Culturally and Racially Marginalised Women in Leadership

A FRAMEWORK FOR (INTERSECTIONAL) ORGANISATIONAL ACTION

What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality refers to how some people experience compounded discrimination due to multiple marginalising *and* interlinked characteristics.

The term was first coined by Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw[1] in 1989, to talk about Black women's unique and specific experiences of discrimination in the USA.

Why is intersectionality important?

It is important to take an intersectional approach when designing, delivering, and evaluating Equity, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) workplace initiatives. In the case of gender equity initiatives, taking an intersectional approach means the initiatives are more likely to be inclusive of and benefit all women. Workplace gender equity initiatives, even with the best of intentions, can inadvertently fail to consider the different life experiences and needs of all women – resulting in improved outcomes mainly for white, middle class, able-bodied, heterosexual, cisgendered women.[2]

Some examples of compounding discrimination at work…

Below are some examples of women who experience compounding discrimination at work. The list is illustrative – it is not intended to be an exhaustive list.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women have substantially lower rates of workforce participation (52%) than Indigenous men (65%) and non-Indigenous women (59%),[3] and are paid less, on average, than Indigenous men, being over-represented in most of the lower weekly income brackets and under-represented in the highest income brackets.[4]

Culturally and racially marginalised women. In Australia, CALD women migrants and refugees are overrepresented in insecure industries and roles (e.g., manufacturing, accommodation, food services, cleaning, labouring), and are more likely to be employed on a casual basis and to be at a disadvantage negotiating terms of employment.[5] All else being equal, relative to white men, Black women must have more prior job-specific experience and more overall work experience before receiving a promotion.[6]

Lower class women. Lower class women workers are much more likely than other women, and all men to report experiencing workplace discrimination and/or harassment in the past year – 45% of lower class women workers, compared to 39% of lower class men workers, 21% to 24% of middle class workers, and 25% to 27% of higher class workers.[7]

Women with disability are more likely to work in informal, vulnerable, part-time and lower-paid jobs; are less likely to be in paid workforce; and have lower incomes than men with disabilities.[8]

Understanding intersectionality

Intersectionality refers to how some people experience compounded discrimination due to multiple marginalising and interlinked characteristics.

Multiple marginalising characteristics

Intersectionality recognises that some people have **multiple marginalising characteristics** (e.g., Black women, women with disabilities, Asian non-binary women) which negatively affect their access to opportunities. Current approaches to gender equity often treat 'women' as one homogenous group. Instead, intersectionality recognises that white women have more access to power, privilege, and resources than CARM women.

For example, DCA research found that while 5.7% of all ASX directors in 2015 were Anglo women, only 2.5% of all ASX directors were from non-Anglo cultural origins.[9]

Interlinked characteristics

Intersectionality recognises that people experience multiple forms of bias or marginalisation all at the same time – these forms of bias or marginalisation are therefore *interlinked*.

For example, an Asian woman at work may experience gendered racism (e.g., assumptions that she is not suitable for leadership as she will be passive and quiet) rather than sexism separately to racism.[10]

Compounding characteristics

Not only are marginalising characteristics interlinked, but they all act together to compound or amplify experiences of discrimination. For example, Black women are paid 67 cents for every $1 that their white male counterparts earn.

Among all women, the wage gap is smaller: about 84 cents for each $1. The difference over a 40-year career would mean earning about $907,680 less than their white male counterparts.[11]
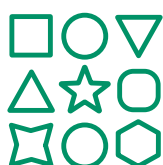
Remember – not all characteristics are marginalising

For example, while "gender" is a characteristic for men, women, and non-binary people, in Australian workplaces today it is women and non-binary people who on average have less career opportunities than men and therefore experience workplace marginalisation.[12]

Similarly, race is a characteristic for both Black and white people, however it is Black workers who on average have less career opportunities than white people and therefore experience workplace marginalisation.[13]

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