

## Intersectional approach

### A. Definition

"Intersectionality is a tool or approach for analyzing and understanding how our **social identities** relate to **systems of oppression, domination and discrimination**<sup>1</sup>. The axes of our social identities interact at multiple levels and contribute to the **oppression or privilege**<sup>2</sup>".

### B. The Intersectional Approach: 3 Key Elements

#### ➤ First Element: Social Identities

The first element of the intersectional approach is "social identities." As individuals in society, we have many social identities. They are based on group memberships or the communities to which we belong. A woman whose lesbian identifies with the LGBTQ+ group. A man in a wheelchair recognizes himself through individuals with disabilities. Through our social identities, we can identify ourselves and identify other individuals by status, categories and attributes<sup>3</sup>. **Here are some examples of social identities:**

|                    |                    |             |
|--------------------|--------------------|-------------|
| Sexual orientation | Immigration status | Nationality |
| Education          | Social class       | Sex         |
| Gender             | Disability         | Religion    |
| Ethnicity          | Race               | Location    |

#### ➤ Second element: systems of oppression

The second element of the intersectional approach is "systems of oppression." They are forces and structures present in all spheres of society. Depending on our social identities or circumstances, these systems operate in two ways: 1) Create inequalities and 2) Reinforce exclusion. For example, the immigration status or the race of an individual can influence their accessibility to certain services or to certain opportunities<sup>4</sup>. **Here are the main systems of oppression**<sup>5</sup>:

|        |              |          |
|--------|--------------|----------|
| Racism | Heterosexism | Classism |
| Sexism | Colonialism  | Ableism  |

### Examples of systems of oppression in society:

#### Language:

<sup>1</sup> Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWID). (2004) « L'intersectionnalité : un outil pour la justice de genre et la justice économique ». Les droits de la femme et le changement économique, n° 9.

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/lintersectionalite\\_un\\_outil\\_pour\\_la\\_justice\\_de\\_genre\\_et\\_la\\_justice\\_economique.pdf](https://www.awid.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/lintersectionalite_un_outil_pour_la_justice_de_genre_et_la_justice_economique.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> LearningNetwork: Facilitate. Educate. Collaborate. INTERSECTIONALITY. Issue 15. October 2015.

<sup>4</sup> [http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/Intersectionality\\_Newsletter\\_FINAL2.pdf](http://www.vawlearningnetwork.ca/sites/vawlearningnetwork.ca/files/Intersectionality_Newsletter_FINAL2.pdf)

<sup>5</sup> La Toupie." Définition : Identité Sociale, La Toupie, [www.toupie.org/Dictionnaire/Identite\\_sociale.htm](http://www.toupie.org/Dictionnaire/Identite_sociale.htm)

<sup>6</sup> Head, Tom. "12 Types of Social Oppression." ThoughtCo., ThoughtCo., 10 Apr. 2010, [www.thoughtco.com/types-of-oppression-721173](http://www.thoughtco.com/types-of-oppression-721173)

<sup>7</sup> Idem 4



- ❖ Homophobic, transphobic, racist and sexist insults.

#### **Social interactions:**

- ❖ Refusing to hire a candidate because he has a "foreign" name.
- ❖ Refusing to hire a woman because she wants to have children.

#### **The institutions:**

- ❖ An annual report was published by Howard Sapers in 2012-2013 at the Office of the Correctional Investigator. They demonstrated that between 2003 and 2013 in all Canadian prisons, there was an over-representation of Black people and indigenous people. In the span of 10 years, the indigenous population has increased by 46.4% and the Black population has increased by 80%. In addition, one third of the women in prison are indigenous<sup>6</sup>.

#### **Laws and policies:**

- ❖ Depending on the immigration status, some social services are sometimes difficult to access or simply not accessible.
- ❖ For example, a non-status woman will have to pay the complete cost of the medico-social examination at a designated centre.
- ❖ An asylum seeker who wishes to have health services in a hospital can be denied service because it's on a voluntary basis. Thus, this means that health centres and health professionals can refuse to treat an individual.

#### ➤ Third Element: The Intersection Between the Two

The third element of the intersectional approach is the "intersection" between social identities and systems of oppression. These two elements do not exist in isolation. These are in constant interaction.

Thus, we cannot analyze how social identities of a person influence their daily life without analyzing how systems of oppression operate in society. For example, racism, heterosexism and ableism affect the daily life of a Guatemalan woman in a wheelchair.

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<sup>6</sup> Howard Sapers. Rapport annuel du Bureau de l'enquêteur correctionnel 2012-2013.

