INTERSECTIONALITY IN TECH 101
Intersectionality

is a critical and necessary concept to understand when developing effective programs to broaden the participation of women and girls in computing. This resource provides a background and overview of the concept, in addition to key readings and resources related to Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC)¹ who identify as women, girls, gender queer, and non-binary in STEM and computing.

¹ BIPOC is a term that has grown in popularity over the past decade. It is meant to ground the distinctive voices and experiences of minoritized groups and to be more inclusive of the diverse range of racial and ethnic populations in the United States. For more background on the origins of the acronym, take a look at The BiPOC project (thebipocproject.org).
Essential terms of INTERSECTIONALITY

Standpoint Epistemology:
The idea that what you know and believe (epistemology) is guided by who you are and your life experiences (standpoint).

Matrix of Domination:
A concept developed by sociologist Patricia Hill Collins that underscores the idea that one’s position in society is made up of multiple contiguous standpoints rather than just one singular standpoint or perspective.

Not all identities are perceived or treated equally within society. One’s unique set of multiple identities can determine how much (or little) power one can possess and experience within societal structures or with other individuals.

BIPOC Individuals:
Refers to self-identifying women, girls, gender queer, and non-binary individuals from racial and ethnic minority groups, including, but not limited to: Black/African-Americans, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian/Pacific Islanders, and Native Americans.

² Latinx is a gender-neutral term used to refer to a group of people or to a single person of Latin-American descent. For more information on this term, see Refinery29’s Gender Nation Glossary (https://www.refinery29.com/en-us/lgbtq-definitions-gender-sexuality-terms).

What is Intersectionality?
Intersectionality is a WAY OF THINKING that takes into consideration the perspectives and experiences of individuals from historically excluded groups.

An intersectional approach recognizes that one’s social location—oftentimes shaped by race, class, gender and other dimensions of who we are—creates multiple, INTERCONNECTED IDENTITIES AND DISTINCT EXPERIENCES.

Employing an Intersectional framework acknowledges that there are social systems in place that create BARRIERS AND CHALLENGES FOR SOME individuals, while simultaneously providing PRIVILEGE AND POWER FOR OTHERS.

While the idea originated from the scholarship of black women, an intersectional lens is an important tool in ADVANCING SOCIAL JUSTICE for all groups in today’s society.
A brief timeline of intersectionality

Mid-late 1800’s
During the first wave of feminism, the discourse and writings of black scholars including Sojourner Truth, Anna Julia Cooper, and Maria Stewart call attention to the experiences of black women that were shaped by race, class, and gender and were often different from middle-class white women’s experiences.

1970’s-1980’s
The scholarship and activism of black women and other women of color (bell hooks, Combahee River Collective, Gloria Anzaldua, and Patricia Hill Collins, for example) start to proliferate academic and community spaces. Their work engages important discussions around privilege, oppression, and identity politics both within and beyond their communities.

1989
Legal scholar Kimberle Crenshaw introduces the term intersectionality, advocating for a multidimensional approach to understand black women’s experiences over a “single-axis analysis.”³

2000’s
An intersectional approach becomes an important component of the landscape of diversity, equity and inclusion. Age, color, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, and other layers of identity are also examined in addition to race, class, and gender identities.

2020
The tragic deaths of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd usher in a global movement against anti-black racism and for social justice. At the core of that movement is a call to action for racial justice, and a renewed focus on how racism intersects with other forms of oppression, such as sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, and classism.

BIPOC individuals are regular and avid users of technology, but they lag behind in representation in computing education and in the technical workforce.

**BIPOC INDIVIDUALS FACE ADDITIONAL BARRIERS** related to their participation and engagement in computing and technology within K-12 and in higher education.

**WOMEN ONLY REPRESENTED 27% OF THE COMPUTING WORKFORCE IN 2022,** and BIPOC women made up a much smaller proportion of the computing field:

- **ASIAN WOMEN** represented just 7% of the computing workforce;
- **BLACK WOMEN** represented a mere 3% of the computing profession;
- **HISPANIC WOMEN** accounted for just 2% of the computing workforce.

**Achieving equity in the tech industry must be approached intersectionally:** race, class, gender, sexuality, and other key factors of identity shape experiences differently; and understanding those differences is critical to promoting diversity, inclusion and change for individuals who have been historically excluded from computing education and careers.
A Bibliography of Key Readings

For a deeper exploration into the core ideas and components of intersectionality, and to learn more about the experiences of BIPOC individuals in STEM and computing, we recommend the following readings and resources:


4. **Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Computer Science Education: A FRAMEWORK** The Kapor Center for Social Impact (2022)


7. **'Intersectionality' has become a hot-button topic in recent years. Here's what it means** (Blogpost) by Leah Asmelash (2023).


11. The Intersectionality Wars (Blogpost) by Joan Coaston (2019)


13. The Urgency of Intersectionality (Ted Talk by Kimberle Crenshaw)


15. True Diversity is Intersectional. (Blogpost) by Ellen K. Pao (2016).

Related NCWIT resources on intersectionality

Learning About Intersectionality: Videos That Spark Conversations
ncwit.org/resource/intersectionality-videos/

Technolochicas: A Critical Intersectional Approach Shaping the Color of Our Future
cacm.acm.org/magazines/2020/8/246359-technolochicas/abstract

Elevating Modern Figures: Dr. Jeremy Waisome and Dr. Kyla McMullen

An NCWIT Community Call to Action for Racial Justice
ncwit.org/blog/an-ncwit-community-call-to-action-for-racial-justice/

An NCWIT Community Call to Action on Racial Justice: January 2021 Update
ncwit.org/blog/an-ncwit-community-call-to-action-on-racial-justice-january-2021-update/

Interrupting Bias and Creating Inclusive Culture
ncwit.org/video/interrupting-bias-and-creating-inclusive-culture/

The Importance of Multiple Approaches to Intersectionality
https://ncwit.org/blog/the-importance-of-complexity-in-attending-to-intersectionality/

Accelerating Racial Equity Progress: Jonah Edelman
ncwit.org/video/accelerating-racial-equity-progress-jonah-edelman/

Intersectionality: How Do We Address Multiple Identities and Biases at Once

Colorism Bias in the Tech Industry
https://ncwit.org/resource/colorism/

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