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# Intersectionality

## in practice

Research findings for practitioners & policy makers

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## Introduction and summary

In the UK, as elsewhere, while race, class, gender and gender identity, disability status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, migration status, and faith continue to be important markers of inequality, and in many ways increasingly so, these inequalities have predominantly been addressed separately. The idea of 'intersectionality' is to focus on the ways that they operate simultaneously and shape one another. Intersectionality names Black women's theory and activism concerning their experiences of gendered racism and racialised sexism. This theory has long been articulated by Black women not only in the US where the term emerged, but also in the UK and by indigenous women and women of colour elsewhere<sup>1</sup>. Intersectionality can be defined as the understanding that inequalities are interdependent and indivisible from one another: 'race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather as reciprocally constructing phenomena'<sup>2</sup>.

Kimberlé Crenshaw used the term 'intersectionality' to describe the ways that Black women's experiences and identities are marginalised by tendencies to treat race and gender as mutually exclusive categories in antidiscrimination law, feminism, and antiracist movements, with all focusing on the most powerful/privileged members of groups (e.g. white women) and taking them as representatives of the group as a whole.

Crenshaw shared examples of legal cases wherein Black women were forced to choose between bringing a claim of discrimination on the basis of either race or gender, and could not say that they had been discriminated against because of the combination of both<sup>3</sup>. In addition, Crenshaw explored how race and gender intersect to shape violence against women of colour, and to marginalise it as an issue within both feminist and antiracist movements<sup>4</sup>.

This failure to consider intersectionality is still widespread in the UK. For example, because the domestic violence awareness movement has tended to focus on heterosexual relationships (particularly cisgender male perpetrators and cisgender female victim-survivors), members of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer and intersex (LGBTQI)+ community have been largely excluded not only from domestic violence movements, but from efforts to mitigate the issue and to provide services to those affected.

At the same time that Crenshaw named intersectionality, intersectionality theory was developed in Patricia Hill Collins' important book *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*, which drew on a rich history of Black

1 Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 1989. "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." *University of Chicago Legal Forum* Vol. 1989, Article 8: 139–68; E.g. Amos, Valerie, Gail Lewis, Amina Mama, and Pratibha Parmar. 1984. "Editorial." *Feminist Review* 17: 1–2; Meyer 2014 as cited in Hancock, Ange-Marie Alfaro. 2016. *Intersectionality: An Intellectual History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

2 Collins, Patricia Hill. 2015. "Intersectionality's Definitional Dilemmas." *Annual Review of Sociology* 41: 2.

3 Crenshaw 1989.

4 Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams. 1991. "Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence against Women of Colour." *Stanford Law Review* 43 (6): 1241–99.

women writers and scholars to focus attention on how systems of oppression are interlocking and interdependent, together forming a 'matrix of domination'<sup>5</sup>.

The value of intersectionality for social justice has been recognised by scholars, policy makers, practitioners and activists. As Crenshaw wrote,

'[i]f...efforts...began with addressing the needs and problems of those who are most disadvantaged and with restructuring and remaking the world where necessary, then others who are singularly disadvantaged would also benefit...placing those who currently are marginalized in the center is the most effective way to resist efforts to compartmentalize experiences and undermine potential collective action'<sup>6</sup>.

Interest in intersectionality is growing because it enables more accurate and sophisticated understandings of the complex reality of social life. Yet, the meanings of intersectionality and the ways that it is used are a subject of debate<sup>7</sup>: for example, some have documented how it can be emptied of its attention to race<sup>8</sup>, and social justice. The use of 'intersectionality' to describe intersections other than race/gender is not uncontroversial.

Since little progress has been made with the separate single issue approach (targeting only one inequality such as gender *or* race) in terms of achieving equality for the most marginalised<sup>9</sup>, there is growing recognition that pursuing social justice requires policy makers and organisations to engage with intersectionality. Yet while interest in it grows, intersectionality is widely thought to be a challenging theory to apply, and it represents a puzzle to policy makers and practitioners who work in both issue area and 'equality strand'<sup>10</sup> silos (of e.g. race, gender, and disability).

The Intersectionality in Practice research project was the first in-depth exploration of intersectionality's applications in the UK, and the first research study internationally to explore how both policy makers and practitioners themselves understand intersectionality, and how they use these understandings in policy and practice. 'Practice' is used to mean the work of third sector<sup>11</sup> practitioners with one another, with their constituents, and with policy makers and those delivering services in the public sector. Specifically, this practice involves delivering services, community development and policy and campaigning work. The project further sought to fill other gaps in research: intersectionality's application in the third sector; intersectional practice in 'intersectional' organisations (working at the intersection of one or more 'equality strands', e.g. Black women's organisations) as

5 Collins, Patricia Hill. 1990. *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness and the Politics of Empowerment*. New York: Routledge.

6 Crenshaw 1989: 167.

7 May, Vivian M. 2015. *Pursuing Intersectionality, Unsettling Dominant Imaginaries*. New York: Routledge.

8 Lewis, Gail. 2013. "Unsafe Travel: Experiencing Intersectionality and Feminist Displacements." *Signs* 38 (4): 869–892.

9 Bassel, Leah, and Akwugo Emejulu. 2017. *Minority Women and Austerity: Survival and Resistance in France and Britain*. Bristol: Policy Press; Women's Budget Group, Runnymede Trust, RECLAIM and Coventry Women's Voices. 2017. "Intersecting Inequalities: The Impact of Austerity on Black and Minority Ethnic Women in the UK."

10 'Strand' is common terminology among policy makers and practitioners meaning equality area, e.g. race equality, gender, disability, etc. 'Single strand' or 'strand specific' is used to mean single issue. 'Equality group' or 'equality community' is used to mean marginal groups pertaining to the strand, i.e. women, disabled people etc.

11 The third sector is used to mean voluntary and community organisations as well as social enterprise organisations.

compared with single strand organisations; and intersectional practice beyond the women's sector, and in coalitions and networks that work across equality sub-sectors.

The project aimed to understand how equality policy makers and equality third sector organisations, which have been predominantly focused around single issues/identities, understand and apply intersectionality. It was conducted with three networks of equality organisations. The networks are each made up of racial justice, feminist, disability rights, LGBTI rights, refugee organisations, and intersectional combinations of these. They work in cities in England and Scotland. The networks have policy intermediary, representative roles between communities and organisations, and local government and planning structures.

Case studies of the networks were conducted, using interviews, focus groups, participant observation and document analysis. This research was important because **much equality work remains hugely 'siloed', predominantly focused around single issues/identities, serving relatively homogenous and privileged groups and excluding more marginalised others.**

### **The project explored the following questions:**

*How is intersectionality understood and used in the equality third sector in England and Scotland?*

- How do practitioners understand intersectionality and where did they get their intersectional knowledge?
- How are intersectionality's understandings and applications influenced by equality policy?
- What are the implications of how it is being understood and used for intersectionally marginalised groups (those marginalised by the combination of two or more structures of inequality, e.g. white supremacy and sexism)?

The project identified that there are five competing applied concepts of intersectionality that circulate in UK third sector equality organising and policy, each of which have different implications for intersectionally marginalised groups and intersectional justice (Table 1). Given that there are different concepts of intersectionality used, it is important to carefully examine the specific meanings given to intersectionality in equality policy and practice.

**Table 1 Applied concepts of intersectionality**

Generic	No focus or very little focus on any equality strand or strands in particular: the same work is delivered to benefit 'all'. Addressing issues that affect 'everybody' (i.e. not only or even primarily marginalised equality groups).
Pan equality	Addressing issues that affect all/most marginalised equality groups.
Multi-strand	Addressing equality strands in parallel, separately but at the same time.
Diversity within	Addressing intersections within an equality strand, e.g. differences among women, etc. One strand/inequality viewed as more important than others.
Intersections of strands	Work of/with specific groups sharing intersecting identities, e.g. women of colour, disabled women, etc. No particular strand is primary or more in focus than the other(s).

Furthermore, in the current context, applying intersectionality fundamentally involves: consideration of representation (who is represented, and whether and how to represent others); and coalition and solidarity building. Conflicts around representation and in networks and coalitions are driven by these competing concepts of intersectionality; in other words, competing concepts are at the heart of the politics of who does intersectionality, and how.

Applying intersectionality requires a twin focus on issues that are common to marginalised groups, and intersectionally marginalised identities, including newer ones (such as non-binary identities). Equality organisations can build greater unity through developing shared understandings of intersectionality, and work to balance acting in solidarity while prioritising the leadership of those who are intersectionally marginalised.

This briefing aimed at practitioners and policy makers shares learning from the research about how intersectionality is applied. It shares examples for practitioners which demonstrate the strengths and limitations of different ways of applying intersectionality, and is intended to inform intersectionality's growing interpretation and application by policy makers.



## Background: UK equality policy and the equality third sector

The Equality Act 2010 brought together anti-discrimination legislation on separate issues, and raised awareness of multiple inequalities, contributing to the current popularity of intersectionality<sup>12</sup>.

Beginning in the late 1990s, equality law and policy in the UK began to move from a purely anti-discrimination approach to a more proactive one placing positive duties on government to promote equality of opportunity. This was driven by recognition of institutional racism in the public sector following the Macpherson inquiry<sup>13</sup> into the murder of Stephen Lawrence, and by European Union directives (which have been influenced by UK law, notably in the field of race equality<sup>14</sup>). The Equality Act 2010 covers England, Scotland and Wales (i.e. Great Britain), and nine 'protected characteristics': race; disability; sex; age; religion or belief; sexual orientation; gender re-assignment (i.e. transgender status); pregnancy and maternity; and marriage or civil partnership. In spite of lobbying from third sector organisations, some groups (e.g. refugees) are not specifically recognised in the Act. The Equality and Human Rights Commission (EHRC), established in 2007, similarly replaced separate commissions on race, disability and gender to enforce the Equality Act. The Act places proactive obligations to eliminate discrimination and harassment, advance equality of opportunity and promote good relations for people with 'protected characteristics' on more than 40,000 public bodies (including central government departments, local governments, and health, education, policing and transport bodies) through the public sector equality duty (PSED). The PSED replaced earlier separate positive duties for race, disability and gender that were in effect from 2001, 2006 and 2007 respectively. The way that the Equality Act brings together different equality areas creates both opportunities and challenges for applying intersectionality<sup>15</sup>.

The Equality Act 2010 and earlier legislation addressing race, disability, and gender, are the result of campaigning by a range of actors from intersecting marginalised groups, one of which is the equality third sector. The equality third sector is made up of voluntary and community as well as social enterprise organisations that have emerged because of inequality related to markers of identity, and aim to increase equality. This sector plays a key and at times overlooked role in creating knowledge about inequalities, and in equality policymaking and implementation, as well as being engaged in more independent

12 Hankivsky, Olena, Diego de Merich, and Ashlee Christoffersen. 2019. "Equalities 'Devolved': Experiences in Mainstreaming across the UK Devolved Powers Post-Equality Act 2010." *British Politics* 14 (2): 141–61. Some sector publications about intersectionality include Equality Network. 2016. *Including Intersectional Identities: guidance on including intersectional LGBTI people in services*. Edinburgh: Equality Network; Women's Budget Group et al. 2017.

13 Macpherson, William. 1999. *The Stephen Lawrence Inquiry Report of an Inquiry by Sir William Macpherson of Cluny*. London: Home Office.

14 Meer, Nasar. 2017. "What Will Happen to Race Equality Policy on the Brexit Archipelago? Multi-Level Governance, 'Sunk Costs' and the 'Mischief of Faction'" *Journal of Social Policy* 46 (4): 657–674.

15 Hankivsky, de Merich, and Christoffersen 2019; Solanke, Iyiola. 2011. "Infusing the Silos in the Equality Act 2010 with Synergy." *The Industrial Law Journal* 40 (4): 336–58; Christoffersen, Ashlee. 2019. "Are We All 'Baskets of Characteristics'?" Intersectional Slippages and the Displacement of Race in English and Scottish Equality Policy." In *The Palgrave Handbook of Intersectionality in Public Policy*, edited by Olena Hankivsky and Julia S. Jordan-Zachery, 705–32. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

work to increase equality. Some organisations and practitioners in the equality sector were 'doing' intersectionality long before it became popular among policy makers (for example, among intersectional organisations constituted around two or more equality areas, for instance Black women's organisations), though this has not always been named or considered 'intersectionality'. The third sector is distinct from the grassroots (grassroots organisations, social movements, individual activists and campaigners); third sector organisations are either formally constituted or funded, and usually both.

**Although intersectionality is growing in popularity in the equality third sector, it also presents an enormous challenge, since the sector remains largely siloed into single identity/issue sub-sectors.**



## Research findings

### Equality policy, austerity and relationships between the third sector and policy makers

Equality third sector organisations understand and use intersectionality within contexts shaped by equality policy, austerity, and the sector's particular relationships to policy makers.

#### Equality policy

Analysis of intersectionality's take-up, uses and meanings in equality policy documents shows that there are a range of definitions of intersectionality, and its use is largely:

- individualised;
- merely descriptive;
- additive (where instead of being viewed as always shaping one another, inequalities are still viewed separately and added and subtracted from one another);
- and superficial.

Moreover, meaningful engagement with race and the intersection of race and gender as key categories of intersectionality theory is lacking in policy<sup>1</sup>.

The meanings and uses of intersectionality in equality policy are influenced by and also influence understandings of intersectionality among third sector organisations. While from an intersectional perspective little progress on equality will ever be made without 'doing' intersectionality, at present in the UK intersectionality is positioned as a kind of luxury that policy makers may or may not address.

#### Barriers to applying intersectionality

Equality organisations face external barriers when seeking to apply intersectionality:

- challenges relating to austerity<sup>2</sup> (lack of funding for intersectional work, and competitive funding environments), and
- unequal relationships between equality organisations and local government and public sector actors, reflected in:
  - practitioner feelings that equality organisations have minimal influence,
  - financial inequalities,
  - limited independence of equality organisations, and
  - interpersonal relationships between practitioners and policy makers<sup>3</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Christoffersen, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Here used to mean post-2008 economic recession policies pursuing deficit reduction through cuts to public spending and tax increases in the UK.

<sup>3</sup> Christoffersen, Ashlee. 2020. "Barriers to Operationalizing Intersectionality in Equality Third Sector Community Development Practice: Power, Austerity, and in/Equality." *Community Development Journal* 55 (1): 139–158.

Equality organisations are significantly hampered in their attempts to apply intersectionality by the low status they occupy as compared with policy makers, and by austerity contexts.

Austerity has decimated the equality third sector, particularly impacting intersectional organisations<sup>4</sup>. Intersectionally marginalised groups are bearing the brunt of austerity<sup>5</sup>.

When intersectionality is understood as work by and for particular intersectionally marginalised groups, under austerity it is viewed as 'niche', having few beneficiaries, and therefore, not value for money:

*Invariably what happens is that the [[Black and minority ethnic] BME women's] sector doesn't get the funding because most local authorities...want to fund a generic service.*

Anika<sup>6</sup>, Director, BME women's organisation, England.

Much intersectional work that organisations do is therefore actually unfunded.

Often, in order to engage in policy work concerning equality and intersectionality, equality organisations are asked to give up time unpaid, to sit at a table in a consultative role in a context where the others present, civil servants and decision makers, are remunerated and hold decision-making power. Therefore,

*The third sector are still at the bottom rung and until we are equally funded...and equally respected, that's not really going to change.* Yvonne, Director, Women's organisation, Scotland.

At an interpersonal level participants report some cases of disrespect, and direct and indirect discrimination, from civil servants towards intersectionally marginalised practitioners (particularly women of colour) trying to engage policy makers around issues of intersectionality.

<sup>4</sup> Bassel, Leah, and Akwugo Emejulu. 2014. "Solidarity under Austerity: Intersectionality in France and the United Kingdom." *Politics & Gender* 10 (1): 130–36.

<sup>5</sup> Bassel and Emejulu 2017; Women's Budget Group et al. 2017; Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. 2017. *Concluding Observations*. Geneva: Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

<sup>6</sup> All participant names used in this briefing are pseudonyms.

## Competing understandings of intersectionality

The term 'intersectionality' is understood and used in multiple, contradicting ways<sup>7</sup>. Five competing 'applied concepts' of intersectionality were identified:

<b>Table 2 Applied concepts of intersectionality: Analysis</b>			
<b>NAME</b>	<b>MEANING</b>	<b>PRACTICE EXAMPLES</b>	<b>LIMITATIONS &amp; EFFECTS</b>
Generic	No focus or very little focus on any equality strand or strands in particular: the same work is delivered to benefit 'all'.  Addressing issues that affect 'everybody' (i.e. not only or even primarily marginalised equality groups).	Work is addressed at and intended to benefit 'everybody', so intersectionality is seen as being 'mainstreamed', or a general approach to the work. Since this concept treats everyone the same, work on specific inequalities is not favoured by those with this understanding of intersectionality.	No attention to power & marginality  Work on issues that affect the most disadvantaged seen as being not intersectional
Pan equality	Addressing issues that affect all/ most marginalised equality groups.	Issues include mental health, hate crime, addressed through joint campaigning and research.	Avoids deciding in advance which issues affect which social groups  Enables more structural (vs. individual) understandings of intersectionality  Yet, flattens differences & prevents work on issues which are not 'common'
Multi-strand	Addressing equality strands in parallel, separately but at the same time.	Some network collaboration and engagement on local equality strategies.	Additive (instead of being viewed as always shaping one another, inequalities are still viewed separately and added and subtracted from one another)  Intersectionality thought to be the same as diversity  Makes intersectional marginalisation invisible

<sup>7</sup> Christoffersen, Ashlee. 2021a. The politics of intersectional practice: Competing concepts of intersectionality, *Policy & Politics*.

Diversity within	Addressing intersections within an equality strand, e.g. differences among women, etc.  One strand/ inequality viewed as more important than others.	How intersectionality is often addressed within single strand organisations: inclusion projects targeted at intersectionally marginalised groups.	Additive (instead of being viewed as always shaping one another, inequalities are still viewed separately and added and subtracted from one another)  Marginalised people viewed as solely oppressed & 'intersectionalities' as 'additional barriers'  Unable to incorporate the idea that inequality structures are always shaping each other, producing both privilege & penalty (therefore no inequality is inherently more important, and the importance of specific inequalities changes depending on context)
Intersections of strands	Work of/with specific groups sharing intersecting identities, e.g. women of colour, disabled women, etc.  No particular strand is considered more important than the other(s).	'Intersectional' organisations  Intersectional alliances (formal and informal partnership projects across equality strands; relatively equitable partnerships).	Intersectionality often individualised (instead of thinking about inequality structures)  Challenges of accounting for all markers of inequality

It is important to identify that there are competing concepts of intersectionality, because each has different implications for intersectionally marginalised groups and intersectional justice. Some concepts are more effective than others at furthering equality for intersectionally marginalised communities, while others actually deepen inequalities.

### **Intersectionality as generic equality: analysis**

*No focus or very little focus on any equality strand or strands in particular: the same work is delivered to benefit 'all'.*

- ➖ No attention to power & marginality
- ➖ Work on issues that affect the most disadvantaged seen as being *not intersectional*

At local level, meanings of intersectionality as 'generic' emerged in contexts of recent austerity. The word 'intersectionality' was used to make cutting the costs of

local government's obligations concerning equality sound innovative. It is much less expensive for local government to fund one 'intersectional' network, than it was to fund three-nine strand-specific networks before this. While a generic approach to *equality* was identified by some practitioners and scholars in the lead up to and following the Equality Act<sup>8</sup>, this research identified how *intersectionality* is used to describe this approach.

This understanding of intersectionality was found among more powerful actors (some policy makers, and the overlap between policy makers, the public sector and third sectors). It was not found in more grassroots (unfunded) organisations. It was found in networks which try to work across both identity-based 'equality' and socioeconomic 'inequality'. It was also more popular among participants with mainly privileged aspects of identity. Those who held this understanding mainly reported learning about intersectionality in academic environments.

One equality network in particular applied intersectionality in a generic way. Network organiser Leanne said that one way the network practiced intersectionality was to structure work around issues, rather than equality strands:

*We made the decision to have discussions around themes rather than equality strands or communities of interest. That was a very conscious decision to have that intersectional focus without calling it an intersectional focus...[because]...those areas affect everybody from all groups...an intersectional approach...[is]...issues that do affect everybody...all people are at an equal standing in the network.*

Other networks have adopted an issue-led approach and still maintained a focus on marginalised, and particularly intersectionally marginalised, equality groups. In contrast, this network seemed to lose sight of structures of inequality and the relationships between them, where not all issues do affect everybody in the same way. Moreover, working on issues that affect only the most disadvantaged is therefore seen as being *not intersectional*.

### **Implications for intersectionally marginalised groups**

A generic concept of intersectionality makes intersectional marginalisation invisible. Some participants resisted this concept, pointing out that although different equality groups may be affected by the same issues, they are likely affected by them differently. They argued that in a situation of inequality, applying a generic approach will reproduce and deepen those inequalities.

<sup>8</sup> Inclusion Scotland, Engender, Close the Gap, CRER, Equality Network, LGBT Youth Scotland, Scottish Women's Aid, Scottish Women's Convention, Stonewall Scotland, and Health and Social Care Alliance. 2017. The Socio-Economic Duty: A Consultation Equality Sector Response. Scotland.



Moreover, a generic approach can serve to increase siloed attitudes, which are a barrier to practicing intersectionality. Treating ‘everyone’ the same can make practitioners emphasise the difference of ‘their’ group from others, creating debates about who is more discriminated against which promote an idea of equality groups as being mutually exclusive. Stephen, director of a racial justice organisation in England, explained.

*If you create a spurious equality between different protected characteristics, for example, say they're all equally worthy of study and being addressed, then I think you're actually going to end up with the opposite of what good intersectionality does. Which is to say that actually these are multiple and you'll end up with a situation where people will end up constructing their own hierarchies of oppression if you're not careful.*

- Generic intersectionality is used in the interests of maintaining the status quo of inequalities.
- This concept was used against the racial justice sector and to displace attention to race<sup>9</sup>. Racial justice organisations were viewed as uniquely incapable of doing intersectionality, with serious consequences for them in terms of funding.

### **Intersectionality as pan equality: analysis**

*Addressing issues that affect all/most marginalised equality groups.*

- ⊕ Avoids deciding in advance which issues affect which social groups
- ⊕ Enables more structural (vs. individual) understandings of intersectionality
- ⊖ Yet, flattens differences & prevents work on issues which are not ‘common’

Pan equality work emerged from networks and coalitions of single strand organisations, many of which were formed because of the Equality Act. As intersectionality has grown in popularity, for some it has taken on the meaning of ‘pan equality’. One possible explanation that this meaning of *intersectionality* has gained popularity is that, similar to generic approaches, pan equality approaches can seem cost-effective to funders. In contrast, many participants commented on the lack of dedicated funding for, and difficulty in acquiring funding for, ‘intersections of strands’ intersectional work (discussed below).

This was the second most popular of the five concepts of intersectionality among research participants. It was the most common concept among those representing equality networks, and was also prevalent in community development organisations, and single strand organisations. It was not found at all among strictly service-providing

<sup>9</sup> Christoffersen, Ashlee. (2021b) Is intersectional racial justice organising possible? Confronting generic intersectionality, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*.

organisations. It was more popular in England than Scotland. Those holding this concept predominantly reported learning about intersectionality from personal experience and diverse staff within organisations, in equality networks and online.

The focus on issues that affect marginalised groups is what distinguishes this concept from the generic one (interested in issues that affect 'everyone'), and is reflected in what the issues are thought to be.

Network organiser Nicola, for example, defined intersectionality as: *The commonalities of barriers and disadvantage faced by different protected characteristic groups.*

### **Implications for intersectionally marginalised groups**

The concept of intersectionality as pan equality creates space for organisations working across different equality issues to come together, develop joint work and pursue policy change together, potentially heightening their impact. Yet the specific agendas of groups of intersectionally marginalised people may be lost when pan equality intersectionality is used on its own; common issues may be watered down in content to the lowest common denominator. However, this concept may also ultimately facilitate intersectional working, as Julie, director of a refugee organisation, noted:

*If we identify the big pan equality concepts...power and structure and hostility and hate and abuse and those things, then it becomes possible to work intersectionally...the pan equality stuff...provides a connecting mechanism for people who are working with...intersections between what in our minds are still separate issues.*

If issues are considered as common to several different marginalised groups, but the groups themselves continue to be considered as separate and unrelated, pan equality intersectionality can make the crossover of inequality structures, and therefore intersectional marginalisation, invisible. Moreover, without a focus on intersectional marginalisation in work and campaigns on broad issues, in practice pan equality can reproduce inequalities between differently positioned individuals and organisations.

Yet, the research found examples of work on hate crime which included *both* campaigning for parity in hate crime legislation across equality strands, *and* highlighting the intersectional nature of hate crime (for instance that disabled women of colour experience specific hate crime in particular ways). This prioritisation is however a matter of constant negotiation, as Catriona described:

*'In [one of our coalitions], there've been a couple of instances where people maybe felt that one intersection was being prioritised over their intersection or their community... there are times when people might feel that...an agenda is going off in a particular direction, and...leaving them behind'.*

- A key strength of pan equality intersectionality is that it leaves issues open, without deciding in advance which issues affect which social groups.
- Another is that in focusing on broader issues, it enables more structural (vs. solely individual) understandings of intersectionality.
- A challenge is that it may flatten differences between inequalities and marginalised groups.
- It prevents work on issues which are *not* necessarily perceived as common.
- **The challenge is to focus on issues while maintaining a focus on power: who is marginalised and who is privileged, and why.**

### Multi-strand intersectionality: analysis

*Addressing equality strands in parallel, separately but at the same time.*

- ➖ Additive (instead of being viewed as always shaping one another, inequalities are still viewed separately and added and subtracted from one another)
- ➖ Intersectionality thought to be the same as diversity
- ➖ Makes intersectional marginalisation invisible

This meaning of intersectionality is related to the Equality Act, which created a multi-strand equality policy framework. Participants recognised this approach in government templates for equality impact assessment, in which there is space dedicated to consideration of each strand separately (with none to consider intersections of them). In this context it may be that some organisations are ‘stuck’ at multi-strand understandings of intersectionality.

This understanding was more popular among service-providing organisations than other types of organisations (most of which are single strand organisations). Similar to generic intersectionality, it was more popular among those with privileged aspects of identity. This is significant because this concept serves to further the interests of singularly disadvantaged groups (groups marginalised by only one structure of inequality, in contrast to intersectionally disadvantaged groups).

‘Multi-strand intersectionality’ is distinct from generic understandings focused on ‘everyone’ which ignore specific inequalities, because for multi-strand intersectionality equality strands remain very important. Multi strand intersectionality includes an idea that all strands *should* be included, and treated equally: receive the same level of attention and resourcing.

### Implications for intersectionally marginalised groups

This concept makes the idea that equality strands crossover to create intersectional

marginalisation invisible, since equality strands continue to be thought about separately. Multi-strand intersectionality prevents a focus on those who are most disadvantaged, since it includes an idea that all strands should be worked on at the same time.

Together with diversity within intersectionality (discussed next), multi-strand intersectionality restricts considering intersectionality to the level of individual identity and experience, focusing work on the symptoms rather than the causes of inequality. It prevents understanding of intersectionality as the synergy of structures of inequality<sup>10</sup>, which means that these structures cannot be separated from one another. Instead of seeing inequalities as being *always* shaping one another, from the perspective of multi-strand intersectionality it is thought that we can add and subtract other inequalities as and when.

Bringing equality strands together, whether into one law as with the Equality Act, or into one network, may create opportunities to explore how inequalities shape one another, and therefore to apply intersectionality. Multi-strand intersectionality may then, given the current siloed way that equality work is organised, be a necessary first step to practicing intersectionality. Yet for some, it seems to stop there: *because this is in and of itself thought to be intersectionality*. While bringing equality strands together into one law or network may *create* opportunities to consider the relationships between them, it is clear from the research that this does not automatically follow, or necessarily happen.

- There is little in this concept that challenges the status quo of single strand equality work, and the siloed thinking behind it.
- Yet, multi-strand equality networks are important places of learning about other equality issues, out of which other approaches to intersectionality may develop.

### **‘Diversity within’: analysis**

*Addressing intersections within an equality strand, e.g. differences among women, etc. One strand/inequality viewed as more important than others.*

- ➖ Additive (instead of being viewed as always shaping one another, inequalities are still viewed separately and added and subtracted from one another)
- ➖ Marginalised people viewed as just oppressed & ‘intersectionalities’ thought of as ‘additional barriers’
- ➖ Unable to incorporate the idea that inequality structures are *always* shaping each other, producing not only marginalisation, but also privilege

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<sup>10</sup> Solanke, 2011.

This concept of intersectionality comes from single strand, siloed working. The development of projects targeted at particular groups within a strand has often been driven by analysis of service users by equality characteristics, which has been instituted as a funding requirement because of the Equality Act.

Multi strand and diversity within intersectionality are more prevalent in Scotland than in England.

This was the most popular applied concept of intersectionality among those in the women's sector. In contrast, this was not the case for any other single strand sector (refugee, racial justice, disabled, Deaf, LGBTI), nor was it true of any of the intersectional organisations included in the research sample. It was more popular among single strand organisations than intersectional ones. It was associated with dominant identities (like multi-strand intersectionality, 'diversity within' serves to further the interests of singularly disadvantaged groups, marginalised by only one structure of inequality). Out of the main sources of intersectional knowledge that participants identified<sup>11</sup>, this understanding was most associated with learning about intersectionality through professional learning (i.e. continuing professional development and on the job training) and within the third sector. Single strand organisations train new staff with this particular understanding of intersectionality.

Here, Diane, a practitioner in a women's organisation in England, explains what intersectionality means to her.

*Intersectionality is the new word...there are lots of issues that are emerging now that...[show] how that recognition of intersectionality impacts on women's lot. It's quite... insidious. The... prioritising of the individual I think is seriously damaging to women as a group. And those intersectional points...is why we need to be clear and articulate, how and when that affects, and keep the case going strongly for keeping those visible. That's my focus.*

Intersectionality is presented as something which has relevance sometimes, but not all the time; as well as something which is inherently individualistic. Recognition of intersectionality is 'insidious' for women 'as a group'. It is their job to pinpoint exactly when intersectionality is relevant, implying that oftentimes, it is not.

Diversity within is applied through inclusion projects targeted at intersectionally marginalised groups. Because other inequalities are thought about as being able to be added and subtracted from one another, rather than being viewed as always shaping the primary inequality, projects within organisations were thought about separately (e.g. a women's organisation with a 'race' project and a 'disability' project). Some single

<sup>11</sup> These are: academic; diverse staff and personal experience; equality organising; the internet; organisation constituencies; equality networks; policy and the Equality Act; professional learning; and the third sector.

strand organisations may therefore have multiple targeted projects/programmes which may be thought of as successful, but these are not always 'layered', and can be seen as and managed entirely separately within an (even quite small) organisation.

### **Implications for intersectionally marginalised groups**

This concept of intersectionality considers one inequality (usually gender, since it was most prevalent among women's organisations) as always more important than other inequalities. Therefore, other inequalities can only be thought of as secondary 'add-ons' to gender. Since one inequality is always thought of as more important, it misses that structures of inequality are *always* shaping one another, so they cannot be separated out from one another. It also misses that intersecting structures of inequality create not only marginalisation, but also privilege.

This way of thinking about intersectionality may take into account that intersectionally marginalised people experience 'additional barriers', but it does not meaningfully engage with privilege or the idea that intersectionally marginalised people have the ability to act for themselves, so it results in projects that lack meaningful participation of intersectionally marginalised people in decision making. Intersectionality is seen as being able to be applied 'as and when' rather than being embedded into practice or policy. Instead of being viewed as always shaping the equality strand considered to be most important, other strands are perceived as being only relevant sometimes.

This understanding bears all of the limitations of gender-first approaches to equality which led to the development of intersectionality theory by Kimberlé Crenshaw and others.

- It is in the interests of single strand organisations to consider multi-strand and diversity within *as* intersectionality. If intersectionality is seen as something else, then it becomes clear that these organisations are not really doing intersectionality, though many are claiming to.
- Funders are also responsible for these limiting uses of intersectionality, since many recognise, encourage and expect diversity within *as* intersectionality.

### **Intersections of equality strands: analysis**

*Work of/with specific groups sharing intersecting identities, e.g. women of colour, disabled women, etc. No particular strand is considered more important than the other(s).*

- ⊕ Intersectionally marginalised people viewed as being able to act for themselves
- ⊖ Intersectionality often individualised (to the exclusion of thinking about inequality structures)

This is the applied concept identified which most closely resembles wider academic and popular understandings of intersectionality. Yet among research participants, it competed with the four other concepts identified in this briefing. Intersectional organisations are increasingly using the term 'intersectionality', recognising their work in the concept though the term itself may be newer to them. The formation of intersectional alliances (formal and informal partnership projects across equality strands; relatively equitable partnerships) is often driven by desire to work in more intersectional ways.

This was the most popular of the five concepts of intersectionality, but by a small margin, and there are important differences among organisations and practitioners related to whether they hold this understanding or not. Unsurprisingly, this is the most popular understanding among those from intersectional organisations by a wide margin. It was more prevalent in England. It tended to be associated with those having marginalised aspects of identity: it was the most prevalent concept among BME, disabled, and LGBTQ participants and those of minority faith. This is the only concept which views intersectionally marginalised people as capable of acting for themselves. Out of the main sources of intersectional knowledge that participants identified, this understanding was most associated with those who learned about intersectionality from their own personal experiences and diverse staff within organisations, and within equality networks.

The key distinction between this concept and 'diversity within' is that no particular equality strand is considered to be more important than the other (or others). In sharp contrast to those employing generic, pan equality, and multi-strand understandings, those with this understanding perceive their intersectional work as that with those who are intersectionally marginalised, belonging to particular overlapping equality groups.

Here, Catriona describes the benefits of such an approach:

*I think I've always felt that if you can work with and support the most marginalised, then really that should be able to be applied to any other community. If we get stuff right for disabled refugees and asylum seekers, then it should work for all other vulnerable refugees. It should work for all other disabled people. It should work for all other people.*

Kya, practitioner in an intersectional (LGBTI refugee) organisation, explains the difference between single strand, 'diversity within' approaches and this approach.

*We already knew about the different challenges, the intersectional challenges that people have. This is what our work originally sought to address... so it's not a concept that is new to us but it is something that our work is already set on for a very long time.*

While some organisations may seek training in or actively try to work intersectionally, others perceive themselves to have always done so.

Within intersectional alliances (formal and informal partnership projects across equality strands), this concept of intersectionality implies an aimed-for equitable partnership or relationship, since no strand is seen as more important, whereas a diversity within understanding does not.

### **Implications for intersectionally marginalised groups**

This way of thinking about intersectionality recognises that structures of inequality are *a/ways* intersecting, so no inequality can be separated out from others that together shape identity and experience. This concept of intersectionality recognises that structures of inequality create not only marginalisation, but also privilege and the ability to act for oneself. It therefore manifests in the meaningful participation of intersectionally marginalised people. It is nearly opposite to generic intersectionality, within which focus on particular intersectionally marginalised groups is viewed by some, policy makers included, as niche, having few beneficiaries, not value for money, and *not actually intersectional*. It is often less powerful actors (intersectionally marginalised people and organisations representing them) who hold this understanding, compared with those holding all other concepts of intersectionality. While much existing research about equality organisations and intersectionality's operationalisation has focused exclusively on single strand organisations, this research highlights the need to consider intersectional organisations as different from single strand organisations and to give them particular attention in research.

- There are two key challenges for work using this concept in order to further equality for intersectionally marginalised groups. The first is individualisation. Although both focus on intersectionally marginalised groups, similar to 'diversity within' approaches, work employing 'intersections of equality strands' can be disproportionately aimed at alleviating symptoms, rather than addressing causes, of inequality.
- The second challenge is meaningfully taking into account all relevant markers of inequality, especially since this is not the approach favoured by policymakers and funders. Nevertheless, this concept of intersectionality enables taking many inequalities into account: once an organisation or project engages in work on a particular inequality, understanding intersectionality as 'intersections of strands' makes it more difficult to subtract inequality areas at will.
- Because of the workings of intersecting structures of inequality, intersectional organisations and alliances have been particularly hard hit by austerity; many have closed. This was identified by participants as a significant barrier to applying intersectionality.





## **Representation: who is represented, and whether and how to represent others**

**Applying intersectionality in equality practice fundamentally involves representation: self-organisation among intersectionally marginalised people, and increasing representation of intersectionally marginalised people within organisations and among constituents.**

**Using intersectionality in practice also involves questions of representation: whether, and how, to represent others.**

### **Representation and equality organising**

- There is an important distinction between equality organisations which are self-organised (led by and for the group that they aim to serve or represent), and those which are led by those more privileged than the organisation's target group. Experience of inequalities is important for knowledge of inequalities. It is notable that the expression 'nothing about us without us' emerged from the UK disabled people's movement, and that contemporary disabled peoples' organisations are one outgrowth of this. The principle of autonomous self-organisation has been similarly important in the feminist, racial justice, LGBTI and migrants' rights movements, and intersectional combinations of these. In contrast,

*There's what I call...generic...organisations which are people who are not specialists but dabble in different communities. Sometimes there's some resentment against them because they're seen as organisations that are not from the community but they come in and take community money.* David, Director, LGBTI organisation, England.

- This important distinction is not always recognised and valued by funders and policy makers, as well as other (non equality specialist) third sector practitioners:

*There are...organisations which don't necessarily have any specific community equalities expertise, particularly around disability and who then start [to] try to move into speaking for disabled people.* Eilidh, Practitioner, Disabled people's organisation.

- However, intersectionality highlights that though one aspect of identity may be shared across those who lead organisations and those they serve and represent, not all aspects are shared.
- Practitioners also perceive themselves to have specialist knowledge that is not merely a product of their experience of marginalisation or identification in particular equality communities, but from their experience of *working* in

equalities. Knowledge of inequalities comes from identification with and experience of inequalities, but in working in equalities, additional expertise is gained.

- In spite of having representative roles, single strand equality organisations and networks of them do not straightforwardly represent equality 'communities' and are often particularly unrepresentative of those who are intersectionally marginalised within them. Some organisations acknowledge this, while others do not.
- However, policy makers and funders give them representative roles when it suits their interests, and at other times attempt to delegitimise their claims on the basis that they are not representative. Equality organisations (and especially of particular kinds) are held to a higher (double) standard of representation compared with other types organisations. There is an expectation that to be valid, equality sector contributions to policy debates require representational legitimacy, when actually this validity might come from the specialist knowledge that practitioners have, and the organisation's own research.
- Some networks are particularly constrained in their abilities to represent the interests of marginalised equality communities by a lack of independence from policy makers and the public sector.

### **Equality organisations, representation and intersectionality**

- Being reflective about problems of representation, and considering its complexities, is an important precondition to taking meaningful steps to work in an intersectional way.
- Recognising that they are not representative, and reflecting on this, many single strand equality organisations are concerned with increasing representation of marginalised groups within their organisations. Here, Myra describes why she feels this is important, drawing a clear link between experience and knowledge.

*You need a mix of people who can help remind each other like have you thought of it from that perspective and once you have a good mix of that it doesn't mean you need to represent every kind of aspect of identity there is, but you need at least four or five different aspects before so that you can get that conversation going so at least somebody will always think about other aspects that you might have missed. ... if you have an organisation that isn't diverse in that ...intersectionality is like an academic exercise for them then sometimes it can work, but it's a lot of hard work to constantly be thinking of those things it's really difficult. Why not just do it the relatively easier way to get people who think about [it] naturally anyway. That's the main thing I think is key. Myra, Director, women's organisation, Scotland.*

Here, Susan describes how they were able to increase representation in their organisation:

*[LGBTI people] became involved in [our organisation]...because [we were] tackling homophobia. Naming it and putting it out there and creating a culture where people felt safe. Susan, Director, Disabled people's organisation, Scotland.*

- Having representation of intersectionally marginalised experiences is important for knowing about and doing intersectionality:
  - A person's own identity influences which applied concept of intersectionality they use. Generic intersectionality and additive multi-strand and 'diversity within' concepts are more popular among those with privileged aspects of identity, while 'intersections of strands' understandings tend to be associated with participants having marginalised aspects of identity.
  - Representation is closely related to sources of knowledge about intersectionality. The most prevalent source of knowledge identified by participants is either their own personal experience, or knowledge from experience shared within organisations.
  
- Intersectional organisations emerged because intersectionally marginalised people were not being represented by single strand organisations. There are power differences between these intersectional organisations and single strand organisations, reflected in representation in equality networks and other structures.

*[The organisation] was set up to meet the needs of a very marginalised group of...women. We weren't visible to anybody. We weren't visible to the wider community. We weren't visible to the internal community. We were there and that was it. Raka, Director, BME women of faith organisation.*

Once an organisation has representation of intersectionally marginalised people among those who run it (staff, trustees/directors), how does it aim to reflect this among those who engage with the organisation? How does it seek to represent those people?

<b>APPROACH</b>	<b>DESCRIPTION AND EXAMPLES</b>	<b>ISSUES</b>
Enabling participation	<p>Beyond increasing representation of previously unrepresented categories of people among those who run organisations, enabling participation of intersectionally marginalised people in the outward-facing activities of the organisation is often viewed as key to how organisations practice intersectionality. Some practitioners seek to equalise power, and to enable participation, so that people might act for themselves.</p> <p><b>Example</b> in a racial justice organisation</p> <p>Having specific consultative fora with women of colour, and other groups including disabled and older people of colour, people of colour and faith, and LGBTI people of colour, when they are producing policy consultation responses. To organise these, they have recruited members of those communities to lead community engagement in them. Moreover, they also separately involved intersectional organisations working at the intersection of race, as well as single strand organisations in other equality sectors.</p>	<p>Participation should have an objective; otherwise it is tick boxing and demotivating for participants</p> <p>Participation is more meaningful at levels of decision making</p> <p>Enabling participation has limitations, since enabling participation of whole social groups or constituencies is not logistically possible</p> <p>Relying on participation can put all of the onus on a small number of individuals, who can become overburdened</p>
Seeking to develop others to participate and/or to act as representatives	<p>Seeking to develop others (usually thought about as more marginal) to act as representatives, through the creation of bespoke structures and in other ways.</p> <p><b>Example</b></p> <p>Creation of structures on which there is representation of intersectionally marginalised people, or the alternative category of 'experts by experience'</p> <p>Structure that includes strand specific organisations, and intersectionally marginalised people positioned at the intersection of those strands. This structure advises on work around accessing rights, including guidance and campaigns.</p> <p><i>Three-way split of experts by experience and then deaf and disabled people's organisations with experience of refugees and refugee organisations with experience of disabled people but really to try and build it so that the people who are leading that are not the lawyers or the medics on either side but the people who really genuinely know...: disabled refugees.</i></p>	<p>Presumption that community members require development and do not already organise and participate outwith the scope and knowledge of equality third sector organisations</p>
Acting on behalf of, or for	<p>Still others reflect that in spite of efforts not to, they ultimately end up speaking <i>for</i> communities.</p> <p><b>Example</b></p> <p>Responding to government consultations on behalf of a whole social group</p> <p>Speaking for those who are perceived not to have a 'voice'</p>	<p>Lack of voice might be more about exclusion from equality sector spaces and lack of outreach</p>

## Enabling participation vs. acting for: Projects targeted toward intersectionally marginalised groups

The research found examples of many projects targeted toward a range of intersectionally marginalised groups. However, there are important differences between these, as illustrated by the following example of projects targeted toward disabled women aiming to increase disabled women's use of, and access to, violence against women and girls' services:

<b>Table 4 Representation and projects targeted toward intersectionally marginalised groups</b>		
<b>PROJECT</b>	<b>CONCEPT OF INTERSECTIONALITY EMPLOYED</b>	<b>HOW REPRESENTATION WORKS IN PRACTICE</b>
A, B	Diversity within	<p>Representation of disabled women among those running and directing the project was viewed as a bonus, not a necessity: "inclusion without representation"</p> <p>Disabled women expected to give up their time for free</p> <p>Not necessarily any outreach to the disabled people's sector in project development/implementation</p> <p>Little attention to other inequalities within the project (e.g. race)</p> <p>Project focus: building capacity of non-disabled women's organisations to serve disabled women (acting for/doing to disabled women)</p>
C	Intersections of equality strands	<p>Aspired to be disabled women-led/survivor-led as a core guiding principle</p> <p>Disabled women advocated for their participation to be remunerated as expertise</p> <p>Building relationships with the disabled people's sector in developing and implementing the project viewed as essential from the outset</p> <p>Consistent attention to other inequalities (race, trans status, sexuality), women of colour represented among decision makers</p> <p>Project focus: developing disabled women-led peer support services (disabled women acting for themselves)</p>

**Different concepts of intersectionality produce competing views of, approaches to and conflict about representation. Not all participants place the same value on representation and experience for practicing intersectionality.**

**Competing concepts of intersectionality are at the root of conflicting views on who is best positioned to do and represent intersectionality, as well as having implications for how representation happens in day to day practice.**

<b>Table 5 Representation and applied concepts of intersectionality</b>		
<b>APPLIED CONCEPT OF INTERSECTIONALITY</b>		<b>REPRESENTATION</b>
Generic	<p>No focus or very little focus on any equality strand or strands in particular: the same work is delivered to benefit 'all'.</p> <p>Addressing issues that affect 'everybody' (i.e. not only or even primarily marginalised equality groups).</p>	<p>Preference for 'neutral', 'unspecific' &amp; 'un-biased' representatives (i.e. belonging to dominant social groups); considered the only ones capable of knowing about and doing intersectionality, and as representing all others. Intersectionally marginalised people (&amp; organisations of them) viewed as unable to think beyond their own experience and identities.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Funding removed from a racial justice organisation because racial justice organisations were viewed as uniquely incapable of doing intersectionality, and awarded to a white-led, generic organisation viewed as more capable of, and best positioned to do, intersectionality<sup>12</sup>.</p> <p>Led to formation of alternative structures by women of colour.</p>
Pan equality	Addressing issues that affect all/most marginalised equality groups.	Varying approaches; representation of intersectionally marginalised people not necessarily viewed as important. Some using this concept justify acting for others.
Multi-strand	Addressing equality strands in parallel, separately but at the same time.	<p>Having representation of different equality strands in a network, coalition or other forum is in and of itself considered to be intersectionality. Similarly, having a diversity of singularly defined individual people can be considered to be intersectionality.</p> <p>Practicing intersectionality stops at representation; makes intersectional marginalisation invisible. 'Intersectional representation' used to mean representation of all single issue equality strands.</p> <p>Fails to engage the challenge of intersectionality by equating it with diversity, of types of equality organisations and the people representing them. From this perspective, intersectionality is equated to addressing equality strands in parallel, which prevents reflection on the extent to which 'representative' organisations of these strands represent intersectionally marginalised experiences and interests.</p>

<sup>12</sup> Christoffersen, 2021b



Diversity within	Addressing intersections within an equality strand, e.g. differences among women, etc.  One strand/inequality viewed as more important than others.	Acting for intersectionally marginalised others viewed as being unable or less able to act for themselves: 'inclusion without representation'. This is seeking representation of intersectionally marginalised people as service users or constituents, but not meaningfully in decision-making or among those running the organisation.
Intersections of strands	Work of/with specific groups sharing intersecting identities, e.g. women of colour, disabled women, etc.  No particular strand is primary or more in focus than the other(s).	Representation and enabling participation of intersectionally marginalised people viewed as important. Intersectionally marginalised people viewed as able to act and make decisions for themselves.

**Enabling participation, and making space for self-organisation of intersectionally marginalised people concerned with the intersections of equality strands, provides the most promising representation model for how practitioners might apply intersectionality in order to advance intersectional justice.**

Given that equality organisations are not often representative of (all) intersectionally marginalised sub-groups, there are many organisations focused on multiple identity axes; yet social change in the interests of intersectional justice demands a higher level of organisation, which the sector aims to achieve through forming networks and coalitions.

### **Networks, coalitions and solidarity**

**While coalition building is an important part of intersectional practice, which concept of intersectionality is used by both networks and coalitions themselves and participants in them determines how successful they are at building relationships of solidarity to further intersectional justice.**

- Beyond representation, a second key issue to understanding and using intersectionality is working in networks and coalitions, which involves both relationship building and solidarity. Many participants described intersectional knowledge and practice, and commitment to it, as emerging from networks and coalitions: equality networks were identified as an important source of knowledge about intersectionality. Alternatively, desire to work intersectionally was also a key driver for coalition building and network membership. In the context of intersectionality, participants often spoke of other coalitions and

networks that they are part of, without being prompted.

- Coalition building can be related to solidarity. The way that the networks come together across difference for shared political goals, namely to cooperate in order to advance equality in their respective cities through practice and policy influence, provides moments consistent with 'political solidarity': a form of solidarity based not on similarity, but on common commitment to opposing oppression and injustice.<sup>13</sup> Networks may also build 'intersectional solidarity': 'an ongoing process of creating ties and coalitions across social group differences by negotiating power asymmetries'<sup>14</sup>. Yet, building and extending solidarity across difference raises challenges.

### **Barriers to intersectional solidarity: siloed thinking**

Barriers to coalition and solidarity include engrained siloed thinking and attitudes, which are particularly associated with additive multi-strand and diversity within concepts of intersectionality. Siloed thinking is thinking about specific inequalities (and the equality sectors organised around them) in isolation from one another: in other words, lack of recognition of the ways that inequalities cross over or intersect. Siloed thinking can be driven by competitive funding environments, which create conversations around who is 'more discriminated against', i.e. whose work is more important and thus more deserving of funding.

As part of this broader pattern of siloed thinking, at times participants have perceptions of other equality sectors as being better off than 'their' sector in various ways: in receipt of a disproportionate amount of available funding, or 'better organised'. Often these perceptions are not reflective of available evidence showing for example where funding is allocated. In general, 'newer' sectors (those representing equality areas for which anti-discrimination legislation is more recent) were perceived to be better off by 'older' sectors, with the LGBTI sector often singled out:

*Some strands are well-organised, some are not... I meant LGBT that was never, I mean from legislation point of view; they just come new into it but they were well-organised. The disabilities came into the legislation very well-organised. Aziz, Director, Racial justice organisation, Scotland.*

Underlying some of these statements is a view of other equality communities as having less complexity than one's 'own'; there were frequent assumptions made by participants that 'their' community is the one with the greatest diversity and complexity. This claim to greater complexity and diversity was made in different ways by participants from the disabled peoples', racial justice, refugee, and women's sectors.

<sup>13</sup> Scholz, Sally J. 2008. *Political Solidarity*. University Park: Penn State University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Tormos, Fernando. 2017. "Intersectional Solidarity." *Politics, Groups, and Identities* 5 (4): 707-20.

At times, siloed attitudes extended to a seeming lack of awareness that strands cross over at all. This is the heart of the challenge that intersectionality presents.

Siloed thinking by necessity compares single strand organisations and sectors, making intersectional marginalisation, and intersectional organising, invisible.

Because of siloed thinking, there is substantial wariness about 'stepping on toes' of other sectors, which can work to prevent practitioners from raising concerns about intersectional disadvantage.

Siloed thinking also manifests in exclusion from policy agendas, as Emma notes:

*I know that [our organisation] has not looked at many of the issues facing young people because we just assumed the children sector should be handling that but then there isn't anyone in the children sector that looks at predominantly BME issues.* Emma, Practitioner, Racial justice organisation.

Networks and coalitions were viewed as solutions to siloed thinking.

*Our role was to increase an understanding about intersectionality and to try and prevent things happening in silos...and people not having an understanding that if they were working with one particular group of people that the people they worked with were bringing in all kinds of experiences and identities with them that affected how they reported and what their experiences were.* Elizabeth, Network organiser.

**For both pan equality intersectionality and 'intersections of strands' work, ultimately the challenge in relation to siloed thinking is to make the case to prioritise particular experiences and issues, without making it in a way that reinforces separation between groups: there is a need to argue that 'all issues are interrelated/any one community includes all others', rather than 'all of these separate groups also experience the same issue'.**

### **Applying intersectionality together: network engagement on developing local equality strategies**

One concrete activity that each network engaged in during the research was attempting to influence local equality strategies developed by local governments. Under the Equality Act, public bodies are required to set equality objectives (England) and outcomes (Scotland) every four years. These objectives and outcomes are intended to be based on analysis of local data and evidence and to reflect local priorities. Networks engaged in contributing to local equality strategies through meetings, events, and submitting documents. This activity of influencing local strategies was



often identified as intersectional in various ways by participants, but this works differently in practice depending on which applied concept of intersectionality is used. The understandings of intersectionality used by both networks themselves and participants in them in this process have very different implications for intersectional solidarity.

<b>Table 6 Applying intersectionality in networks</b>	
<b>CONCEPT OF INTERSECTIONALITY</b>	<b>ANALYSIS OF ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL EQUALITY STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT</b>
Generic intersectionality	<p>In one city, the published equality strategy resulting from the network's processes of engagement rarely comments on issues affecting particular equality groups and intersectionally marginalised groups (AD 36-7<sup>15</sup>).</p> <p>At its consultative event, the network in the city organised discussion about what should go into the local equality strategy around policy areas rather than equality strands, which network organisers identified as key to their intersectional approach. However, discussions were framed around identifying key issues for 'people', rather than for marginalised (or intersectionally marginalised) people (AD 1). When specific issues of inequalities experienced by marginalised groups were highlighted in the discussions, at times the network took a deliberately generic approach to the write up of these points (AD 1, 30-35). Specific issues affecting intersectionally marginalised groups, if raised, were not recorded.</p>
Multi-strand and diversity within intersectionality	<p>In another city, in contrast, the published equality strategy is centrally concerned with 'equalities', yet intersectional marginalisation is made invisible within it.</p> <p>In the network's process of input into the local equality strategy, strands were largely considered in parallel, separately, simultaneously, and equivalently.</p> <p>In contrast to pan equality intersectionality which seeks to identify issues common to marginalised groups, network members emphasised that issues themselves for different equality groups 'differ significantly' (AD 18); commonalities were resisted, making intersectional marginalisation invisible in the process since strands are considered to be separate with no crossover.</p>
Intersections of strands and pan equality intersectionality	<p>In the third city, the published equality strategy does show some (limited) recognition of intersectional marginalisation.</p> <p>In that city, the network sought representation of intersectionally marginalised communities and organisations representing them in these conversations, and created dedicated space in events and sections of documents concerning the local equality strategy to talk specifically about intersectionality (AD 13).</p> <p>This network recommended to local government bodies ways that they could engage more 'intersectionally' in the process of equality strategy development, including targeting specific intersectionally marginalised groups. The network raised issues of remuneration of equality organisations contributing expertise. It further recommended more explicit focus on intersectionality and particular intersectionally marginalised groups in the equality strategy (AD 13).</p>

<sup>15</sup> Each document analysed was listed in a database and renamed as 'Anonymous Document [number]'.

Competing concepts of intersectionality have different implications for who is included in and who is excluded from processes of local equality strategy development. The resulting equality strategies are key documents that drive local resource allocation to equality, as well as wider policy making, for four years. Due in part to the (limited) influence of equality networks, ultimately these strategies differ in the extent to which intersectional marginalisation is made invisible or prioritised, with important effects for intersectionally marginalised people and intersectional justice.

### **Challenges for applying intersectionality in networks and coalitions**

Since they view members of equality groups as solely oppressed along one marker of inequality, additive multi-strand and diversity within concepts of intersectionality can lead to resistance to recognising that inequality structures are *a/ways* shaping one another to produce both marginalisation and privilege. A key example of this in the research was the opposition and resistance of some women's organisations to the expansion of rights of trans people in general and trans women in particular, in the context of proposed changes to the Gender Recognition Act (GRA) by Westminster and Holyrood respectively.

Some women's organisations argued that trans rights were in opposition to 'women's rights'. The existence of trans women was made invisible by comparing these two groups, as though they were mutually exclusive. This created problems in relationships with other equality organisations. In contrast, participants with intersections of strands and pan equality concepts tended to view the proposed expansion of rights as a human rights issue affecting an intersectionally marginalised group.

Intersectionality is fundamentally about recognition of how structures of inequality are related, but this requires a prior step of recognising the structures themselves. Those employing diversity within understandings of intersectionality, a prevalent understanding among participants from the women's sector, view one strand (gender) as more important than others. Some do not recognise the structure of inequality which marginalises trans people: cisgenderism, an ideology that 'denies, denigrates, or pathologizes...[that] creates an inherent system of associated power and privilege<sup>16</sup>'.

Even women's organisations that were aiming to be trans inclusive at times expressed similar views. This indicates the limits of 'diversity within' intersectionality: inclusion of trans women in services provided within cisgendered spaces, or simple inclusion of those previously excluded from service provision, does not necessarily mean a lack of discriminatory attitudes, or a commitment to intersectional transformation. Without representation of intersectionally marginalised people in decision-making,

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<sup>16</sup> Lennon, Erica, and Brian J. Mistler. 2014. "Cisgenderism." *TSQ: Transgender Studies Quarterly* 1 (1-2): 63-64.

organisations practicing intersectionality as ‘diversity within’ can oppose the expansion of rights of those they have sought to merely include in services, as multiply disadvantaged, ‘hard to reach’ people lacking the capacity to act for themselves. For these organisations, binary trans identity is incorporated merely as an additional barrier *among women*, but the relationship between sexism and cisgenderism, how they are *always* shaping one another, is left unacknowledged. Because of this, they are left with no framework in which to recognise *non-binary gender* as a marginalised category, as these participants noted.

For multi-strand and diversity within concepts of intersectionality, structures of inequality are viewed additively, so that while it may be considered preferable or desirable to work on other inequalities, it is not considered *necessary*. As a consequence, multi-strand and diversity within intersectionality consider people as solely oppressed (or wholly privileged) along one marker of inequality, and so consideration of how we are each located within inequality structures that are *always* shaping one another is prevented. When other inequalities are considered, they can be incorporated as ‘additional barriers’ but less so as privileged social positions, since one inequality is viewed as more important than others, and so other inequalities are viewed as being able to be subtracted at will. Any acknowledgement of privilege is then momentary, and disappears once attention to that secondary inequality is put on the back burner. Therefore, these concepts prevent meaningful consideration of privilege itself.

### **Creating intersectional solidarity**

Network responses to challenges and conflicts offer some insight into how to create intersectional political solidarity:

#### **‘Allyship’ and solidarity**

Competing concepts of intersectionality produce conflicting views on and approaches to allyship<sup>17</sup> and solidarity. Specifically, there were differing perspectives among participants about what role, if any, more privileged people have in intersectional practice concerning those whom they are privileged in relation to. These differing perspectives were related to competing understandings of intersectionality. Since additive understandings of intersectionality cannot meaningfully engage with privilege, they identify intersectionality as pertaining only to marginality, in individualised ways. These understandings of intersectionality prevent people with privileged aspects of identity from relating intersectionality to themselves, and seeing roles and responsibilities for themselves as allies (or as acting in political solidarity).

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<sup>17</sup> Here allyship is used to mean an action rather than an identity.

Because they view inequality in terms of multiple barriers, these concepts lack recognition of the abilities of intersectionally marginalised people to act for themselves, and so lead to 'acting for' them in paternalistic ways.

Yet allyship has been identified by other participants with non-additive concepts of intersectionality (pan equality and intersections of strands) as a key tool for creating intersectional political solidarity.

For those with intersections of strands concepts of intersectionality,

*Intersectionality is almost as much or more about helping me personally to realise the types of privilege I've got. Rather than the disadvantage or the intersectional disadvantage.*  
Eilidh, Practitioner, Disabled people's organisation.

These participants are able to use intersectionality to locate themselves in structures of inequality that are *always* shaping one another, allowing them to recognise types of privilege. They feel that being privileged in some respects creates a duty to act in allyship/solidarity on others' behalf, for example network organiser Catriona.

*For me, it's really important to know all those different parts of yourself and be prepared to state them and be prepared to, yes, stand in solidarity with our brothers and sisters who might because of other intersections, might be in a less safe position to do that...I obviously have many more advantages than many other people that I work with or alongside. Even as [a marginalised person in some respects] I'm still in a much better position to open a door and hold it open for other people to get heard.* Catriona, Network organiser.

Allyship has therefore been identified by participants as a key tool for creating intersectional political solidarity, and networks and coalitions can break down where the will for allyship among members is lacking. Yet, issues arise when networks and coalitions are composed largely of allies, i.e. when they lack representation of the relevant intersectionally marginalised group. However, there is a need to avoid leaving it solely to those experiencing discrimination directly to challenge it. **This highlights a key problem of representation in networks and coalitions aiming at intersectional practice: in the absence of representation of a group which is being discriminated against (e.g. trans women), how to practice solidarity while avoiding 'speaking for' marginalised others.**

Allyship and solidarity require action, including pointing out problematic practice, and seeking leadership from intersectionally marginalised groups. They also require reflective practice, as Catriona explains.



*[Sometimes we are going to have to] put our hands up if we don't do it perfectly, and that we're all constantly trying to learn and improve that. I think, also, then, that requires you to tell people when they've got it wrong as well.* Catriona, Network organiser.

### Addressing challenges

- To address challenges related to allyship and solidarity, some networks and coalitions have taken steps such as external facilitation, training, and establishing policies.
- Dialogue and learning between equality sectors (for example, trans/LGBTI and women's sectors) were identified as important.

<b>Table 7 Coalition and applied concepts of intersectionality</b>		
<b>APPLIED CONCEPT OF INTERSECTIONALITY</b>		<b>COALITION</b>
Generic	No focus or very little focus on any equality strand or strands in particular: the same work is delivered to benefit 'all'.  Addressing issues that affect 'everybody' (i.e. not only or even primarily marginalised equality groups).	All-encompassing structures and non-specific issues that affect 'everyone', so it is unclear who would be in coalition with whom, and why. Generic intersectionality does not enable coalition building or intersectional solidarity. Networks at work using this concept failed to produce solidarity.
Pan equality	Addressing issues that affect all/most marginalised equality groups.	Creates opportunities for campaigns and coalitions focused on broad issues that affect marginalised groups. Facilitates building intersectional political solidarity in combination with an intersections of strands concept of intersectionality.
Multi-strand	Addressing equality strands in parallel, separately but at the same time.	Coalitions and networks that lack solidarity. Single issue organisations come together to further single issue interests, united in the overall message that all strands need to be included and addressed separately. When equality strands are thought about additively, the possibilities for more meaningful coalition and solidarity are limited.

Diversity within	Addressing intersections within an equality strand, e.g. differences among women, etc.  One strand/inequality viewed as more important than others.	Offers the fewest possibilities for coalition. Since one strand is considered to be more important than others, equitable relationships between strand specific sectors are viewed as unnecessary to developing projects targeted at intersectionally marginalised groups. Participation in networks and coalitions may be viewed favourably, but as unnecessary.
Intersections of strands	Work of/with specific groups sharing intersecting identities, e.g. women of colour, disabled women, etc.  No particular strand is primary or more in focus than the other(s).	Values equitable partnership and representation, and so leads to organising intersectionally in organisations and coalitions. Leads to solidarity since it views inequalities as always shaping one another.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

- The five ways of applying intersectionality that the research identified help to think through the practicalities of applying intersectionality in siloed contexts.
- Each applied concept of intersectionality serves different interests, and has different implications for intersectionally marginalised groups; for example, who receives funding for 'intersectional' work, who this work benefits and whom it disadvantages (or makes invisible).
- **There is a pressing need for organisations, practitioners and policy makers to be much more specific about which particular concept of intersectionality they mean when they use the term.** Organisations may also think through how their practice aligns with the concept of intersectionality that they subscribe to.
- Although the research focused primarily on the third sector, the five ways of applying intersectionality identified are also relevant to policy making, the work of public sector equality and diversity practitioners, and grassroots organisations.
- Overemphasis on 'evidence' serves to construct intersectionally marginalised communities as small, and on which there is little reliable evidence. This serves to marginalise self-organised intersectional organisations, and reinforce individualised understandings of intersectionality. In quantifying intersectional work, it is actually 'un-intersectionalised' through disaggregation.

Some concepts of intersectionality are complementary to one another (pan equality and intersections of strands; multi-strand and diversity within), while others are opposing (in particular, generic and intersections of strands). Yet, all of these applied concepts are currently funded and delivered under the name of 'intersectionality' in the UK. Actually, if we are specific about which concept of intersectionality we are seeking to apply, then some practical implications are clear from this study:

<b>Table 8 Recommendations to equality networks, organisations and practitioners</b>
Explore and specify the applied concepts of intersectionality that you use: practice and advocate for 'intersections of strands' and pan equality concepts, instead of generic, multi-strand and diversity within ones
Build unity, networks and coalitions around shared understandings of intersectionality and common issues
When working on common issues, highlight and prioritise intersectionally marginalised experiences, including newly articulated ones (e.g. non-binary identity)
Form intersectional alliances (formal and informal, equitable partnerships between equality organisations working on different issues)
Seek and build leadership of intersectionally marginalised groups. Facilitate participation and self-organisation of intersectionally marginalised people
Be responsive to newer articulations of identities and inequalities (e.g. cisgenderism and non-binary identities)
Address perceived conflicts between strands as they emerge
Facilitate and engage in dialogue and learning between equality sub-sectors
Work to balance practicing solidarity with avoiding 'speaking for' marginalised others
Practice intersectionality <i>within</i> equality organisations as well as in outward facing work. This attention to internal practice could help to make structures of inequality more visible: they operate both <i>within</i> organisations and in the sector as well as outside of it

- Specificity about intersectionality could be written into policies, and it could be a requirement of funding bids to 'do' intersectionality. It could also form a basis of unity for more fruitful coalitions and partnerships.
- Placing intersectionality at the centre is accomplished in intersectional alliances and organising.
- Single strand organisations can focus on facilitating the meaningful participation and self-representation of intersectionally marginalised groups, and be responsive to new articulations of inequalities and identities that challenge established thinking.
- Marginalised communities/unpopular issues do not necessarily place any faith in organisations that are not run by and for them to represent them: they organise to represent themselves. The ongoing need for self-organisation is why coalition and solidarity are so important. Nevertheless, building coalitions across the huge range of self-organised intersecting identity-based organisations raises serious logistical challenges. **A challenge of intersectionality is working to build greater unity while balancing these tensions: the drive towards 'generic' intersectionality because of austerity, as well as a willingness to act on issues that might not be our 'own'. This is ultimately about learning how to practice solidarity in ways that avoid 'speaking for' others.**
- Pan equality work can be a starting point to identify common goals, as well as differences and impasses. The challenge is to avoid it being 'lowest common

denominator', thereby reinforcing inequalities. This is overcome by highlighting intersectional issues within broader campaigns. Using intersections of strands concepts of intersectionality can overcome impasses (for example, the challenges that trans organising poses to how practitioners think about gender), but diversity within cannot.

<b>Table 9 Recommendations to policymakers and funders</b>
Explore and specify the applied concepts of intersectionality that you use: advocate for 'intersections of strands' and pan equality concepts instead of generic, multi-strand and diversity within ones. The implications of employing 'intersections of strands' concepts for policy makers may be that intersectionality cannot be generally applied in policy, but needs to always be context-specific interventions
Respect the principle of self-organisation based on identity
Fund intersectional organisations and alliances, which present models for intersectional practice
Hold single strand organisations accountable for facilitating meaningful participation and self-representation of intersectionally marginalised groups

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## Appendix 1: About the research

This research and analysis was conducted between 2016-2020 in the Social Policy subject area, School of Social and Political Science, University of Edinburgh, UK. It was supported by the UK Economic and Social Research Council.

The research was conducted with equality networks because participants in scoping research felt that thinking through and applying intersectionality, and trying to prevent a 'siloes' approach, were network goals. Equality networks also act as 'representatives' of the equality third sector in relationships with equality policy makers, and so are relevant to study the relationship between equality policy and practice. Following a mapping of networks in England and Scotland, three networks with commitments to working in an intersectional way were selected. The networks aim at cooperation to address identity-based inequality, and advance equality, and work predominantly at a local level.

### About the researcher

*As a white woman, it is important to explain what led me to research understandings and uses of the Black feminist theory of intersectionality: my key motivation for this project was my background as a practitioner in the equality sector, specifically in a Black-led LGBTQ community development organisation which was committed to working in an intersectional way.*

The research drew on ethnography and participatory research. For about 1.5 years, the researcher participated in the networks (attending semi-regular meetings and events and participating in network email lists). Networks were engaged at an early stage and had input into the development of research questions and design. Some participants were involved in data collection and recruitment. Within the case studies, four methods were used:

Research Methods	
METHOD	NUMBER
In-depth, semi-structured interviews	41 in total 39 with representatives of organisations from 13 equality sub-sectors/intersectional combinations and network staff 2 with policymakers
Focus groups	1 in total
Participant observation	9 network meetings and events
Document analysis	24 national and UK level equality policy documents 42 (total) documents pertaining to the case study equality networks

The research was grounded in an intersectional, feminist, and antiracist theoretical framework.

Job roles of participants varied, from volunteers, to practitioners, to directors. In representing a range of primarily self-organised and staffed equality sub-sectors, participants were diverse across: age; disability; D/deafness; gender; race; religion/belief; sexual orientation; and transgender status. Individuals, organisations, networks, and cities are anonymised; all names used are pseudonyms. Information about the organisations that participated is in the table below.

<b>Third sector organisation characteristics</b>			
<b>CHARACTERISTIC</b>		<b>NUMBER OF ORGANISATIONS</b>	<b>%</b>
Country in which organisation is based	England	14	48.3%
	Scotland	15	51.7%
Total		29	100.0%
Funding	Funded	24	82.8%
	Unfunded	5	17.2%
Total		29	100.0%
Type	Community development	2	6.9%
	Network	3	10.3%
	Policy/campaigning	11	37.9%
	Service provider	7	24.1%
	Mixed policy/campaigning/ service provider	6	20.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Equality sub-sector	BME women of faith	2	6.9%
	BME women's	1	3.4%
	Deaf	1	3.4%
	Disabled	3	10.3%
	Disabled women's	1	3.4%
	Faith	1	3.4%
	LGBTI	2	6.9%
	LGBTI refugee	1	3.4%
	LGBTI young people	1	3.4%
	Network (all strands)	3	10.3%
	Racial justice	4	13.8%
	Refugee	2	6.9%
	Trans	1	3.4%
	Women's	6	20.7%
<b>Total</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Single strand vs. intersectional	Intersectional	6	20.7%
	Single strand	23	79.3%
<b>Total</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>100.0%</b>
Size	Small (10 staff or less)	22	75.9%
	Medium (11-29 staff)	3	10.3%
	Large (30 staff or more)	4	13.8%
<b>Total</b>		<b>29</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

Several sessions were held to share and interpret findings with participants, including a workshop bringing together some participants from each city and each network, held in March 2019, after the research was completed. Participants confirmed that they recognised the five competing concepts of intersectionality. This session informed the research findings shared in this briefing.

The workshop was followed by a cross-sector public conference, [Equality and Intersectionality](#), produced in collaboration with two other PhD students<sup>18</sup> and Scottish national LGBTI charity the Equality Network, and funded by the University of Edinburgh and the Scottish government Equality Unit. At 100 participants, this was Scotland's largest ever conference on intersectionality. It brought together those working in the equality third sector in England and Scotland, practitioners in the public sector, equality policy makers, academics, and grassroots organisations and activists. The conference aimed to share learning about equality work and applying intersectionality across cities, sectors and countries of the UK; and to provide relationship building opportunities across these sectors. These aims were accomplished through short presentations, group discussions and workshops. The design of the event and the programme were shaped through the input of research participants.

The five applied concepts of intersectionality which are identified in this briefing are generalised theoretically, based on case studies of three equality networks, interviews with policy makers and other key equality sector actors, analysis of equality policy documents, and background knowledge gained from previous research in the areas of UK equality policy and equality organising<sup>19</sup>.

<sup>18</sup> Leah McCabe (Social policy) and Cat Wayland (Politics).

<sup>19</sup> E.g. Christoffersen, Ashlee, and Annette Behrens. 2014. *Intersectionality Literature Review*. London: centred.





