

The Operationalizing Intersectionality Framework

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Intersectional approaches are needed in sport research and administration to create significant changes in access, participation, and leadership. The operationalizing intersectionality framework—graphically represented as a wheel with spokes and points of traction—offers a nonexhaustive, evolving structure that can facilitate contextual, deliberate actions to disrupt overlapping systems of oppression. The framework was assembled to guide E-Alliance, the gender equity in sport in Canada research hub, in embodying its commitment to intersectional approaches and designed for broader application to sport. Current gender equity efforts mostly continue to prioritize the knowledge and needs of White, middle–upper-class, nondisabled, not fat, heteronormative, binary, cisgender women and have yet to achieve parity. Acting meaningfully on commitments to intersectional approaches means focusing on how axes work together and influence each other. The framework can help advance cultural sport psychology and ultimately improve athletic well-being.

Keywords: embodied, equity, recreation

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Commitments to Action: Context of the Operationalizing Intersectionality Framework

The operationalizing intersectionality framework was assembled by the Operationalizing Intersectionality Working Group at E-Alliance¹ and designed for broad use by people with roles in organizing, administrating, or otherwise supporting athletes and sport.

Approaches that are intersectional consider the experience of overlapping, simultaneous systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 1989). Black feminist legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw coined the concept of intersectionality through her examination of several legal cases in which employers discriminated against Black women employees, but were not legally found to be discriminating on the separated grounds of race or sex. Crenshaw (1989) therefore argued the need for legal doctrine to take into account multiple facets of oppression—that is, racism and sexism—as having one whole, simultaneous effect on experience as opposed to the culmination of each separate aspect of identity. In other words, oppressions are not additive and ought not to be treated as such.

In the Working Group's context, gender equity in sport research and programming that took additive approaches to identity predominantly centered on White, cisgender, binary, nondisabled, not fat, women, and girls.² However, gender equity cannot be achieved in sport without centering on the experiences of women, girls, two-spirit, and nonbinary people who face overlapping systems of oppression (e.g., racialized women and disabled queer people). In gender equity in sport, additive approaches to identity have resulted in:

- Gender equity initiatives framed as projects to “include the other” and disproportionately benefit only the most privileged members of the group(s) they seek to include (e.g., middle- to upper-class cis-women in gender equity initiatives, or White gay cis-men in the 2SLGBTQ+ community);
- A dearth of research on women and girls who face multiple systems of oppression in accessing, participating in, or leading sport (Lim et al., 2021);
- Consistent application of a “women-first” model of equity wherein White, nondisabled, heterosexual, cis-women are prioritized as equity-deserving in sport “before” equity for “other” identity groups (e.g., people who are racialized, Indigenous, two-spirit, trans and/or nonbinary, disabled) can be considered; and
- A misuse of “gender” which tends to exclude nonbinary and transgenders and assumes homogeneity of nonbinary and transexperiences.

Intersectional approaches are needed in gender equity in sport research (Carter-Francique & Flowers, 2013, Kerr & Willson, 2021, Lavallée, 2020b, Michon et al., 2021, Trussell et al., 2021) to create meaningful changes to sport access, participation, and/or leadership for all people of all genders.

The Operationalizing Intersectionality Working Group was formed to guide E-Alliance in how to put intersectional approaches into practice in sport research, activities, and operations. The four core members of the working group—two faculty scholars who are members of the scientific committee and two staff

research associates—assembled operationalizing intersectionality framework for use within E-Alliance and for people involved in sport to apply in their own contexts. The group generated the framework through a collective compilation of our lived and academic learnings related to critical race studies, queer theory, embodiment theory, sociology, disability justice studies, physical cultural studies, anthropology, fat studies, and health studies. Informed through these academic disciplines and theories, and our experiences, we came together to collect our ideas and draw, refine, and revise the framework. Each author is deeply connected to community, bringing knowledge sharpened from sitting outside dominant systems.

While the framework was constructed specifically to embody the commitment to intersectionality in gender equity in sport research, the need for intersectional practices applies to all aspects of sport. It is a nonexhaustive, evolving framework that can support sport psychologists, researchers, and administrators in finding concrete ways to enact their commitments to inclusive, intersectional approaches, and make changes to normative methodologies and practices that continue to center on White, cis-gender, binary, nondisabled, not fat, men in sport. Decentering these prioritized positions must be extended into clinical practices and sport psychology in order to provide appropriate care or advice. This need is emphasized through the pursuit of cultural sport psychology, which has been described as an important avenue through which to incorporate clinical praxis considerations of how individuals' multiple social identities differentially impact their access to and support within sport, their sport performance, or their overall senses of well-being and belonging in sport (Schinke et al., 2019). The psychological is connected to the sociocultural through marginalized athletes' experiences, as they navigate social power systems, and links further to the psychologists who may offer differential service and support to an athlete toward fulfilling their potential. Attending sport psychologists can affirm and recognize athletes' lived experiences of microaggressions or marginalization, or they may exacerbate the problems by participating in these same insidious systems, not least through "treating all athletes equally." In particular, microaggressions cause harms and demonstrate the barriers athletes outside dominant systems may experience in their athletic pursuits or even in accessing athletic spaces (see Gearity & Henderson Metzger, 2017; Lin et al., 2016; Williams, 2020). Furthermore, understandings of what, for example, an embodied phenomenon—an injury or pain—means and what should be done about it may differ depending on an athletes' relationship to dominant power structures present in sport (e.g., how practitioners react or have reacted to an athlete's pain may vary; the lived experience of the pain or injury itself may vary; experiences of trauma may influence the ways pain or injury are experienced). Incorporating intersectional approaches to psychological praxis can limit the harm done, facilitate safer sport spaces for athletes, and foster an athlete's relationship with their body.

In other advising contexts, such as in education, affirming and supporting students' identities and experiences were positively correlated with well-being, belonging, and performance (Powell, Demetriou, & Fisher, 2013). Regrettably, deployment of such supportive practices (e.g., microaffirmations) on their own does not appear to be a viable solution to the problem of intersectional oppressions; rather, practices such as microaffirmations are the product of deeper cultural, space, and sport community transformations. "Solutions" cannot be simply added to the

current power structures that cause athletes such egregious harm and decreased performance. This framework therefore lays out movements toward taking apart disrupting and dismantling power structures to make room for the contextual changes that can foster supportive sport practices and environments. The operationalizing intersectionality framework is a guiding tool that can facilitate intersectional approaches to the practice of sport psychology.

The Importance of Intersectional Approaches and Action in Sport and Sport Research

Research has long shown that physical activity, including organized sport, contributes to physical, psychological, and social well-being (Warburton & Bredin, 2017). Given these benefits, every individual should have access to quality physical activity and sport opportunities, but we also know that opportunities for sport vary considerably across social positions.

Recent literature reviews undertaken by E-Alliance scientific committee members (e.g., Joseph et al., 2020, Lavallée, 2020a, Peers & McGuire-Adams, 2021) suggested that girls and women, disabled people, newcomers, people with lower incomes, and members of gender and sexual minority communities (among others) participate in physical activity and sport at far lower rates than those whose embodiments match the norms systematically privileged through power relations in sport. Current sport systems center White athlete, men, identification within the gender binary, heteronormativity, and secularity and are designed for the experiences of cis-gender, nondisabled, not fat, middle–upper-class, European-descended settlers (Bauman et al., 2012; Blodgett et al., 2017; Joseph et al., 2012). Those existing outside these privileged categories are marginalized and excluded, as Ray (2014) illustrated through her analysis of the lack of physical activity among middle-class Black women. As a result of these imbalanced power relations, Brown (2015) noted the “bodies of women and/or racialized minorities become seen as ‘space invaders’ when they move into domains that have historically been dominated by white male bodies” (p. 8).

A prominent contemporary example of systematic exclusion observed in sport is the case of such athletes as Caster Semenya (see Mahomed, 2019), who faced race- and gender-based discrimination in her sport. In tracing the geopolitical politics of gender testing in the Olympics over time, Bohuon (2015) expands on the particular confluences of racism and misogyny that have resulted in the controversy surrounding the talented athlete and several other prominent racialized women athletes, articulating that the reasons for the scrutiny of Semenya’s body and outstanding performance were not merely concerns about fairness or doping. Rather, long-standing racist understandings of “a woman” and how to perform “femininity” as well as intertwined geopolitical Olympic tensions between nation-states in the Global North and Global South are present. Ongoing ideals of White femininity form the standards to which elite women athletes must conform in order to not raise gender suspicions in their success, and “Semenya ‘has performed gender badly’ . . . [by] not represent[ing] traditional normative standards of femininity” (Bohuon, 2015, p. 966). Racially charged geopolitics and racism are parts of the backdrop through which Semenya’s critics

exert extra scrutiny on her and other racialized women athletes' bodies (and respective genders more specifically). Here, the confluence of anti-Black racism and misogyny (misogynoir) is at once observed not as additive but simultaneous. Semenya's critics continue to center White, cis-gender women athletes' bodies by conceiving of "fairness" and the limits of "femininity" within such embodied frameworks. Meanwhile, Black, cisgender women athletes' bodies are questioned, made suspect; such athletes' experiences are ignored, excluded, and pushed to the margins. Furthermore, Litchfield et al. (2018) demonstrated how the notion of the Black female athlete as "other" is reinforced in virtual spaces through their analysis of Serena Williams's social media coverage during the 2015 Wimbledon games in which Williams faced gender questioning, accusations of performance-enhancing drug use, and other forms of anti-Black misogyny (see also Razack & Joseph, 2020, for their analysis of misogynoir in sport media portrayals of Naomi Osaka). Black women are excessively negatively scrutinized in sport.

According to Lim et al. (2021), intersectionality has mainly been mobilized in sport research to qualitatively investigate varying axes of marginalization beyond sex/gender, with a special focus on race and ethnicity in the context of sport participation. This literature corpus examined how varying intersections of social categories impacted individuals' opportunities to participate in sport. The majority of qualitative articles show the invisibility or negative experiences of racialized women in physical activity and sport participation. Some researchers, like Gearity and Henderson Metzger (2017), demonstrate how the intersectionality of multiple factors of marginalization—such as race, gender identity, sexual orientation, and religion—increases microaggressions in the coach–athlete relationship. All examined studies illustrate how intersectionality theory may enable us to further understand the complex phenomenon of multiple interlocking systems of oppression and privilege shaped by intersections of individuals' social positionalities (Lim et al., 2021). Intersectionality teaches us that oppression is seldom the result of only one system of oppression and in order to understand the complexity of lived experiences, we need to focus on how axes work together and influence each other (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 2). Based on their recent literature review on the operationalization of intersectionality in sport and physical activity, Lim et al. (2021) argue that intersectionality is a necessary and useful concept to apply to better understand the observed disparities in the sport sector. The experiences of people marginalized by overlapping systems of oppression can be more clearly articulated and challenged through an intersectional lens rather than taking an additive approach to identity.

Theoretical Considerations: Critical Inquiry and Praxis

In a context in which "intersectionality" is often appropriated through a "set of discourses and disciplinary practices [which] evacuate critical race theory from the contemporary apparatus of intersectionality and marginalize racialized intersectional knowledge producers in current academic debates and spaces" (Bilge, 2015, p. 9), it is necessary to return to its Black feminist roots. Remember,

intersectionality emerged from the Black feminist activist movement in which Black women workers confronted the situation where their needs fell through the cracks of antiracist social movements, feminism, and workers' unions (Crenshaw, 1989). The activist origins of intersectionality are important to emphasize since, as Cho et al. (2013, p. 795) pointed out, "what intersectionality does rather than what intersectionality is" form core of this approach. Social justice calls on us to put ideas into practice to actually change power structures.

The work we present in the following pages is created in the vein of intersectionality as a form of critical inquiry and praxis with an emphasis on the latter. In this context, praxis refers to "the ways in which people, either as individuals or as a part of a group, produce, draw upon, or use intersectional frameworks in their daily lives" (Hill Collins & Bilge, 2016, p. 32). As Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) explained,

popular understanding of intersectionality underemphasizes the practices that involve criticizing, rejecting, and/or trying to fix the social problems that come with complex social inequalities. Critical praxis also constitutes an important feature of intersectional inquiry—one that is both attentive to intersecting power relations and essentially vital for resisting social inequality. (p. 32)

We therefore propose an embodied approach to intersectionality, which means that researchers, sport psychologists, recreation managers, and other stakeholders in the sport community and system—especially people experiencing multiple forms of privilege (e.g., White, man, cisgender, heterosexual, middle class, nondisabled, not fat)—can undertake a journey to challenge the status quo and transform power relations in their own everyday practices. The changes we enact have the potential to impact the sport environment in order to make it more welcoming by eroding and dismantling systems of oppression from within. As Hill Collins and Bilge (2016) concluded, "intersectionality is a tool that we can all use in moving toward a more just future" (p. 204).

While there has been considerable expansion and development of intersectionality theory (for more on the genealogy, origins, and uptake of intersectionality, please see Bilge, 2013; Matsuda, 1987; or Valdes et al., 2002), there is still limited research regarding its operationalization (Atewologun et al., 2016; Ressa et al., 2017). Despite the popularity of intersectionality as a theoretical approach, researchers have not dedicated the same energy to developing corresponding embodied methods, nor, by extension, practices (Nash, 2008, 2019). This paper, therefore, contributes to advancing the body of work on intersectionality studies.

An Embodied Approach: The Operationalizing Intersectionality Framework

After several evolutions and rounds of discussion, the Operationalizing Intersectionality Working Group arrived at the operationalizing intersectionality framework, Figure 1 below. Earlier versions of this figure and information about it have appeared in the E-Alliance "Welcome to Intersectional Research Approaches" (Keyser-Verreault et al., 2020) request for proposals of companion

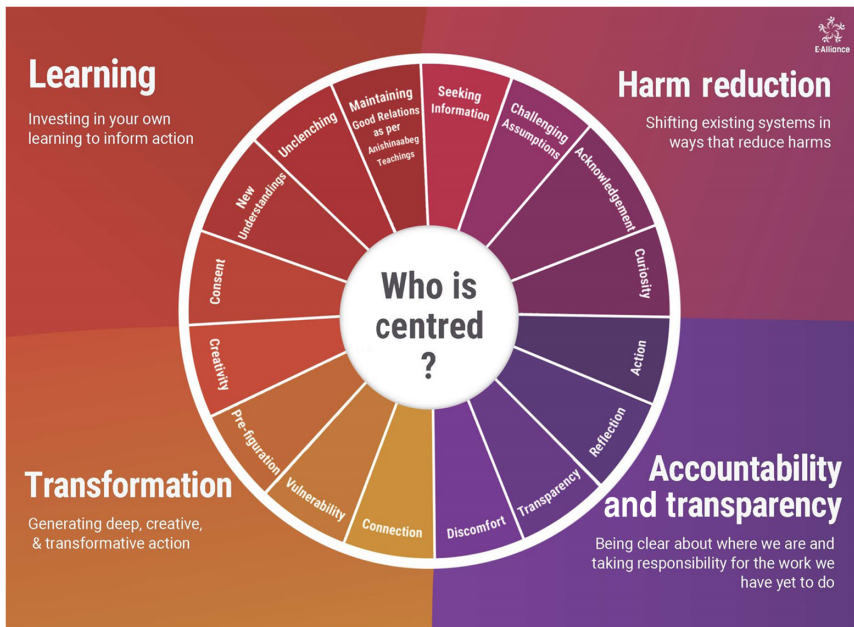


Figure 1 — Operationalizing intersectionality framework.

documents and the Sport Information Resource Centre’s blog (Kriger et al., 2021). To presume any framework, describing intersectional approaches is ever done runs contrary to Hill-Collins and Bilge’s (2016) note that “intersectionality itself is constantly under construction” (p. 31), and the updated framework presented here is a testament to how the operationalizing intersectionality framework evolves and is refined over time and with further thinking and use.

The operationalizing intersectionality framework takes the graphical representation of a wheel with spokes. The wheel encompasses four quadrants, understood as points of traction, each one a necessary element of sustainable intersectional approaches. Starting at the top left and following clockwise, the four points of traction are: (a) learning, (b) harm reduction, (c) accountability and transparency, and (d) transformation. At the center of the wheel framework lies the wheel hub asking the question of “who is centred?” Spokes, representing individual practices, connect the hub to the outer rim.

The next sections move readers through elaborations on these framework components. The operationalizing intersectionality framework is intended to facilitate and deepen embodied intersectional approaches to sport research and programming and designed for flexibility through practice to evolve or adapt to a variety of contexts. Each member of the Operationalizing Intersectionality Working Group brought embodied richness to the framework’s creation, but there are many more perspectives needed to shape and contextualize intersectional approaches. There are unlimited opportunities to engage meaningfully with intersectionality.

Why the Wheel?

There are several key principles that inspired the visualization of the operationalizing intersectionality framework as a wheel:

1. *Traction and momentum.* Traction and momentum are needed in order to build movement. As wheels make contact with the ground and start spinning, they gain traction, become faster, and generate more force. The more points of traction with which an individual engages in the operationalizing intersectionality framework, and the more individuals who join the movement, the more momentum toward advancing intersectional approaches is gained. For example, if one team psychologist starts by reading a blog about ways to affirm gender (e.g., adopting gender neutral terms for groups of people) and another colleague listens to a podcast about the impact of racial microaggressions (e.g., coaches mispronouncing racialized peoples' names), they might join together to advocate for team coaches to pronounce and use athletes' names and pronouns that the athletes prefer, draft more inclusive policy language, or share what they have learned with more members of their team. They may become motivated to learn more, to listen more, or to gain more cultural humility.
2. *Nonlinear growth and movement.* Operationalizing intersectionality is dynamic and evolving; it cannot be a static endeavor. Welcoming embodied diversity is not a matter of checking boxes on a list; rather, it is steady transformational change on individual, organizational, and societal levels because there are always more relationships to build, more ideas to embrace, and more actions to take. A dedication to intersectional approaches means ongoing learning; the work is never finished. Since there are no definitive start or end points to operationalizing intersectionality, the graphical representation also needs to communicate that folks could be at any level or area of engagement with intersectional approaches already and use the framework to deepen their connections. The graphical representation of the framework therefore demonstrates the cyclical, ongoing growth, and nonlinear movement that takes place to operationalize intersectionality and invites users to engage from any starting point.
3. *Relationship to systems.* The wheel and its spokes put emphasis on an individual's relationship to broader systems and their ability to disrupt and dismantle systems of oppression. By highlighting the relationship between those who are centered (at the wheel's hub), individual practices in the spokes, and the impact these have on the wheel's movement, the operationalizing intersectionality framework supports reflective action and encourages individuals to recognize how they can act to disrupt systems of oppression from their respective, contextual position(s). For example, in working with a racialized woman athlete experiencing mental health challenges, one might consider the broader context of her specific communities, acknowledge existing racism, sexism, and ableism she has experienced, and learn how she is empowered or not to shift the boundaries she operates within. The hub and spokes help in refusing to see psychological challenges in isolation.
4. *Connection.* While each point of traction is useful in taking intersectional approaches, traction is needed at all points to transform systems. The

movement of the wheel depends on the connections among points of traction, individual actions and commitments, and between individuals.

It is important to note that the philosophies of the wheel are prominent among many cultural onto-epistemologies, despite appearing somewhat new to the linear logics of capitalism and colonialism in which sport and sport research are embedded. Especially in the context of living on Turtle Island (colonially known as North America), it is important to recognize and acknowledge the long-standing Indigenous knowledge and teachings of the medicine wheel that have been threatened, ignored, marginalized, and co-opted through colonization and ongoing coloniality. While the graphical representation of the operationalizing intersectionality framework as a wheel was not directly derivative of Indigenous medicine wheels, there are similarities in the philosophies and much on which the framework stands to improve by learning from Indigenous leaders and scholars. Dapice (2006) described the medicine wheel as a symbol of wholeness which “includes cycles, seasons, and passages, but also assumes that change can and will occur” (p. 251)—the operationalizing intersectionality framework aspires to be similarly principled.

Who Is Centered?

Indigenous, Black, queer, fat, and disability justice scholarship and activism teach us that justice for everybody in sport can be advanced through centering, prioritizing, and deeply valuing the knowledge of those who are marginalized by overlapping systems of oppression instead of continuing to prioritize and deeply value only the knowledge of those usually positioned at the center. For example, prioritize marginalized peoples’ knowledge by using the terms community members use to refer to their community. The operationalizing Intersectionality framework inverts Hill Collins’s (1990/2009) matrix of domination (see also Sisneros et al., 2008, for a model that centers privilege) which shows the position of those privileged through overlapping systems of oppression at the center and those oppressed through the same systems at the margins. The operationalizing intersectionality framework has the question “who is centered?” at its core to be intentional about centering people who are systematically marginalized; anyone practicing intersectional approaches must first ask themselves who their research/initiative/program/clinic/policy centers. More specifically, this question asks whose knowledge is not trusted, who is not directing the initiative, to whom are sport researchers, psychologists, and administrators not listening, and who is not included.

There are several key reasons why it is necessary to always start with the question ‘Who is centered?’. We expand on three key reasons below.

We Ask “Who Is Centered?” to Avoid Treating People as Objects to Be “Fixed”

Sport researchers and practitioners aspiring to inclusion tend to objectify marginalized people facing multiple systems of oppression that prevent them from participating in organized movement as “Others” in inclusion discourses (Tink et al., 2020). As people who are already centered in sport, sport researchers and practitioners often understand their benevolent duty as “fixing” or “helping” those at the margins (Tink et al., 2020) and see “their role within institutionalized requirements or cultural preferences for objectivity and expert inviolability, which

are often imbued with the traditions of the hypermasculine, White settler” (Joseph & Kriger, 2021, p. 9). This approach does not lead to intersectionality—it leads to enforced conformity to current sport practices and sport embodiments. The path toward intersectional approaches is to decenter the knowledge already in power in sport and re-center the knowledge of those at the margins. People facing overlapping systems of oppression in sport need to be listened to and centered, which is more sustainable than a supposed benevolent practice of inclusivity that provides for “others” but maintains their marginality or partial inclusion.

We Ask “Who Is Centered?” to Emphasize the Specific Actions Sport Researchers and Practitioners Can Take to Intervene in Oppressive Systems

The question reinforces that some people are impacted by overlapping systems of oppression (such as racism, sexism, ableism, genderism, heteronormativity) and reminds users of the operationalizing intersectionality framework that a crucial strategy toward intersectional approaches is to de-center the people in power and instead center the people, scholars, activists, communities, whom they have historically marginalized. The framework emphasizes that it is the systems around the center that must be addressed, and that because individual people uphold systems, there are actions individuals can take at any point of the wheel to support centering the previously marginalized peoples and the transformational work to follow. Any action can contribute toward dismantling overlapping systems of oppression and building momentum for larger, major changes. Moreover, part of the impetus behind the framework’s configuration is to show how intersectional approaches must also consider the dynamism of an individual’s identities through space and over time. If an individual is centered in some ways or in some spaces and continually marginalized in others, there may be differing, contextually based options available to dismantle systems of oppression. For example, a sport psychologist may have significant power over athletes but experience marginalization as the only queer mother, or only racialized woman on a coaching staff. Imploring leaders to demonstrate vulnerability and be publicly transparent about gender and racial demographics as well as goals for future hiring practices could transform the organization. The operationalizing intersectionality framework offers options for supportive action that can be fluid in accordance with who is centered.

We Ask “Who Is Centered?” Because, if We Are Not Specific and Intentional About Who Is at the Center, Any Initiatives Will Benefit Only the Most Privileged Members of the Group(s) We Are Seeking to Include

Naming who is at the center renders visibility about which systems of oppression an initiative aims to disrupt and ultimately benefits anyone who experiences the impacts of any of the systems of oppression in focus. Not engaging from the onset with and naming, for example, disability or race, will leave the center unspoken and result in the vast majority of work systematically centering around White, nondisabled people. Not explicitly naming nonbinary and/or transpeople will result in the centering of cisgender and binary gender.

Asking “who is centered” makes explicit the decisions those in charge have made with regard to who they wish to take part. If left ambiguous or vague, initiatives

such as those for “women and girls” will tend to benefit only the women and girls who do not face the impacts of many overlapping systems of oppression. As Joseph and Lavallée ([forthcoming](#)) note, gender equity in sport in Canadian initiatives have largely focused on White, nondisabled, cisgender, binary women, and girls—and still have yet to reach parity. Using the opportunity of asking “who is centered” to be explicit about who needs to be involved and which systems of oppression sport research, programming, or policy will prioritize for dismantling has the potential to move access forward for a much broader range of people, and in particular, for those who have the least welcoming and affirming access in the existing system.

Spokes

The work of embodying intersectional approaches that promote social justice is relational and interpersonal ([Ellison & Langhout, 2020](#)); there are commitments that individuals can make in their own respective embodied practices to contribute to and facilitate that relational, interpersonal work.

The spokes of the wheel for the operationalizing intersectionality framework are individual practices and commitments that are important parts of sustainable and effective intersectional approaches (see [Table 1](#) below for the spoke list and descriptions). The spokes function to “true” and support a wheel while it is spinning, transferring weight between the hub and rim. Similarly, the individual practices and commitments steady movement toward embodied intersectional approaches and support actions among the points of traction. They facilitate and support the cultural and systemic changes needed to dismantle overlapping systems of oppression. Also like a wheel, the more traction gained and the faster the wheel spins, the more blurred the spokes become; as movements toward intersectional approaches gain traction, the more practices and commitments overlap and flow into each other.

The beneficial capacities necessary to correct unbalanced power relations, such as good communication, respect, trust, good faith, integrity, and humility, can be built through the continued practice of spoke commitments listed below (e.g., acknowledging the impact of one’s actions, acting to address injustices, connecting with impacted communities to build relationships, offering transparency to decision making, so everyone knows who was involved and how a given decision came about). These capacities are relational and cannot be achieved on an individual level, but they can be facilitated as interim results of simultaneously practicing several spoke commitments. Practicing spoke commitments can help strengthen those relational, interpersonal capacities and facilitate a foundation from which to enact more just and mutually beneficial relations.

Each commitment, what it means, and how it is embodied could be expanded upon (and indeed, in some cases has been). It is the authors’ hope that scholars and practitioners will jointly take up the call to expand upon each, and extend and evolve the list.

Points of Traction

Four nonhierarchical points of traction underlie the operationalizing intersectionality framework: (a) learning, (b) harm reduction, (c) accountability and transparency, and (d) transformation.

Table 1 List and Descriptions of Spoke Commitments

Spoke commitment	Description
Seeking information	Sensing, reading, observing, and listening transform ideas. Practitioners must find ways to seek out, absorb, and apply knowledge that has emerged from communities that are centered.
Curiosity	Deep learning begins with unlearning. Questioning taken for granted assumptions, and actively seeking other ways of knowing and understanding shifts in how we relate to others.
Action	Beginning to make movements and changes will be based on new understandings. On our way to large transformations, we can take many small actions that reduce harm within current systems.
Acknowledgement	Truth will “lay the foundation for the important question of reconciliation” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. vi). Openly recognizing current and past harms, and differing privileges, barriers, and limitations is a precursor to change at individual and organizational levels.
Reflection	Considering one’s embodiment, position in social systems, and how actions or words may inadvertently reproduce these hierarchies. Goel (2015, p. 25) describes this as: “questioning one’s own position, i.e., interrogating one’s privileges and biases, in order to think about those who are easily ignored.”
Transparency	Being open about current and historical complicity with systems of power must be paired with resisting temptations to overstate one’s desires, actions, and commitments to make changes. Publicly acknowledging changes which you aspire to achieve, but have not. Being forthcoming and providing information that is as accurate as possible so that individuals can make informed decisions about how and if they engage (in particular, about personal or organizational decision-making processes, influences, factors, considerations, positions with regard to dismantling systems of oppressions, and any structural/political limitations).
Discomfort	Learning about one’s privileges and one’s harmful impacts can be uncomfortable. So can being decentered. Working on ways to stay present through this discomfort, and to not retreat into recentering when pain or embarrassment arise is essential.
Connection	Seeking and initiating relationships with individuals and communities who are underrepresented in an organization and leadership team should happen in nonextractive ways. Rather than asking something from them, show up to learn from and volunteer at their events. Investing in their communities and in reciprocal relations in consensual ways will require investment over long periods of time.

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Spoke commitment	Description
Vulnerability	Claiming one's vulnerability means acknowledging not-knowing, accepting mutual dependency with other beings, dismantling self-serving binaries and hierarchies while "reflecting on power sharing and common humanity" (Joseph & Kriger, 2021, p. 6). These acts can be challenging for leaders who see themselves as experts. Yet, it is crucial to be humble, apologize when appropriate, and accept criticism as a rare and generous gift.
Prefiguration	Approaching transformation as though we are already living in a transformed world requires thinking and acting in justice-oriented ways. Within academia, Boggs described prefiguration as "the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision-making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal" (1977, p. 100, as cited in Yates, 2015, p. 2). Prefiguration refuses the idea that the ends justify the means; instead, the means should enact the desired ends.
Consent	Checking in with each other in an always-ongoing practice requires transparency, ensuring that all parties are as informed as possible about possible choices and repercussions. Consent involves curiosity and vulnerability by actively affirming all choices in relation to another person's continued involvement and collective decisions moving forward. Consent requires an explicit acknowledgement of how unequal power relations can serve to reduce choice, or make exercising choice feel precarious for some. It is a prefigurative act for transformational change, a step to building meaningful connections, and harm reduction actions.
Creativity	Collectively building something other than what we currently have will make working like an artist essential (see D'Andrea, 2019, for example). We must celebrate bold attempts at new ways of being together, knowing that not all of them will come to fruition, but all will lead to learning.
New understandings	Consensually ³ engaging with information from community leaders to transform understandings about a community's embodied experiences, challenges, issues, and demands. Taking in a wide array of perspectives, especially within a community (i.e., not treating social identity communities as monoliths) will require engaging with that community's books, academic and news articles, documentaries, visual art, comedy, podcasts, speakers, movement practices, and social media (such as memes and videos). We must learn not only from the lived experiences of individuals, but also from community-respected knowledge holders within and outside of academia (including activists, artists, elders, and scholars).

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

Spoke commitment	Description
Unclenching	Unclenching is an embodied phenomenon that is challenging to describe. Unclenching involves a kind of onto-epistemological softening that facilitates a person sitting with another's reality. It is what happens when a person opens themselves to the possibility of another's reality being as accurate as their own instead of immediately falling into binary logics of "right" and "wrong," "true" or "false." Unclenching contrasts with defensiveness or "hardening one's heart." It is an embodied sense of "letting one's guard down" or welcoming different realities and understandings of the world even if they are prospectively experienced as affronting.
Maintaining good relations (as per Anishinaabeg teachings)	To maintain good relations is to act in the world keeping in mind and heart the concept of "all my relations"; this is an Indigenous concept described by Wagamese (2013) in part as "a recognition of the fact that we are all one body moving through time and space together." In Dr. Nicole Bell's (2014) <i>Teaching by the Medicine Wheel: An Anishinaabe Framework for Indigenous Education</i> , she concludes, "The fundamental concepts of wholeness, inter-relationship, interconnectedness and balance/respect are valuable for all" (p. 16). To commit to these values means to reflect on our participation in the world in order to share mutual, respectful, ethical relationships.
Challenging assumptions	Accepting the status quo as spatially and historically contextual and therefore mutable or fluctuating allows for disputing all presuppositions. Asking questions about the underlying, often unspoken premises which act as the foundation of a given situation or argument makes space for different conclusions to be drawn.

Many of those involved with sport express commitments to such values as “diversity” and “inclusion,” values which, if meaningfully realized, necessitate disrupting systems of oppression and recentering marginalized people in systems of power toward better access and more just sport. However, many sport administrators and researchers describe their challenge of not knowing how to disrupt and tend to request a standard checklist of actions to complete in order to become “diverse” and “inclusive.” The tension here is that although some checklists can be helpful for implementing short-term harm reduction strategies, the systems of oppression that create these harms are kept in place through many mechanisms on many levels and cannot simply be solved by enacting a set checklist. The term “disrupt” may seem to some people as a force of destruction or of “taking away,” but it is through means of disruption, disturbance, and dismantling that we produce better, more inclusive designs; in other words, disruption is productive and creative. Hill-Collins (1990/2009) described four, interrelated domains of power that comprise and keep oppressive structures in place: structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal. These domains of power reflect the existence of structural elements of society (e.g., government, schools, institutions, law) through which individuals enact oppression and exert domination through policy/behavioral regulation, sociocultural systems, and everyday relationships and actions. We designed the points of traction as nonexhaustive frames to help guide thinking on what possibilities might exist for an individual to disrupt power within each domain, at every level, and change the culture, actions, relationships, policies, practices, and structures that keep systems of oppression firmly planted as part of sport systems.

Each point of traction emphasizes an individual’s ability to disrupt systems of oppression by taking a variety of different approaches simultaneously, categorically, or sequentially—in whatever ways start to build traction and momentum.

Learning is an important piece to any intersectional approach and refers to investing in broadening education in order to inform changes in action. There are ways to learn that run the gamut of accessibility and formality. In this context, learning is a concerted effort to better understand experiences, terminology, key concerns, arguments, histories, circumstances, and relationships that are salient to a given community’s complex realities. Learning can take place through different methods: sensing; experiencing; participating; reflecting; searching for trusted sources on the internet; watching films or videos; viewing images; reading academic and nonacademic works; conversing; or attending a workshop, lecture, seminar, game, or match. Everyone learns differently and has access to different learning materials and modalities. There is no one way to learn about intersectional approaches, but each way does have in common a desire to adopt better practices through seeking further knowledge.

Learning can include such actions as reading or connecting outside your discipline, listening to marginalized people (including scholars and activists), and joining in community with marginalized people where appropriate. For example, learning can include a commitment to prioritize all of the sessions on race, and talks by racialized scholars, at every conference you attend over the next 2 years. It could mean taking a year to make your way through extraordinary reading lists (e.g., <https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/ein-hymchwil/reading-lists/intersectionality-reading-list> or specific to sport psychology, a diversity resource

list from the Association for Applied Sport Psychology (https://appliedsportpsych.org/site/assets/files/13591/aasp_diversity_resource_list_7_3_16pdf.pdf), podcasts (e.g., <https://guides.library.utoronto.ca/IndigenousBookClub/podcasts>), or pedagogical materials (e.g., <https://www.concordia.ca/news/stories/2021/04/19/launched-a-database-of-anti-racist-educational-videos-and-learning-materials.html>) already curated by subject matter experts.

Harm reduction involves shifting the existing systems in ways that reduce harm. The term “harm reduction” is borrowed from decades of public health activism specifically regarding substance use. Harm reduction is the evidence-based philosophy used to advocate for supervised injection sites, which lessen the harms associated with substance use (e.g., overdose, sexually transmitted disease, or bloodborne infections), so people who use substances are more safe. Part of the philosophy behind harm reduction is to acknowledge that harm exists and seek ways to reduce harmful effects and improve safety and well-being.

To gain traction for intersectional approaches using a harm reduction strategy is to recognize that the path of transformational change may be longer than we would like. In the interim, we have an ethical obligation to minimize ongoing harms that current systems are producing, so as to support well-being, remove barriers, and minimize existing inequities. Actions that fit in this point of traction work to support marginalized people in gaining access, services, community, material resources, and other means to make navigating, negotiating, resisting, and surviving these systems easier. Colloquially, the harm reduction point of traction is working “within the system” to lessen harmful impacts, while moving toward more long-term foundational change. On a practical level, harm reduction can look like checklists or policy recommendations that connect directly to changes in practice, such as the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport’s resources supporting inclusion of transgender athletes in sporting organizations (<https://cces.ca/sites/default/files/content/docs/pdf/cces-transinclusionpolicyguidance-e.pdf>).

Complementary to a harm reduction approach and an especially exciting point of traction, transformation refers to generating deep, creative, transformational action. Transformation involves working collectively—within grassroots communities or at the level of major social systems—to fundamentally change existing harmful and exclusive systems and/or to create novel, creative alternatives to these systems and structures. Transformation is the process of cocreating the just worlds in which we want to live and in which we can all flourish. Contemporary examples of transformational work are grassroots organizations led by those often marginalized within Western sporting systems. For example, Hill Run Club (<https://www.hillstudiot.com/hillrunclub>), led by Allison Hill, centers Black women’s wellness in relation to bigger bodies and anticolonial movement.

One of the most accessible and integral points of traction is accountability and transparency. Accountability and transparency refer to being clear about where we are and taking responsibility for the work we have yet to do to advance intersectional social justice. Many individuals and organizations communicate claims that indicate they support all kinds of individuals and communities, but this can be dangerous and harmful when their practices fall short. As Ellison and Langhout (2020) attest, “building intersectional movements requires accountability for oppressive acts so that intersectional solidarity can flourish” (p. 951); without organizations taking accountability for their role(s) in enacting systemic

oppressions, they can contribute to significant harms. Without being transparent about where their practices are actually at, organizations can generate deep community mistrust and the stifling of conversations and learnings, all of which work against the stated goal of greater organizational inclusion. It is important to be transparent about the realities of a space, decision-making processes, exclusions, and impacts while simultaneously making movements to improve them. It is also important to be accountable to the communities served through sharing research findings, program ideas, processes, and decisions with the communities each will impact and to listen to community members' thoughts, feelings, reactions, and feedback.

Relatedly, accountability also means taking responsibility and apologizing for mistakes when appropriate,⁴ and practicing taking criticism as a generous, rare, and important gift. When a person—especially a person who is marginalized or otherwise harmed—spends their energy, time, and other resources to elucidate what needs changing, their notes ought to be taken as a generous, labor-intensive contribution of their knowledge toward improving the space.

Each of these points of traction represents excellent areas in which to gain momentum for intersectional approaches. Start in whichever area(s) are available to you, and, as you gain traction, the wheel will spin faster, bringing these approaches into conversation with one another and opening up new, context-specific opportunities and pathways that can expand and deepen this model.

Discussion and Future Implications

The knowledge needed to take intersectional approaches to sport research and practice has long been systematically absent or otherwise deprioritized from education and training. Whole schools of thoughts, such as Black feminist, queer, Indigenous, and disability justice approaches have been marginalized, particularly in disciplines such as kinesiology (Nachman et al., 2021) where many sport psychologists might get their start. As a result, dedicated researchers and practitioners often do not learn about intersectionality and how to take intersectional approaches; they fall into the comfort of binaries and centering those who have previously benefitted from the system. There is a need for guidance on how to make first or next movements toward welcoming all embodied people. Even among those well-versed in intersectional scholarship, the challenges of refuting binaries and practicing embodied intersectional approaches remain salient, and ought to be addressed individually and collectively. The operationalizing intersectionality framework offers contextually adaptable ideas to support moving thoughts and commitments to action, practices, and transformation in sport psychology research and practice.

One important and promising element of the framework is that it directly addresses cultural change through practice. Management literature on gender equity has long theorized that organizational change follows a linear path from structural changes to political changes and then finally result in cultural changes (Brière & Martinez, 2011, Mukhopadhyay et al., 2006), observing in most cases that, despite some changes in the structure and politics of an organization, the culture remained unchanged and exclusionary. Instead of relying on this model of

linear change, the operationalizing intersectionality framework encourages everyday embodied practices, which aim to precipitate individual actions that change the culture, directly attempting to intervene interrelational reproduction of systems of oppression within sporting, academic, and organizational cultures. In doing so, overall change may potentially occur much faster, as cultural changes are necessary to enable meaningful structural and political changes. These changes must all occur for any change to gain traction.

Practically, there are several key applications of the framework for sport researchers and practitioners. For researchers, this tool can be applied to constructing intersectional approaches in such areas as research, participant and team recruitment, methods and methodologies, partnerships and collaborations, topics/priorities and their frameworks, data, ethics and consent practices, publishing/presenting/sharing research, and many more. The operationalizing intersectionality framework can facilitate brainstorming about how to improve in these areas and act to take first or next forays into intersectional approaches to research by asking: “Who is centered?” Practitioners can also use this framework as a tool to guide their intersectional approaches to client care, programming, policies, and spaces as well as make monitoring and evaluation more precise and aligned with embodied inclusion goals. Sport psychologists in particular can apply the framework toward service communications and marketing, seminar topic selection, advice for athletes, return-to-play guidance for athletes, facilitator and participant recruitment, and clinical issues with athletes. The framework will help guide thinking and build understanding of what overlapping systems of oppression a person might be facing in addition or related to the challenge with which an athlete is presenting.

As a more specific example, consider how sport psychologists might attend to athlete injury and/or career transitions differently, depending on “who is centered”: Joseph et al. (2021) noted that racialized athletes experience disproportionate barriers to being believed they are injured as well as unfair exclusions in hiring and promotion processes. When offering psychological services to racialized athletes who are injured or who may be seeking a career transition, then, sport psychologists can use the framework to consider actions that can reduce harm for racialized individuals. This could mean extra attention to complaints of pain that research tells us is otherwise overlooked and actively ignored among athletes facing racism; other times, harm reduction may manifest by understanding that career advice for athletes leaving their sport is directly shaped by the embodied relationships between psychologist and athlete, and of each of the actors within overlapping social systems. Advice that may be helpful to athletes who do not experience racism—such as acquiring further designations toward coaching or becoming an athletics administrator—may not work the same way for athletes facing racism (e.g., see Joseph et al., 2021). Sport is an exercise in how an individual experiences their body and movement, and sport psychology often has the aim of optimizing an athlete’s performance as it aligns with mental health. The same way in which a broken finger might mean something completely different to a world-famous volleyball player versus soccer player (thereby changing what each person would need psychologically toward their respective performances), so a shoulder injury might hold a different position in the lifeworld of a wheelchair athlete, given that such an injury is likely to not only impact sport performance, but also their capacity to transfer into bed, shower, or get around their home. A similar injury might

be compounded for a transdisabled athlete, who is likely to experience dead-naming and misgendering within transphobic healthcare systems, as well as potentially gender dysphoria with particular medical procedures. Foundational and supposedly neutral concepts such as “safety,” “pain,” “injury,” “career,” “mental health,” “healing,” “recovery,” “performance,” “self-care,” or “athlete” can mean different things to differently privileged and oppressed people. Therefore, broader consideration of the impacts of overlapping systems of oppression outside of sport—such as varying material means, networks, reputational risks, or resources and supports—is needed.

Sport psychologists can develop their understandings of how sport and related embodied conditions can differ and how those differences relate to identity through practice of the framework. The operationalizing intersectionality framework guides sport psychologists in where to shine a light toward (a) changing *status quo* psychological conceptual foundations toward actively breaking oppressive patterns, and (b) toward incorporating how various athletes’ experiences in sport and in psychological health systems might impact their relationships to their injury and/or to the career options available.

In addition to interpersonal (microlevel) applications, the operationalizing intersectionality framework also offers meso- and macrolevel direction through which sport practitioners can reconsider staff and executive hiring and board makeup; strategic plans; facility provisions such as changerooms, washrooms, pools, dugouts, penalty boxes, tiered seating, and other spaces that have been shown to be differentially affirming; dress codes, space rentals and prioritization, and membership policies; and many other areas. The framework gives flexible bounds to various areas of traction within which organizations can brainstorm possible actions.

This framework is proposed to be used by researchers, practitioners, and others who feel the need for more action toward social justice. As the framework is a living practice, it will certainly evolve. We hope to follow how it is used and make it even more accurate to practice in a variety of settings. Simply put, we hope to draw upon experiences as a source of knowledge as Hill Collins (2019, p. 13) invites us to do: “social action as a way of knowing . . . valorizes experience [and] potentially strengthens intersectional theorizing” (p. 13). The proposed framework is meant to be in motion and lived out in the world.

Notes

1. E-Alliance, the gender+ equity in sport in Canada Research Hub, was established in March 2020 with the mandate to “provide credible thought leadership and generate an evidence base to support gender equity in sport” (E-Alliance, 2020, “How We Came to Be”). To fulfill its mandate, E-Alliance committed to seven key principles, the first of which is to take intersectional approaches to research and organizational operations.
2. See Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport (2016) for a glossary of some sex/gender terms and/or The 519’s (n.d.) *Glossary of Terms, Facilitating Shared Understandings Around Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Awareness*.
3. It is important to note, as Ellison and Langhout (2020) do, that “those with more relational power and privilege in the specific context must develop literacies to aid in their learning without

burdening others” (p. 953). It is up to the person/organization asking for more information and/or gaining from that information to make sure the interaction is consensual. As a prime example: If those wishing to learn are learning and/or sharing from a content creator, especially a content creator from communities whom those who wish to learn more are marginalized, it is important to fairly compensate that content creator.

4. Learning when apologies are appropriate and how to apologize each have vast literatures and resources from academics, activists, and community educators. While it is not our goal to summarize those literatures here, resources generally prompt reflection on who benefits from an apology (e.g., Is the apology to help someone who harmed another “feel better,” or does it benefit the aggrieved party/parties?), the contexts of apologies, what alternatives there are to apology, what makes a good apology, and similar topics which examine the relationships between apologies, forgiveness, reconciliation, transformation, and embodied power relations. Some examples examining state apologies that can offer places to start are Dirk Moses (2011) and Tarusarira (2019).

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