Analyzing the intersections of diversity:

A strategy towards equality

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ABSTRACT

In the quotation below, Geddy Lee (lead singer of Rush) exhorts those who have the authority to effect change to do so by creating a new reality. This article – which was mistakenly omitted from the previous issue of Diversity magazine – supports the idea that intersections of diversity are an important consideration in the context of ensuring that national identities are inclusive. The author proposes a practical approach to helping decision-makers implement government policy that reflects a reality which is more inclusive, and therefore closer to the heart.

And the men who hold high places
Must be the ones who start
To mould a new reality
Closer to the heart
Closer to the heart
The blacksmith and the artist
Reflect it in their art
They forge their creativity
Closer to the heart
Closer to the heart[1]

Intersections analysis is a step in the policy development process. It refers to the process by which decisions are made when taking into account the complexity of human identities. In the same way that a gender analysis requires consideration of how outcomes may differ between men and women, intersections analysis requires policy-makers to consciously take into account the complexity of the lived experiences of people they do not necessarily know well. The objective of intersections analysis is for policy and decision-makers to understand the individual and cumulative characteristics associated with an individual or community in order to 1) minimize any negative impacts of initiatives under consideration, and 2) accentuate positive impacts.

Intersections analysis is important because, despite a half a century of intense immigration, the government of Canada has yet to achieve a workforce of policy-makers and legislators that reflects its population. As a result, options tend to reflect the experiences and perspectives of that particular group of policy makers or legislators. In relying on this information, decision-makers may not appreciate the impact of their decisions. Consequently, decisions taken may trigger unexpected outcomes on groups of people whose lived experience and identities were not taken into account early on in the policy-making process.

The purpose of applying an intersections analysis is to ensure that decision-makers make informed choices. When policy-makers adequately understand the characteristics of stakeholders, programs, policies and legislation can be tailored to meet particular needs and/or to achieve predictable outcomes. The application of an intersections analysis can also inform decisions about whose needs should be prioritized. In the context of decisions about who gets public funds, the analysis can support decisions to focus funding on particular groups, for particular results.

The application of Intersections analysis

People are made up of a multitude of characteristics such as gender, race, age, ability, income. Intersections analysis seeks to understand the relationship between these characteristics in order to achieve equitable policy outcomes. In some cases, a dominant characteristic will emerge to drive the policy or program choice. For example, a young man with a physical disability will need physical access to school as a priority. In such a case, the dominant characteristic will be the mobility impairment. One can expect that school decisions about services for this student will aim first to ensure physical access. To the extent that service implications emerge from an analysis of other intersections such as the student's age, race, or income, these become secondary considerations.

Another example of intersections analysis could involve the assessment of the recreational facility needs of inner-city youth. An appreciation of the compounding intersections of race, income, age, religion, and immigrant status might yield the following information for use by community centre program directors:

- To the extent that Christian religious holidays result in the closing of local community centres, non-Christian youth will require alternative programming when centres are closed for statutory holidays they do not celebrate, such as Christmas and Easter. (Intersections of youth+religion).

- To the extent that youth in inner-city neighbourhoods are likely to be non-white and from low-income single-parent families, the choice of scheduling activities in the evening may limit the participation of youth who provide primary childcare when their mothers are at work. (Intersections of youth+race+low income)
- To the extent that parents who have immigrated from police states avoid interaction with authorities in Canada, these parents are less likely to encourage their children to engage in recreational activities which involve basketball games with local police officers. (Intersections of youth+ immigrant status)

The outcome of incorporating the information elicited by these kinds of intersections analyses is that policies and programs can then be adjusted to address lived experience.

Intersections Analysis – A retrospective

My exploration of intersections analysis stems from work in the 1980s and 90s at the Equality Rights Branch of the Ministry of the Attorney General for Ontario. Then and now, policy issues such as civilian oversight of police and racial profiling in the justice system were at the forefront of the justice agenda. Policy-makers were required to address the impact of programs, policies and legislation on youth who were racialized[2] and whose identities were as often Canadian-born as immigrant. Information was elicited via formal and informal consultation with members of African Canadian communities, enabling policy analysts and Crown Attorneys to look at the problems they were trying to solve in a new way.

In the l990s work on a variety of more formal analytical tools (diversity lenses) took place across government departments. At one point there were over 16 lenses being developed by individual departments to assess particular policy impacts. In 1997, intersections analysis became more formalized at the federal Department of Justice. At that time, a gender analysis tool was being implemented across federal departments. That tool noted that "gender equality analysis should be part of a more comprehensive analysis of the impacts of policy, law or programs on diverse groups (or 'diversity analysis')."[3]

Building on the gender analysis work, policy officials at the Department of Justice worked with colleagues across the country to implement a tool to assist in more formally analysing the impact of intersecting identities. This work culminated in the development of an analytical tool called IDEAS (Integrated Diversity and Equality Analysis Screen)[4] endorsed by Deputy Ministers of Justice across the country for use by their justice officials. IDEAS was a simple set of focusing designed to elicit information that might otherwise not come to the attention of decision-makers. As the guiding principles of IDEAS state: "Diversity analysis does not attempt to determine whether an initiative should proceed; rather it provides information on the impacts of the initiative on diverse groups."

The IDEAS tool identified thirteen groups deemed to "frequently experience disadvantage in their dealings with the justice system."[5] Enumerated below, the tool initiated thinking about these groups with the following question: "Are there foreseeable specific impacts of the initiative on individuals who can be identified by membership in one or more[6] of the following groups?"

1. Women
2. Aboriginal People
3. Persons with disabilities[7]
4. Recent immigrants
5. The elderly
6. Persons with literacy problems
7. Racialized[8] minorities
8. Religious groups
9. Refugees
10. Youth and Children
11. Social assistance recipients and the poor
12. Gays and Lesbians, transgendered and bi-sexual persons
13. People who speak neither Official Language[9]"

The process of agreeing to these groups was not without hurdles. The reality is that the tool required an understanding of communities we did not necessarily know well, and about whom there was limited information. As the tool was developed, fact sheets were compiled to assist in guiding the thinking about each group. The fact sheets were a source of intense debate. Some officials worried that "a little knowledge is a dangerous thing" and that brief descriptions about group characteristics could perpetuate negative stereotypes. Others felt that basic information, even if limited, was better than no information given that decisions were being made which would affect members of these groups. In the absence of consultation with members of these groups, the primary source of information was Statistics Canada data.

A colleague, Mala Khanna, developed another training piece around intersections entitled: "When Blue and Yellow make Green"[11] thus cleverly capturing the impact of intersections (blue and yellow) and the ensuing creation of a completely new colour (green) which exacts appreciation on its own merits. In the body of that piece Mala acknowledged the complexity and the backlash that a requirement to assess the impact on so many groups can trigger. She noted:

> At the same time, recognizing all of the possible intersections that can exist between and within the profiled groups, and understanding the realities of those intersections is a challenging task. There is a fear that the boundaries between these profiles will be blurred so much so that policy makers and decision makers will have to account for all of the complex and intricate combinations that could be made. This fear is not unfounded. As stated earlier, it is not possible, nor is it desirable to attempt to objectively determine the outcome of various intersections. They are infinite. However, we can make an effort to recognize that policies will impact some groups and some individuals within those groups more so than others.

Applying Intersections Analysis in the Cultural sector

Artists and arts communities have long recognized the creative advantage which emerges from the intersections of multiple identities and ideas. A recent issue of *Rice Paper* is dedicated to "the end of Pure Race," a controversial title tied directly to hybridity.[12] *Fuse Magazine* has spent over 25 years reflecting on the relationship between political issues and contemporary culture, advocating from the perspective of a multitude of intersecting voices.[13] Nonetheless, the reality is that the extensive diversity of voices, histories, and talent resident in Canada is not well reflected on stage, screen, in radio, films, music, books, museums or galleries.

In the cultural sector, the application of an intersections analysis is about minimizing the exclusion and disadvantage which arise from limited access to funding. At the federal level, the Department of Canadian Heritage is responsible for policy and programs in support of the cultural sector. In this context, the application of an intersections analysis seeks primarily to ensure programs and policies encourage diversity in Canadian content by promoting access to arts and heritage for all Canadians. In recognition of an identified need to better reflect the diversity of Canadian talent, the Department of Canadian Heritage adopted a Strategic Plan on Diversity and Culture in 2003.[14] Using an approach similar to that of IDEAS, questions are asked about program and policies impacts in relation to membership in five groups enumerated as: Culturally and Racially Diverse, Aboriginal Peoples, Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered people, Official Languages and Persons with Disabilities.

The Appendix to the Strategic Plan on Diversity and Culture sets out the following guiding principles:

> Diversity analysis removes imbalances in order to achieve:
> **Access:** Opening up the Canadian Heritage Portfolio programs and activities.
> **Equity:** Ensuring inclusion.
> **Social Cohesion:** Facilitating participation and interaction across communities.
> **Fair Decisions:** Making decisions based on informed choices about the impact of policies on diverse communities.

The questions outlined in the Diversity and Culture Strategic Plan, will assist departmental officials in setting priorities for funding as the department seeks renewal of several programs and initiatives. Arts institutions such as the Canada Council, who implemented targeted funding towards diverse artists several years ago, are now beginning to see the results of efforts to increase their reach into diverse communities. As noted in their 2002/03 Annual Report referring to the Council's Capacity Building program, the Report notes:

> The impact of the program can be seen in the overall artistic growth of the companies involved, which is being felt throughout the diverse communities they serve. In Vancouver, the board and staff of Centre A, the Vancouver International Centre for Contemporary Asian Art, are engaged in a promising strategic planning process that will sustain growth of the organization. Arsenal Pulp Press, an award-winning Vancouver publishing house, has hired a marketing manager – and increased sales by 43%. In Montreal, the Black Theatre Workshop, inspired by renewed leadership, has presented a full season of cultural activities, including a community project that weaves the stories of the francophone and anglophone African diasporas. And in Toronto, the AfriCanadian Playwrights Festival has hired an in-house web designer, thereby creating a virtual home for Black Canadian playwrights.[15]

These efforts by government to understand how to meet the needs of communities with complex intersecting identities are important steps towards achieving equality of outcomes. As dub poet, cultural activist and teacher, Lillian Allen, has written: "Representation is presence, and presence is participation and more equitable re-distribution of resources…"[16] In this sense, intersections analysis is one step along the continuum of effort required to achieve representativity in public institutions and equity in resource allocation.

At the end of the day, governments will need to pay attention to the outcome of intersections analysis in order to maximize scarce resources. Equitable access to arts funding will remain a challenge for all government funders given limited funding envelopes and high demand from new and established arts institutions. An intersections analysis can help determine whether a program is likely to achieve its objectives or to incur extra costs due to unforeseen impacts. Public resources remain scarce so care must be taken to ensure that funds are well-spent. While the level of public resources will never be able to meet all public needs, to the greatest extent possible, informed choices should be made about the impact of initiatives, what needs should be met, and in what order of priority.

In conclusion, I quote Lillian Allen who writes: "We must keep working to support what is fundamental to our identity and our communities and what offers not only a way forward but great and exciting possibilities as a nation."

Notes

1 Lyrics from Closer to the Heart, by *Rush* From the album "A Show Of Hands"; Words by Neil Peart and Peter Talbot, Music by Geddy Lee and Alex Lifeson

2 "Racialization is the process by which societies construct race as real, different and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political and social life." Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System (1994) (From concepts by Stuart Hall, Robert Miles, and others.)

3 www.canada.justice.gc.ca/en/dept/pub/guide/evaluation.htm://canada.justice.gc.ca/en/dept/pub/guide/evaluation.htm

4 IDEAS – An Integrated Diversity and Equality Analysis Screen, a document approved for use by |Federal Provincial Territorial Deputy Ministers of Justice and the F/P/T Working Group on Diversity, Equality and Justice (1997)

5 Extract from Purpose section of IDEAS

6 "one or more: refers to whether there are foreseeable specific impacts on individuals who can be identified by membership in one or more of these groups.

7 Persons with disabilities includes persons with physical and/or developmental disabilities

8 "Racialization is the process by which societies construct race as real, different and unequal in ways that matter to economic, political and social life." Report of the Commission on Systemic Racism in the Ontario Criminal Justice System (1994) (From concepts by Stuart Hall, Robert Miles, and others.)

9 This group was identified in order to distinguish between the experiences of recent immigrants and older immigrants who have never learned English or French.

10 Refers to women such as prostitutes who tend to be subject to regular police scrutiny

11 "Khanna, Mala "When Blue and Green make Yellow", Draft article prepared for the Department of Canadian Heritage, 1999.

12 http://www.ricepaperonline.com

13 http://www.fusemagazine.org

14 Appendix 2 – Department of Canadian Heritage – Strategic Plan on Diversity and Culture Draft Diversity Questions for Program Renewal http://www.pch.gc.ca/special/dcforum/pubs/strat/index_e.cfm

15 http://www.canadacouncil.ca/council/annualreports/2002-2003/equity_equite-e.asp

16 Lillian Allen, as extracted from The Vancouver-based periodical *Rice Paper* (www.ricepaperonline.com) The end of Pure Race, Ricepaper, 2003 RicePaper, http://www.ricepaperonline.com/curren