

# AT THE INTERSECTIONS what is intersectionality?



Intersectionality<sup>1</sup> is a way to understand how a person's various identities – their race, their class, their gender identity, etc. – affect how they move through the world. Intersectionality helps explain why some populations of people may be targeted for violence at higher rates than others or experiences multiple forms of violence, and the ways systemic barriers impact people differently depending where they fall on the continuum of power.

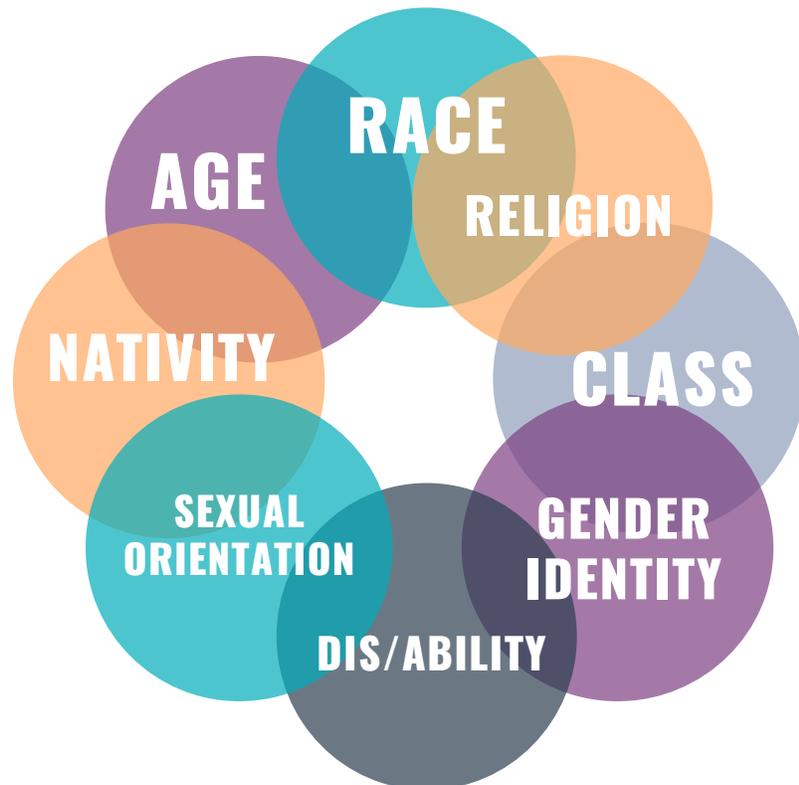
## WHY DOES INTERSECTIONALITY MATTER?

People who exist at the intersection of multiple oppressions are more vulnerable to all forms of violence, including sexual violence, because of the institutional and individual violence targeted toward them. They often lack resources to have their basic needs met, including safety. This results in higher rates of violence and an underreporting of these crimes:

- Women who are bisexual or gay are **three times more likely** to report experiencing sexual violence than heterosexual women.<sup>2</sup>
- Men who are gay are **fifteen times more likely** to experience sexual violence than heterosexual men.<sup>3</sup>
- In 2015, **47 percent** of people who are transgender have been sexually assaulted in their lifetime.<sup>4</sup>
- 20 percent of incarcerated transgender people have been sexually assaulted by staff, including youth in juvenile facilities.<sup>5</sup>
- Native American women are **2.5 times more likely** to experience sexual violence than women of

### ► intersectionality:

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other racial and ethnic groups.<sup>6</sup>

- Black women are less likely to engage law enforcement after an assault.<sup>7</sup> The Department of Justice estimates that for every African American woman who reports their assault, 15 do not,

compared with five white women who don't report for every one white woman who does.<sup>8</sup>

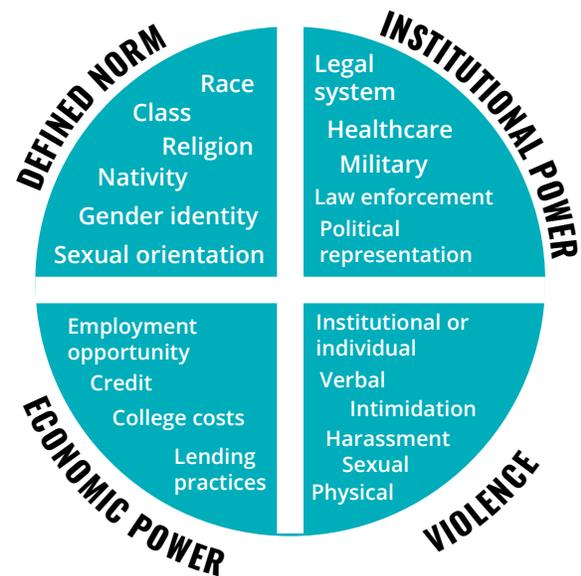
- Women of color experience **disproportionately high rates** of sexual violence.<sup>9</sup>

Intersectionality exists within the broader understanding of oppression, of systems designed to privilege some groups and disadvantaging others. There are four interlocking elements that determine people's access to power and safety.<sup>10</sup>

People at the intersections of multiple forms of oppression may also struggle to have their needs met in the aftermath of violence. Law enforcement, medical professionals, and advocates may not have proper training and support working with survivors from diverse backgrounds and as a result may create more harm to the survivor in their attempts to help. Inclusivity for all survivors is critical in service provision. For example, service providers can take extra care to ensure their intake forms include a range of options for one's gender identity.

**Intersectionality can feel like a big idea to wrap our heads around.**

Seeing the ways in which oppression weaves into the lives of others and ourselves is complicated. Identifying how our own intersecting identities have influenced our place in the world is a great place to begin. Ultimately, sexual violence exists on a foundation of oppression. By eradicating oppression in all its forms, we can also eliminate sexual violence.



## REFERENCES

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<sup>2,3</sup> Rothman, E., Exner, D., Baughman, A. (2011). *The prevalence of sexual assault against people who identify as gay, lesbian or bisexual in the United States: A systematic review*. Journal of Trauma, Violence, and Abuse.

<sup>4,5</sup> The Report of the 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey: Executive Report. (December 2016). National Center for Transgender Equality

<sup>6</sup> Gilpin, L. *Native American women still have the highest rates of rape and assault*. (June 2016). High Country News.

<sup>7,8</sup> Axtell, B. *Black women, sexual assault and the art of resistance*. (April 2012). Forbes Woman.

<sup>9</sup> Tjaden, P. & Thoennes, N. *Full report of the prevalence, incidence, and consequences of violence against women*. (November 2000). U.S. Department of Justice: National Institute of Justice.

<sup>10</sup> Pharr, S. *The common elements of oppressions*. Excerpt from: Homophobia: A weapon of Sexism. (1988). Inverness, CA: Chardon Press.

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The New Jersey Coalition Against Sexual Assault (NJCSA) is the statewide organization representing 21 county-based rape crisis centers and Rutgers University's Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance. NJCSA elevates the voice of survivors and service providers through advocacy, training, and support for efforts to create safer communities for all people.

