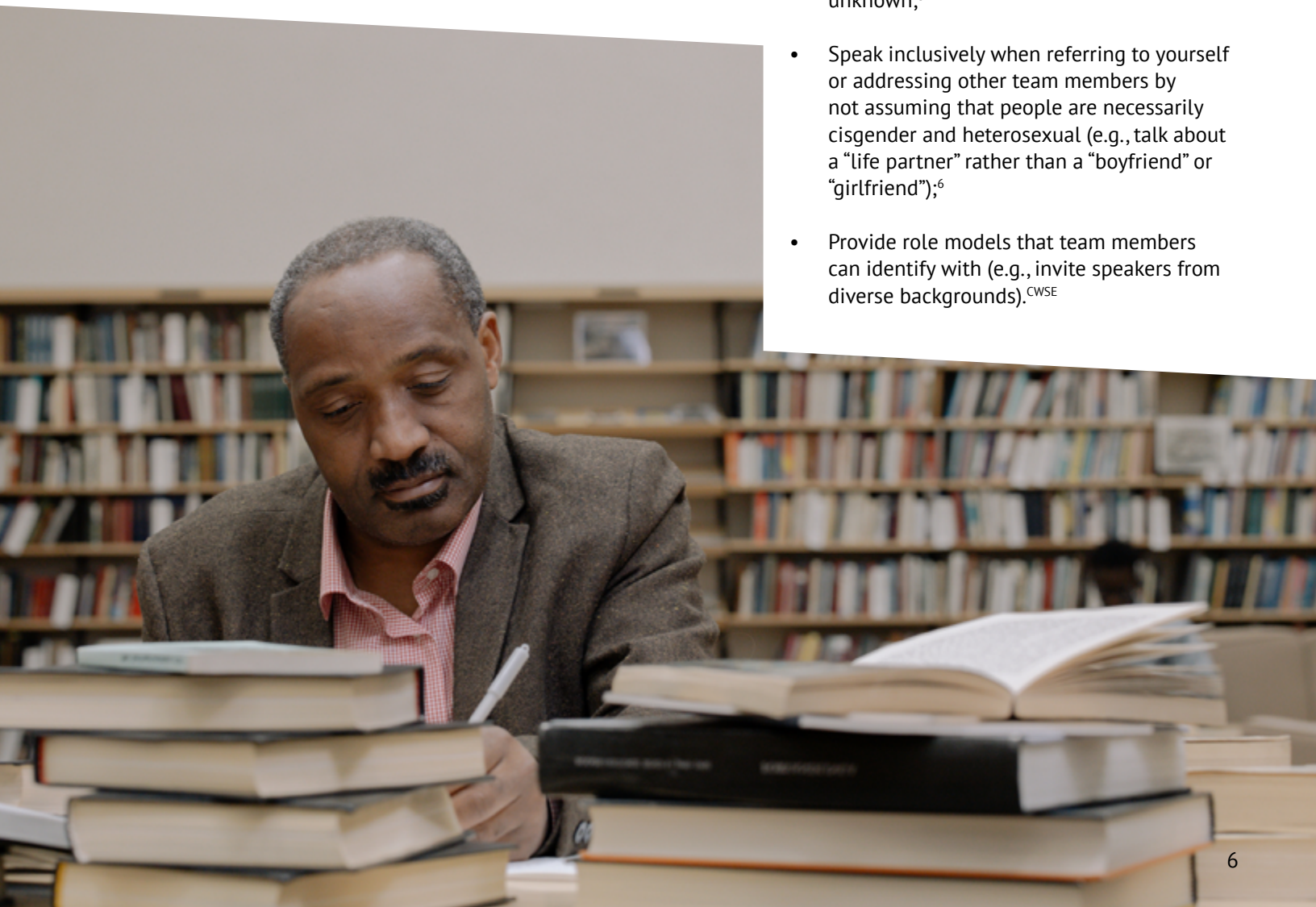
- Raise challenges with team members through interviews or questionnaires<sup>18,26</sup> (see the [Guide to Identifying EDI Challenges](#) for more information);
- Where appropriate, ask them if they have any suggestions for improving the work climate or environment;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Take the diversity-related challenges faced by team members seriously and manage them proactively.<sup>27</sup>

### Onboarding and integration

- Introduce new team members to academic and community resources and suggest that they use them if needed;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Focus on developing a sense of belonging<sup>25</sup> (see the [team member integration pamphlet](#) for more information);
- Organize networking and mentoring activities;<sup>25</sup>
- Learn about the history of colonization and its effects on the marginalization of Indigenous peoples today;<sup>11</sup>
- Include the desired pronoun to use within one's personal signature to indicate belonging or to raise awareness of different gender identities (e.g., elle/she/her).<sup>28</sup>

### Psychological work and study climate

- Raise team members' awareness and get them thinking about microaggressions so they can define, recognize and deconstruct them, and recognize their impact<sup>8,9,10</sup> (see the [Microaggression White Paper](#) for more information);
- Raise awareness of EDI and its challenges among the people in charge and team members<sup>26</sup> (see [the documentation available online](#) for more information);
- Actively listen to colleagues and treat them with respect;<sup>29</sup>
- Listen to each team member equitably and if a colleague's words did not receive the attention or consideration they deserved, speak up about it;<sup>30</sup>
- Avoid using gendered titles (mister, missus and miss) when someone's preferred title is unknown;<sup>31</sup>
- Speak inclusively when referring to yourself or addressing other team members by not assuming that people are necessarily cisgender and heterosexual (e.g., talk about a "life partner" rather than a "boyfriend" or "girlfriend");<sup>6</sup>
- Provide role models that team members can identify with (e.g., invite speakers from diverse backgrounds).<sup>CWSE</sup>



## Supervision and advancement

- Become aware of your own biases and prejudices<sup>12</sup> (see the [unconscious bias pamphlet](#) for more information);
- Assign roles and responsibilities equitably among team members;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Take into account non-linear pathways (e.g., maternity and caregiving leave, immigration processes);<sup>32</sup>
- Make adaptive measures (e.g., flexible schedules, clear instructions) available to all staff rather than assigning them on the basis of disability. This may promote the retention of neurodiverse individuals and have benefits for all employees.<sup>33</sup>

## Values in work and study environments

- Educate yourself, as a manager, about EDI issues;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Make sure you know your team well with respect to the forms of diversity it contains in order to be able to better understand issues and act appropriately;<sup>30,34</sup>
- Make sure that team members share the same core goals;<sup>35</sup>
- Where appropriate, draw a link between diversity and team performance so that the team understands the benefits of diversity and is aware of the potential losses if diversity is neglected;<sup>30</sup>
- Provide opportunities for all team members, whether from the student community or staff, to learn about the issues facing LGBTQ2+<sup>5</sup> communities, women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities and persons belonging to visible minorities.<sup>CWSE</sup>

## Finances and scheduling

- Demonstrate supervisory flexibility by taking into account the delays that can result from certain situations;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Allow some scheduling flexibility for those who need it and clarify with the team that this is not a special privilege but an accommodation;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Take into account individual characteristics and interests when organizing activities (e.g., avoid evening activities for parents; have different types of team-building activities).<sup>CWSE</sup>

## Physical work and study environment

- Ask people to specify if they require any adjustments<sup>6</sup> (e.g., seating at meetings to facilitate lip reading for a deaf person, limited noise for people with attention issues);<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Diversify visuals such as photos on walls<sup>36</sup> and on the website;<sup>CWSE</sup>
- Make sure that each person has access to work tools (e.g., adapted software) and safety accessories properly adapted for them.<sup>NSERC</sup>

## Policies and measures

- Be familiar with the policy and the law on psychological and sexual harassment in the workplace and provide each team member with a copy;<sup>37</sup>
- Adopt a zero-tolerance policy toward acts such as violence and harassment (this has a positive impact on individuals' retention and advancement);<sup>27,25</sup>
- Include a paragraph on the team's commitment to EDI and on the anti-discrimination policy in effect in the research contract;<sup>38</sup>
- Inform individuals of the remedies available in the event of discrimination or harassment.<sup>21</sup>

# RESOURCES

Guide to identifying EDI challenges in a research team and pamphlets on EDI in research: unconscious bias; integration of team members.

<http://cfsg.espaceweb.usherbrooke.ca/resources-for-implementing-edi-in-research/>

Neutral and gendered pronouns pamphlet.

<https://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/our-resources/creating-authentic-spaces/gender-specific-and-gender-neutral-pronouns>

Gendered titles pamphlet.

<https://www.the519.org/education-training/training-resources/our-resources/creating-authentic-spaces/starting-conversations>

Diversity in science and engineering: Intersectionality; Microaggressions.

<http://cfsg.espaceweb.usherbrooke.ca/download/4696>

<https://wwest.mech.ubc.ca/diversity/>





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- <sup>CWSE</sup> Chair for Women in Science and Engineering in Quebec



## ABOUT THE NSERC CHAIR FOR WOMEN IN SCIENCE AND ENGINEERING IN QUEBEC

The mission of the Chair for Women in Science and Engineering (CWSE) in Quebec is to increase the representation of women and maintain their participation in the field of science and engineering (SE). The Chair's first action area is to work with girls and the people close to them to present and demystify the opportunities that SE has to offer. The Chair also works with students and professionals to better equip them to overcome the obstacles that continue to affect their careers. Moreover, the Chair works with several communities to rally efforts around equity, diversity and inclusion in higher education and research. The Chair's second action area is to conduct research to understand and raise awareness of this issue. In this way, it helps propose potential solutions to the various authorities involved, with a view to driving change.



## ABOUT UNIVERSITÉ DE SHERBROOKE

In its 2018–2022 strategic plan, Université de Sherbrooke committed to becoming an exemplary environment with respect to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). This commitment has resulted in the adoption of a related action plan, which is under the direct responsibility of the rector. Implementation of this plan is supported by the Executive Committee, the EDI Strategic Committee and all its working committees, and by several influential members of our community. The university is proud to be able to count on the leadership of the Chair for Women in Science and Engineering, which is contributing to this objective by developing a series of EDI-related training and tools, thereby strengthening our academic community.

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Founding partners:

Natural Sciences and Engineering Council of Canada (NSERC) and Université de Sherbrooke (UdeS)

Major partner:

Rio Tinto

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Fonds de recherche du Québec – Nature et technologie

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