



Intersectionality in Research: Implications for gender transformative practice

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Background

- Knowledge production is an essential domain of gender transformation in Science, Technology, and Innovation (STI).
- Gender bias in knowledge production and research methods still exists, leading to partial or incorrect findings and perpetuating gender inequality (Sharman & Johnson, 2012). Only 30% of researchers in Africa are women (Huyser, 2019).
- There is growing awareness that integration of a gender lens in research design, content, and the constitution of research teams is not only a question of rights and justice, but also enhances rigour, credibility, social benefit, and impact of research (Liani, Nyamongo, Pulford, et al., 2021; Schiebinger, 2014).

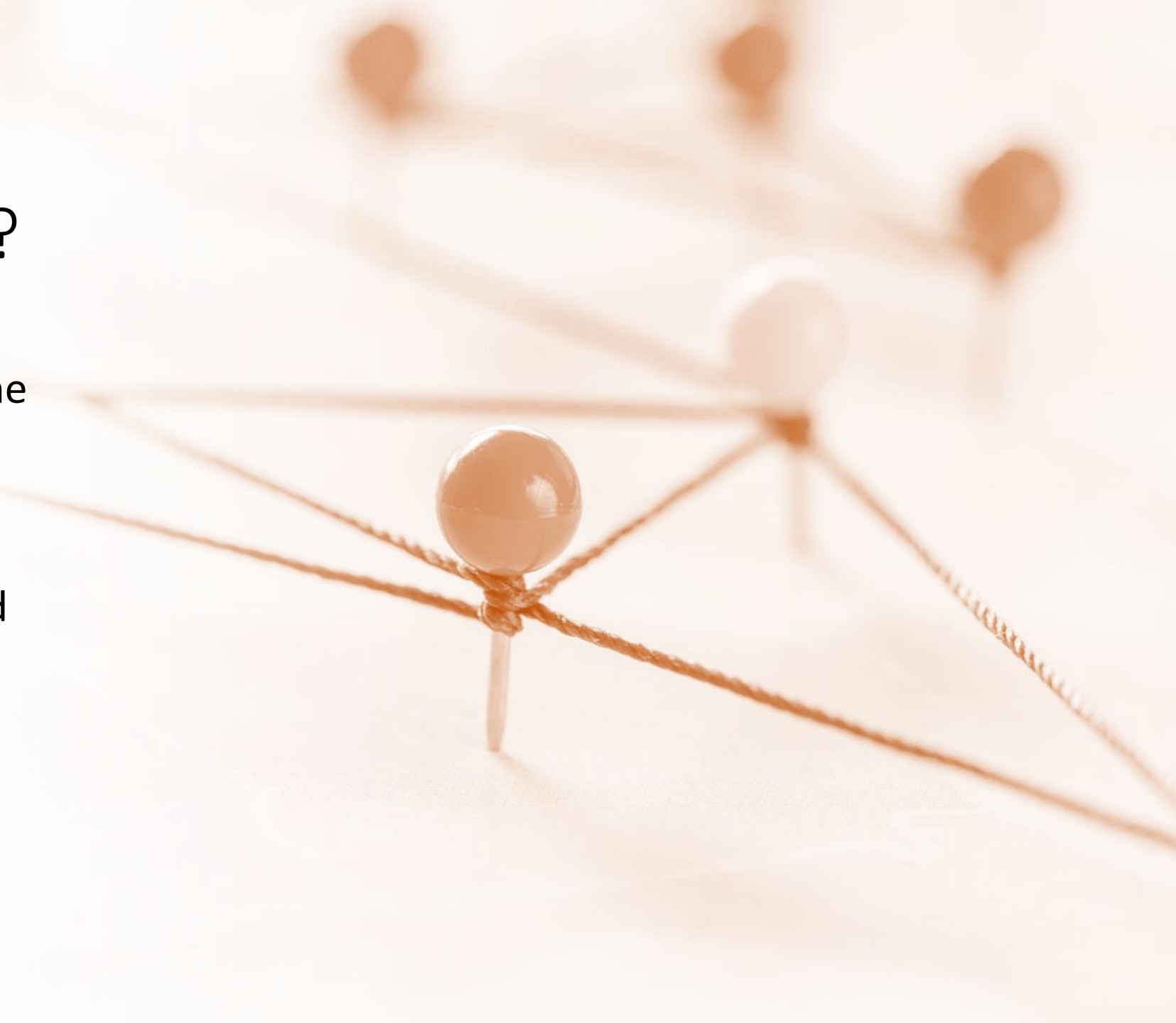
Background (continued)

- Efforts concerning gender inequality in research are evolving.
- Marginalised groups are heterogeneous and consist of diverse populations with varying degrees of power” (Brown et al., 2019, p. 3).
- Structural oppressions linked to diverse social identities, as these are intertwined with gender oppression, still determine access to rights, resources, and opportunities.
- Intersectionality is complex to apply. Primarily qualitative application, quantitative less.

What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality explains the ways in which social identities – such as gender, sexuality, age, race, class, and (dis)ability, amongst others – are interconnected and create unique experiences of oppression and discrimination for marginalized persons.

Coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw





Reflexivity requires researchers, policy makers and stakeholders to commit to ongoing dialogue about “implicit, personal, professional or organizational knowledges” and their influences on policy.



Importance of time and space in any analysis, knowledge is situated in these dimensions which are fluid, changeable and experienced through our interpretations.



Theories of knowledge and power, and in particular, with the relationship between power and knowledge production.



Social Justice & Equity- frequently challenging inequities at their source and requires people to question social and power relations to transform social structures.



consideration of resistance and resilience is integral to intersectionality because these can disrupt power and oppression

Intersectionality in knowledge production

Study overview

Research objectives:

- (i) to establish the extent to and the manner in which an intersectional framework is adopted throughout the knowledge production, grant-making and research cycle;
- (ii) to provide practical recommendations on the role of public funding agencies in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion in research, through applying an intersectional framework.

Mixed-methods project:

- A regional and global evidence review on intersectionality scholarship
- Key informant interviews with subject experts applying intersectional methods
- A desktop review of selected African SGC institutional policies and programmes.

Integrated Report

Intersectionality in research, grant-making and human capital development:

Considerations for public funding agencies in advancing equality, diversity and inclusion



Gender & Inclusivity
A PROJECT OF THE SCIENCE GRANTING COUNCILS INITIATIVE



How do researchers engage with the concept of intersectionality?



Qualitative component

- Data collected through online in-depth interviews (n=9): via e-mail (asynchronous), and via Zoom or Microsoft Teams (synchronous)
- 6 out of 9 submitted written responses to the interview questionnaire
- The online interviews were transcribed verbatim; transcripts were organized, coded, and thematically analysed using ATLAS.ti (version 9)
- Out of the nine participants: two identify as male and seven as female
- Geographic locations span the USA, Kenya, Namibia, Sweden, Canada, and South Africa.
- Participants' career levels ranged from doctoral student level to veteran professors in their fields of study, although some did not view themselves as experts on intersectionality per se

Participants' research areas

Disability studies

Political ecology and
feminist sciences studies

Gender politics with a
focus on women's
representation, women's
movements, and policy
issues such as GBV and
intersectionality

History of Science,
Medicine, and Technology

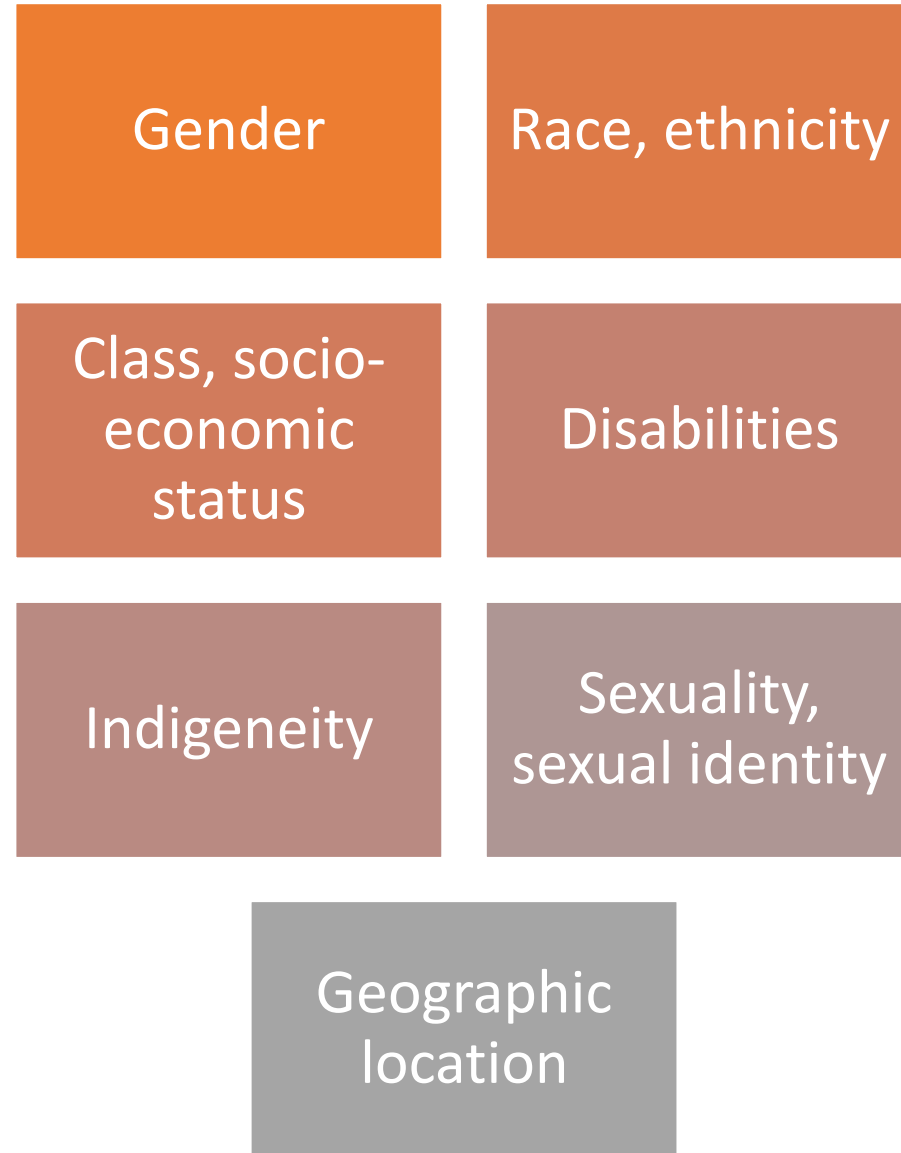
Health equity, and sexual
and reproductive health
and rights

Public health

Sociology of gender and
sexuality

Immigration, inequality,
oppression

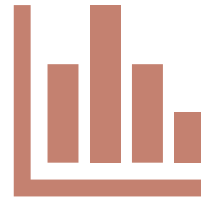
Social
identities
mostly
studied by
participants



Methodologies participants primarily used in their research



Qualitative research



Quantitative research



Mixed methodologies

Domains in interview questions

participants' conceptualisation of intersectionality in research

decision-making process concerning which categories of identity to include or exclude in a study, mainly if they make this process explicit in research publications

which research methodologies they find appropriate when conducting intersectional research

the benefits, drawbacks and challenges in applying an intersectional lens to research

reflections on researcher positionality

What does intersectionality mean?

I have some difficulty with the term because on the one hand, you know, it makes absolute sense. I mean, when it comes from a history of feminism- it really has to do with that people are positioned differently, their experience of colour, privileged white women, you know? You add up all of these to markers of identity and you look at the sort of identity amongst them. I think that's a really good contribution to point that out.

...And I think that one of the key issues to consider... is the extent to which the idea of intersectionality is used almost in a sort of subtractive way in order to argue that some forms of exclusion or difference are unimportant because they're not linked to other forms of difference and-- and exclusion. (Male participant 1)



Research in service of social and structural change

Applying an intersectional lens is described as providing the theoretical and methodological tools to make these inequalities visible, in order to address them.

Using intersectional methodologies is considered as extending beyond exploring marginalised social identities to assist in identifying ways of dismantling the systems of power and privilege that create marginality and vulnerability

Research in service of social and structural change

"Social identities intersect in real life—the study attempts to capture that. My work seeks to create social equities" (Participant 1).

"Evidence shows that, health systems often fall short of meeting the needs of certain population segments because of their structural or behavioural patterns of service delivery. Unlocking these barriers using innovative ways is our focus of our research." (Participant 2)

Intersectionality assists with making the invisible visible

Intersectionality provides a lens that can "help make visible the experiences of some groups in society" (participant 7)

"In research on GBV we need to understand race and class in relation to where people live, their access to transport at night, for example, their access to shelters, etc." (Participant 6)

By considering social identities together as opposed to in isolation of each other, it is much more likely that researchers can capture experiences more accurately and can inform actions more directly in terms of reducing inequalities, especially when the work directly links to policy and programmatic priorities.

"[W]hen we talk about experiences of black lesbian women within the health care system, we cannot understand the experiences of this particular group of women when we study the experiences of black women and the experiences of lesbian women separately.

The experiences of black women do not fully represent the experiences of black lesbian women, and the experiences of lesbian women do not fully represent the experiences of black lesbian women." (Participant 7)

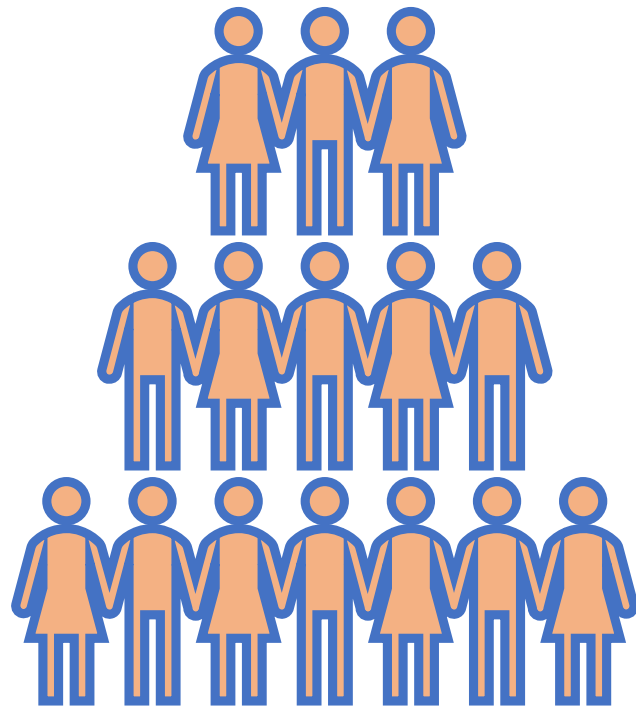
A personal commitment to intersectionality in research

Participants' accounts relate to how the personal experiences of researchers foster a particular sensitivity to identifying power disparities informed by intersecting social locations. This awareness contributes to their commitment to their research and the development of a nuanced analytical focus.

For some participants, their research interests and personal experiences are closely aligned, and it came through passionately in the interviews, for example, being influenced by a history of political struggle and then following a career using a political economy framework.

"I explore research through the capabilities lens. This is my approach to life too and is important when considering how to expand the multidimensional capabilities of those in society to enhance participation." (Participant 8)

Would I have been interested in disability if my [family member] had not been disabled, I'm not disabled myself... But I grew up with a disabled [family member], who would never have used that term. So, of course it made me look at things in a very different kind of way. (Participant 1)



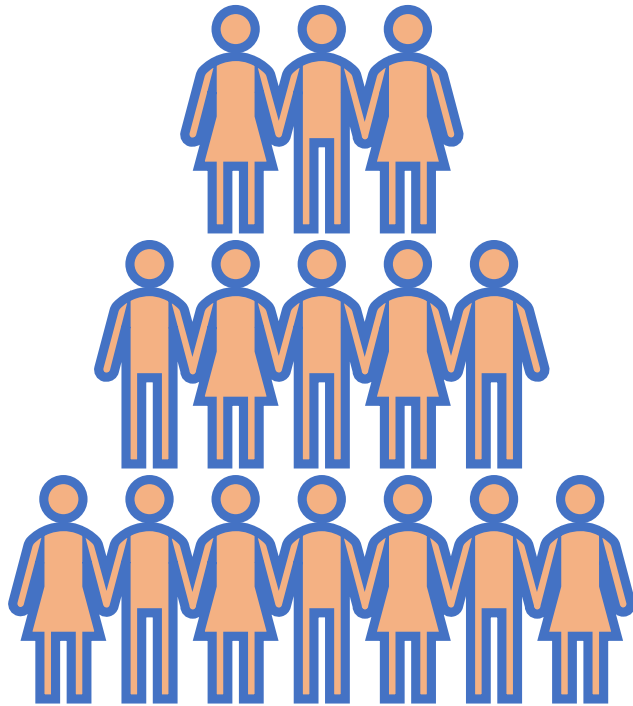
Challenges around which identities to focus on

Participants noted that the decision-making process around which identities receive prominence can be challenging.

“[A challenge is] the complexity on how best to conceptualise different social experiences – relevance and by whom” (Participant 5)

The identities researchers tend to focus on in their work, inadvertently contribute to and reinforce the idea of priority “building blocks”, namely race, socio-economic status and gender... for example...

Challenges around which identities to focus on



“Something is happening around what is valued and what is not valued [...]. Part of the problem with the idea of intersectionality I think is you can add up your little building blocks and the building blocks tend to always be the same (e.g., race, class and gender), but the question for me with those building blocks is what are they still obscuring and what is not added up and when people say I’ll take an intersectional lens what do they really mean and what’s really included?”

(Participant 1)

Practicing self- reflexivity

While most researchers acknowledged that their personal experiences and viewpoints may influence what they study, they equally state the importance of ensuring that these personal viewpoints add value and do not detract from their work. This is often achieved through the practice of self-reflexivity

“Self-reflexivity leads to a process of thinking how to understand someone else’s context, to not be judgmental, to think about your race, class biases etc.” (Participant 6)

“Being reflexive of my experiences gives me an opportunity to advance the agenda of studying these issues together.”

(Participant 2)

Conclusion

Methodological decision-making is influenced by the potential for research to advance social and structural change; the particular intersecting identities and experiences that require illuminating; conceptual refinement based on personal experiences; and the need to integrate self-reflexivity throughout the research process.

Intersectionality is more than an analytical frame, but speaks to a worldview and approach to conducting research; influenced in many instances by personal histories and experiences.

An intersectional orientation researchers adopt and sometimes embody, assists researchers to move beyond merely exploring marginalised social identities, but shift towards identifying ways of stripping down the systems of power and privilege that produce marginality and vulnerability

A photograph of a woman with a light-colored headscarf and glasses, looking down at a laptop screen. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent blue rectangle containing text. The background of the photo shows an outdoor setting with a brick wall and some greenery.

Integrated Report

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