

# Learning Network

## Facilitate. Educate. Collaborate.

October 2015

## Issue 15: Intersectionality

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Effectively responding to gender-based violence (GBV) requires addressing the multi-dimensional and complex circumstances of identity and oppression surrounding every survivor and every individual who uses violence.

*But what does this really mean?*

Intersectionality is made up of 3 basic building blocks: social identities, systems of oppression, and the ways in which they intersect.

1. **Social identities** are based on the groups or communities a person belongs to. These groups give people a sense of who they are. For example, social class, race/ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation are all social identities. A person is usually a member of many different groups or communities at once; in this way, social identities are **multi-dimensional**. An individual's **social location** is defined by all the identities or groups to which they belong.
2. **Systems of oppression** refer to larger forces and [structures](#) operating in society that create inequalities and reinforce exclusion. These systems are built around societal norms, and are constructed by the dominant group(s) in society. They are maintained through language (e.g. "That's so gay"), social interactions (e.g.

“catcalling” women), institutions (e.g. when school curriculum does not acknowledge residential schools), and laws and policies (e.g. immigration policies that make it difficult for new Canadians to access health services). Systems of oppression include racism, colonialism, heterosexism, class stratification, gender inequality, and ableism.

3. Social identities and systems of oppression do not exist in isolation. Instead, they can be thought of as **intersecting** or **interacting**. In other words, individuals’ experiences are shaped by the ways in which their social identities intersect with each other and with interacting systems of oppression. For instance, a person can be both black, a woman, and elderly. This means she may face racism, sexism, and ageism as she navigates everyday life, including experiences of violence.

## *INTERSECTIONALITY...*

- Challenges the status quo
- Takes a holistic approach to human experience
- Enhances understanding
- Explores new approaches
- Encourages inclusivity

## *AN INTERSECTIONAL MODEL OF TRAUMA FOR SERVICE PROVIDERS*

Gender-based violence (GBV) impacts the mental health of women and girls, with gender playing a significant role in the types of traumas women are likely to experience and their individual responses to violence.

Personal and social resources used to cope with trauma are not only influenced by

gender, but also, by the ways in which gender intersects with multiple social identities, such as race and class.

Intersectionality is a useful framework through which to examine how forms of privilege and disadvantage shape women's experiences of trauma and access to resources.

It acknowledges the social factors that contribute to gender-based violence and subsequent health. An intersectional lens can also improve the way services are organized and provided with attention to multiple forms of oppression and structural violence.

#### **Trauma informed by intersectionality:**

- Oppression exists in various forms (e.g. sexism, racism) and across many levels (e.g. institutions, policies)
- Different forms of oppression interact and shape an individual's sense of power, resilience, and well-being
- Advantages and disadvantages in the distribution of social resources (e.g. income) affect individuals' mental health and well-being
- The effects of trauma accumulate over time and interact with other life experiences, impacting health.

***“The constellation of women’s lived experiences matters most to their well-being”*** - Samuels-Dennis, J., Bailey, A., & Ford-Gilboe, M. (2011). Intersectionality model of trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder. *In O. Hankivsky (Ed)., Health inequities in Canada: Intersectional frameworks and practices (pp. 274-293).*

*Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.*

## *EXPERIENCES OF GENDER-BASED VIOLENCE ARE SHAPED BY THE INTERSECTION OF VARIOUS ASPECTS OF IDENTITY...*

For example, a person may be:

- cisgender, first generation university student, Aboriginal
- paraplegic, upper-middle class, African-American
- married, HIV positive, lower-middle class
- Muslim, immigrant, employed full-time
- Older, unstably housed, transgender
- Lesbian, single mother, college graduate

## *IDEAS FOR BRINGING INTERSECTIONALITY INTO PRACTICE*

- What group(s) do you identify with or belong to?
- How do the people in your life talk about violence in relationships? What do they say about violence against women? Are there conflicting views?
- Are the messages about violence in the group(s) you belong to different from your own understanding of the violence you've experienced? How does this make you feel?
- What impact do these views have on you – a woman who's actually been there?
- You mentioned that being \_\_\_\_\_ (e.g. an Asian woman and a lesbian) has had a big impact on what you've been through. Tell me about that...
- Have any specific challenges (e.g. racism, ableism) affected your experience of violence? In what way(s)?
- In what ways, if any, have your community(ies), your family, your friends, affected your decisions through it all? (e.g. decisions to tell someone or to report; decisions to end or continue the relationship; decision to get help) How have those decisions worked out for you?
- Are there other pieces about your life (or personal story) that have made it hard to talk about what you've been through? What were they?

- Have you received support from your family and your friends throughout it all? What does being supported feel like to you?
- Are there any specific traditions, practices, or resources that are important to your healing? How can we make sure we include those here?
- Are there certain challenges (e.g. access to affordable housing, coping with homophobia in family) that would be helpful for us to talk about before getting to your experience of violence?

Do your training programs talk about how to apply intersectionality?

*How do you use intersectionality in your work? Let us know at [vawln@uwo.ca](mailto:vawln@uwo.ca)!*

## QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER WHEN WORKING INTERSECTIONALLY

### **Your own position as a service provider:**

- What are your own identities, privilege(s), and positions of power in relations to the issues you are addressing? Are you a member of the group(s) you are working with?
- How does your position impact your work?

### **The social locations of the persons you are working with:**

- What are the challenges? (e.g. unstable housing, discrimination)
- What are the strengths that can be drawn upon? (e.g. resources, community centre)
- Are there groups within the broader community you are working with that have gone unnoticed? (e.g. have you considered older people, immigrants, children...?)

### **The conditions that impact social locations:**

- What are the social, political, economic, or cultural conditions that are impacting the person or group(s) you are working with?
- What, if any, are the recent policies, practices, or laws that may be particularly relevant to the person or group(s)?

## *ACKNOWLEDGING THE INTERSECTIONAL IDENTITIES OF MEN*

Intersectionality is a key framework for understanding gender-based violence (GBV) and yet is primarily applied to women survivors in the existing literature.

GBV prevention efforts are increasingly involving boys and men, who are most often the perpetrators of violence against women.

Men's perpetration of – and attitudes toward – violence is shaped by gender, race/ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and other factors.

There are multiple masculinities, meaning “being a man” or “doing masculinity” varies among different groups of men. Men's perpetration of violence is therefore best understood in the context of their intersecting identities.

If we want to end gender-based violence, we must work with ALL men. We must meet men where they are and create positive change with educational campaigns and intervention programs reflective of men's social locations.

At the same time, we must also recognize that men can be survivors of physical and sexual violence, and that their vulnerabilities to and experiences of violence are affected by diverse and challenging intersections of identity.

Programs and services for male survivors of violence must take into account the unique needs of different groups of men to increase the effectiveness of supportive efforts.

## *MAKING ALL CHILDREN VISIBLE*

### **So, what about children?**

Like women and men, children's experiences of and responses to violence vary along the lines of race/ethnicity, ability, gender, and other social dimensions. Attention to children's intersectionality provides increased visibility to diversity among children, facilitating a more in-depth understanding of their experiences and the creation of more effective prevention and response efforts.

### **Children's Unique Circumstances of Power, Privilege and Identity**

#### **Structural Forces:**

- Colonization
- Politics
- Globalization
- Capitalism
- War
- Foster Care System
- Education System
- Economy
- Legal System
- Child Welfare System
- Immigration Systems

#### **Types of Discrimination:**

- Ethnocentrism
- Transphobia
- Ageism
- Homophobia
- Ableism
- Racism
- Discrimination
- Heterosexism
- Sexism
- Classism
- Social Exclusion

#### **Aspects of Identity:**

- Race/Ethnicity
- Family Structure
- Socioeconomic Status
- Religion
- Developmental Level
- Age
- Indigeneity
- Gender
- Geographic Location
- Peer Pressure
- Citizenship Status  
refugee Status
- DisAbility
- Parental Characteristics (e.g. substance abuse)
- Spirituality
- Gender Identity
- Sexual Orientation
- Food/Housing Insecurity

This intersectionality diagram is adapted from CRIAW/ICREF's intersectionality wheel.

Words have been added to the diagram that are unique to children and that are not typically considered when applying intersectionality to adults (e.g. parental characteristics, child welfare system).

## *ORGANIZATIONAL CHECKLIST FOR INTEGRATING INTERSECTIONALITY INTO PRACTICE & POLICY*

### **Education:**

- ✓ Educate and train board members in understanding an intersectional approach to gender-based violence, including social diversity and oppression.
- ✓ Know and understand your clients' social locations.
- ✓ Provide employee training on dimensions of inequality and oppression and how these intersect to shape the needs and experiences of survivors, abusive partners, and their children.

- ✓ Partner with various communities when developing education and training.

### **Reflective Practices:**

- ✓ Develop a vision statement to guide the work of your organization that reflects an intersectional framework.
- ✓ Examine whether your response as a service provider ignores or takes into account the multiple social identities of survivors, abusive partners, and their children.
- ✓ Be aware of your social location and how it may enable or inhibit clients from discussing issues related to racism, sexuality, and so forth.
- ✓ Obtain feedback from clients on whether service provision is meeting their needs.

### **Policy/Program Design:**

- ✓ Determine which social locations are important to the policy/program problem.
- ✓ Consult with various groups on how their needs can best be served.
- ✓ Evaluate assumptions underlying the area being considered. Avoid “one-size-fits-all” approaches.
- ✓ Strategize how policy/program will avoid reinforcing or perpetrating further inequalities for some groups.
- ✓ Include inter-organization/inter-disciplinary collaboration where possible.

### **Accessibility and Inclusion:**

- ✓ Comply with all accessibility and human rights legislation.

- ✓ Ensure job postings encourage application by individuals facing multiple barriers in accessing jobs or who have historically faced exclusion and discrimination.
- ✓ Where possible, allow flexible working hours/conditions (e.g. the option to work from home).
- ✓ Include professional development opportunities to enhance employees' skills (e.g. French language training).

**Evaluation:**

- ✓ Identify whether the policy/program includes different groups and if differences within these groups are recognized.
- ✓ Evaluate services and programs to determine which populations are accessing them.
- ✓ Ensure policy documents address inequalities as well as a structural understanding of power and inequality.
- ✓ Develop an "Intersections Committee" to oversee the integration of an intersectional approach throughout your organization.
- ✓ Review organizational policies and practices regularly to ensure they take into account the needs and experiences of different groups being served.

**Informed by:**

Murphy, Y., Hunt, V., Zajicek, A., Norris, A. N., & Hamilton, L. (2009). Incorporating intersectionality in social work practice, research, policy, and education.

Washington, D.C.: NASW Press.

Hankivsky, O. (2012). An intersectionality-based policy analysis framework. Vancouver, BC: Institute for Intersectionality Research and Policy, Simon Fraser University.

## *APPLYING INTERSECTIONALITY: GENERAL STRATEGIES FOR RESEARCHERS*

Intersectionality should be integrated in all stages of the research process: theoretical framework, research questions, data analysis, reporting of results, and discussion/conclusion.

The following is a list of general strategies to facilitate this integration:

- ✓ Commit to using an intersectional approach.
- ✓ Provide a definition of intersectionality that will frame the study.
- ✓ Clearly identify which categories of oppression will be studied, the aim of understanding the intersection of these categories, and why these particular intersections were selected.
- ✓ Where possible, involve the individuals being studied in shaping the research question and/or determining the issues in need of research in their communities.
- ✓ Engage in interdisciplinary collaboration.
- ✓ Avoid asking questions that treat identity categories as separate from each other.
- ✓ Use samples large enough to allow for the interaction of multiple identities.
- ✓ Allow the use art, music or other nonacademic options for participants to share their experiences, narratives or thoughts.
- ✓ Supplement quantitative analysis with qualitative analysis and vice versa.

- ✓ Consider forms of oppression in relation to power or inequality rather than simply as descriptive characteristics.
- ✓ Contextualize findings in relation to broader meso and/or macro level trends.
- ✓ Do not assume findings are universally applicable.
- ✓ Avoid large group categorizations that risk conflating intragroup differences.
- ✓ Recognize how your own values, experiences, knowledge, and social positions influence your approach to research.

## *INTERSECTIONALITY & HIGHER EDUCATION*

Incorporating intersectionality into social justice education programs can enhance students' understanding of gender-based violence and challenge them to become “catalysts for change”.

Consider setting program goals that encourage students to:

1. Develop an awareness of their intersecting identities.
2. Become aware of perspectives that differ from their own.
3. Identify and analyze systems of oppression.
4. Develop the capacity and strategies to alter systems of oppression.

As an educator, it is also important to recognize the role of intersectionality in classroom interactions. Both students and instructors occupy particular social locations that bring complexity to the classroom. Being aware of the lived realities brought by each individual into the classroom and taking these realities into consideration in curriculum planning and in every day interactions with students can enhance educational experiences and challenge oppression.

For educational tools on intersectionality, see the resources page at the end of this newsletter.

## *RESOURCES*

### **General**

[Intersectionality 101](#)

### **For Researchers**

[Mixed Methods Primer](#)

[Qualitative Primer](#)

[Quantitative Primer](#)

### **For Educators**

[Everyone Belongs: a toolkit for applying intersectionality](#)

[Intersectionality & Higher Education: theory, research, & praxis](#)

[Training for Change: practical tools for intersectional workshops](#)

### **For Service Providers**

[Domestic Violence: intersectionality and culturally competent practice](#)

[Incorporating intersectionality in social work practice, research, policy, and education](#)

[Incorporating intersectionality in social work practice, research, policy, and education](#)

### **For Policy Makers**

[Intersectionality based policy analysis](#)

[Intersectionality: moving women's health research and policy forward](#)

*UPCOMING LEARNING NETWORK WEBINAR:*

**Preventing Domestic Homicides: Lessons Learned from Tragedies**

December 10, 2015 | 10:00am - 11:00am EST

**Dr. Peter Jaffe**, Academic Director, Centre for Research & Education on Violence  
Against Women & Children

Domestic homicides are the most predictable and preventable form of homicide. This webinar will present lessons learned from domestic violence death reviews that point to a pattern of risk factors associated with these tragedies as well as consistent recommendations in regards to intervention and prevention.

Register here: [vawlearningnetwork.ca/upcoming-webinars](http://vawlearningnetwork.ca/upcoming-webinars)

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*WRITTEN BY THE LEARNING NETWORK TEAM:*

**Linda Baker**, Learning Director  
**Nicole Etherington**, Research Associate  
**Elsa Barreto**, Graphic Design

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Let us know what you think. Your input is important to us. Please complete this brief survey on your thoughts of this newsletter:

<http://fluidsurveys.com/surveys/crevawc/intersectionality-newsletter-issue-15/>

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Contact [vawln@uwo.ca](mailto:vawln@uwo.ca) to join our email list!

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