

FEMINIST INTERSECTIONALITY

Feminist Intersectionality: A primer

Feminist intersectionality seeks to analyze and explain how some women experience multiple forms of discrimination and inequality at the same time.

Racialized women were among the first to explore and describe the complex experiences of women facing multiple forms of discrimination.

Mohawk lawyer, activist and academic, Patricia Monture-Angus, from the Six Nations of the Grand River, described how the experience of multiple intersecting inequalities cannot be separated from a gendered experience.

According to Monture-Angus,



"TO ARTIFICIALLY SEPARATE MY GENDER
(OR ANY OTHER PART OF MY BEING) FROM
MY RACE AND CULTURE FORCES ME TO DENY
THE WAY I EXPERIENCE THE WORLD.
SUCH DENIAL HAS DEVASTATING EFFECTS
ON ABORIGINAL CONSTRUCTIONS OF REALITY."

Patricia Monture-Angus

ORIGINS OF INTERSECTIONALITY

In recent years in the US, Black feminists have used different analytical frames to capture the complexity of Black women's lived experience.

Black American feminists like the Combahee River Collective spoke about the "simultaneity of experiencing multiple oppression"—for example, experiencing racism and sexism at the same time.

Claudia Jones refers to the "triple oppression" of gender, race and class inequality, and Patricia Hill Collins elaborated a "matrix of domination".

Kimberlé Crenshaw, a Black feminist legal scholar coined the term 'intersectionality' in 1989 in response to US anti-discrimination laws, which failed to remedy employment discrimination for Black women because sex and race were considered mutually exclusive categories of discrimination.

Crenshaw argued that Black working-class women faced employment-related discrimination that was not based solely on sexism or racism, but the combination of both.

This intersection of sex, race, and class discrimination created a unique experience for Black working-class women that was different than the experience of both white working-class women, who faced sexism but not racism, and Black working-class men, who faced racism but not sexism.

Today the term intersectionality has entered into mainstream use in academic settings, in women's organizations, in many social justice movements and even in government policies.

The concept of intersectionality encompasses a broad range of identities and aspects of social differentiation that can include sex, race, age, class, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity, for example.

OPPRESSION

refers to the systematic disadvantage, mistreatment, and dehumanization of certain groups as a result of unequal power relations and systems of power.



Kimberlé Crenshaw

SEX

CLASS

RACE

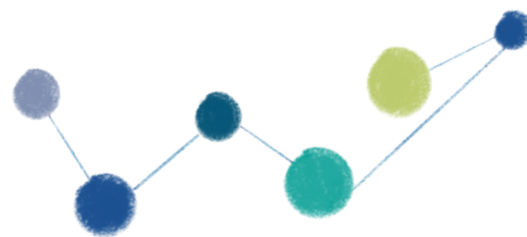
SYSTEMS THINKING

Intersectionality, and the key terms often used to apply intersectionality as a framework, rely on what we might call “systems thinking”.

Rather than looking at the world in terms of individual people and the relationships between individual people, systems thinking identifies patterns of relationships that individuals and groups have to larger social, economic, and political systems.

Rather than generalizing about people or society, systems thinking looks to historical conditions in our societies, such as colonialism and patriarchy, as roots that do not determine but shape how patterns of behaviour, popular ideas, and societal practices grow and change over time.

Systems thinking requires understanding these roots, the ways they shape larger processes and practices and the way those larger processes impact individuals and groups.



RELATIONSHIPS
BETWEEN INDIVIDUALS



PATTERNS OF
RELATIONSHIPS

RELATIONS OF POWER AND PRIVILEGE

To understand how power operates, an analysis of how structures and systems enable, reproduce, and interact to entrench inequalities is needed. For example, it is necessary to examine how sexist colonial assumptions are built into the fabric of social structures—such as the legal, political and economic systems, the market, and the media.

How are different groups of women excluded and why? Who has access to resources, assets and decision-making power and why? How do different structures, institutions and social forces (historic and current) create and reinforce conditions of inequality and social exclusion?

Gender, race, class and ability are historically, structurally and socially created and are used to control social, economic and cultural engagements by formalizing relations of power and privilege. Analyzing power means looking beyond the individual intersection of various social identities (sex, race, class, ability) and instead looking at how various systems of power, like racism, sexism, classism and ableism interact with patriarchy.



FEMINIST INTERSECTIONALITY

CRIAW-ICREF defines feminist intersectionality as: A framework to analyze how different girls and women experience multiple forms of oppression or inequality. These multiple forms of oppression are simultaneous and cannot be separated from their experiences of sex- and/or gender-based discrimination.

Feminist intersectionality analyzes power and how different systems, institutions, or structures and socio-economic and political practices (historic and current) work together to create and reinforce conditions of inequality and disadvantage, and privilege and advantage, based on one's social location and identity.

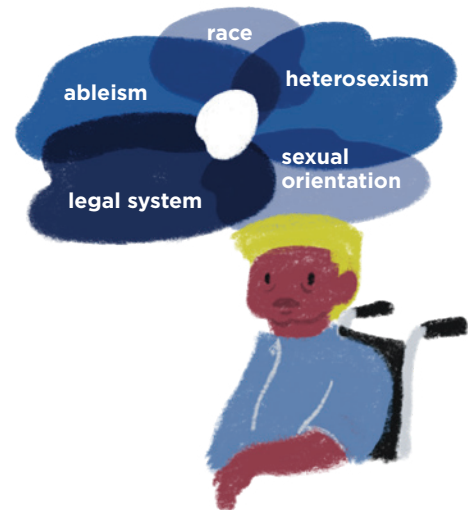
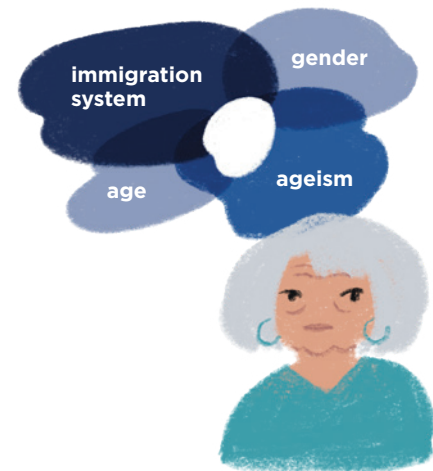
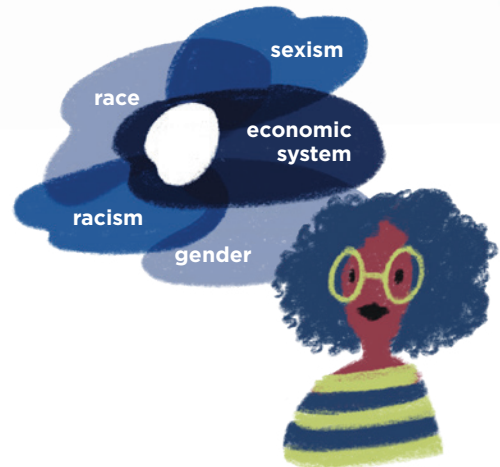
Recognizing diverse identities and inequalities are important elements of a feminist intersectional analysis. But it should also go further to explore why and how women experience intersectional inequality.

The goal of a feminist intersectional analysis is to understand power relations and systems of power that create barriers to women's equality so we can work to remove those barriers and redistribute power equitably.

WHY FEMINIST INTERSECTIONALITY?

To create social change for girls and women, we need to draw attention to the prevailing systems and structures that create and perpetuate the barriers that create marginalization and social exclusion. Sexism can take different forms as patriarchy is culturally specific. Feminist intersectionality takes into consideration how multiple systems of power interact and are interconnected with sexism.

Feminist intersectionality allows us to analyze women's experiences of inequality, in all our diversity, in the broader web of power relations and their interconnections. Only by understanding and considering the differences and commonalities in our experiences as women, can we truly work to eliminate inequalities for ALL women.



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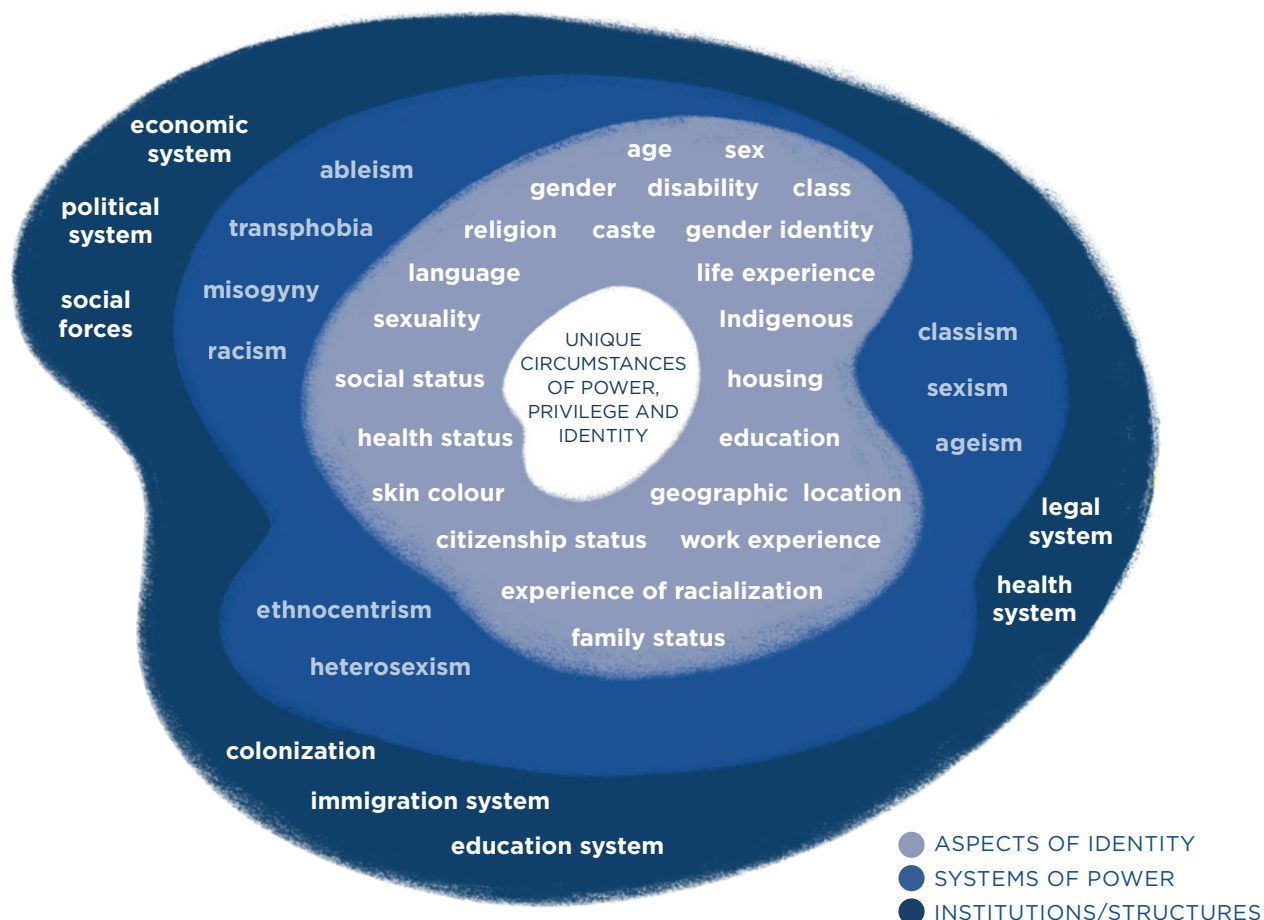
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FOR EXAMPLE

Multiple forms of oppression intersect, creating unique and varied experiences of discrimination.

