Transcript for Centring Intersectional EDI in Research Practices and Approaches
BCcampus Research Speakers Series event hosted November 21, 2023
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Host: Gwen Nguyen

GWEN NGUYEN:
Good morning. Hello, everyone. It is my pleasure to welcome you all to BCcampus Research Speaker series session three. Today we will delve into a very crucial topic, Centring Intersectional EDI in Research Practices and Approaches. My name is Gwen and I'm a learning and teaching advisor with BCcampus. Before we start, I'd like to go over a few housekeeping items. First thing, this whole session will be recorded and you're welcome to keep your camera off. And feel free to rename yourself to "Participant" if you prefer. Live captioning has also been enabled for accessibility. A special thank you goes to my two exceptional teammates, Britt Dzioba and Kelsey Kilbey. Britt has been an indispensable partner for this Research Speaker Series project, providing both inspirational and also unwavering commitment. Kelsey has also been our wonderful support behind the scenes, especially during busy October and November events at BCcampus.

Before we dive into the session, I'd like to begin with the territorial acknowledgment. BCcampus has two offices located on the ceded territories of the Tsleil-Waututh, Squamish, Musqueam, W̱SÁNEĆ, and Esquimalt and Songhees Nations of the Lekwungen-speaking People. As we respond to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Calls to Action, we continue our journey of learning and relationship building with diverse Indigenous people. Today I'm joining everyone from Victoria, the traditional land of the Lekwungen-speaking People, including Songhees and Esquimalt People. I'm very grateful every day for living and working in the place that is so close to nature with four beautiful seasons in a very naturally setting place at BCcampus. I recognize my positionality as a short Southeast Asian middle-aged woman of colour, heterosexual, a wife, a mother of two beautiful children. A first-generation immigrant to Canada because I, having worked and lived in multiple countries, I realized that I become an outsider to both my home cultures and the new cultures. I'm very sensitive to challenges that minorities usually face in academia. I'm strongly committed to creating a more inclusive as well as accessible education and giving more marginalized group voices and choices. Please feel free to share your introduction, as well as territorial acknowledgement in the chat, if you wish.

We usually share the survey link at the end of the session. But recognizing that many of you might have tight schedules, I'd like to mention upfront that we invite you to participate in a short, anonymous survey. The link is available in the chat. Your feedback will help us shape more future professional events at BCcampus.

Turning back to our session focus, we're here to delve into understanding how intersectional EDI is not just a theoretical concept, but also a practical and essential element in advancing critical knowledge, especially in research. To guide us through this journey, we are very privileged to have with us Dr. Moussa Magassa. Dr. Moussa served as the associate vice

president of Equity Diversity and Inclusion at Mount Royal University in Calgary. His work is not just a career, but it's actually a calling, developing institutional EDI strategies, policies, and programs focused on experiences of equity, diversity of deserving individuals with a very rich background in critical race theory, anti-racism, and human rights education. Dr. Magassa's expertise is shaped by his diverse academic journey and professional roles, including his commitments and contributions at the University of Victoria as well as University of British Columbia and the current institution. Now please join me in welcoming Dr. Moussa Magassa as he leads us through this session today. Here you go. Thank you.

MOUSSA MAGASSA:
Thank you. Thank you so much, Gwen. This is just so kind of you. Can everyone hear me? Good morning, everyone. As I usually say, I want to thank you for being part of my world and my life because I come from a culture, we say people who come across your life, even if it is a second, you should be thankful to them because their impact on your life moving forward will be forever. Thank you for being here, but also, I want to say thank you for all the work you do because I know we are part of those unsung heroes doing EDI work is more than just the day-to-day work. It is more.

Today we're going to be talking about centring intersectional EDI, equity, diversity, and inclusion, in research practices and approaches. Like Gwen did, I also wanted to acknowledge the territory, the land and the territories and the place I live in here in Calgary. And I'm just so thankful for all the communities who have accepted me and have allowed me to be here. And I want to thank all the communities, not only those in the past, the ancestors, but also those in the present and those coming in the future. Land acknowledgment should not just be a rhetorical word. It should be a reality. I hope that after we acknowledge that, we can commit to not only work with our Indigenous sisters and brothers to implement the 94 Calls for Action of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but also to work alongside them to also address some of the systemic issues that currently exist and that happen every day. If we make that commitment, now we can talk about research and how to centre intersectional equity, diversity, and inclusion in research.

For my presentation today, I endeavor, I hope that the objective I will try to achieve by the end of our conversation today will be hopefully we will develop together a common understanding about the goals of intersectional EDI as an action-oriented community advocacy and change program. I don't take those words very lightly. What I'm trying to do here is to challenge research itself. Research should be meaningful. It should be something that contributes to social change and that contributes to address issues in our society. Research should be advocacy based. It should go for a social transformation and change. I hope also that we will be able to critically reflect on the intersections of EDI and our research practices and approaches. That we will be courageous enough to question how much our research aligned with intersectional EDI principal values. At the end, we have enough time to share ideas with others on how to centre intersectional EDI principal values in our research and not the other way around. This won't be a lecture, to be honest with you. I will have breakout rooms. I hope that

we pollinate our ideas. We discuss, we come with solutions and ideas, but that we leave this conversation today with more questions than answers. If we do that, I will be happy that we have achieved something.

The premise of my presentation is my argument is that centring intersectional EDI in research practices and approaches should be a key priority for all of us as EDI practitioners or for researchers who are really committed to advance critical knowledge and learning that will practically challenge the current local and globally structural barriers that we know marginalized and limit access and participation to many individuals like us. That's the action I want to see in our research if it is infused, embedded in through the lenses of equity, diversity, inclusion, and intersectionality.

However, I have a question for all of you, the title Centring Intersectional ECI in Research Practices and Approaches. What does that mean for you? When you hear this title what comes to mind? By the way, what is even intersectional EDI? Those are the questions. I'm not going to answer them straightway. I am going to tease you to challenge you to talk about it in your breakout room. We're going to send you for a 10-minute breakout room. We want you to prepare and come with some answers that you can also post in the chat. And hopefully we will have someone from your group as a volunteer to report to the big group as well. Kelsey, go ahead and send people off.

Excellent, welcome back everyone. I hope you had a bit of time. I know that 10 minutes is not enough. This is a lifetime conversation. But hopefully this 10 minutes you have had a chance to maybe address one or two ideas. But what do we mean by centring EDI in research practices and approaches? What is intersectional EDI for you? What I will suggest is that the person reporting for you, if they can post it in the chat, the answer, one or two answers, that will be helpful. But I might also call a couple of breakout rooms and ask if those people want to report.

I look at room number five. I was wondering if someone from that room wants to share with us one or two things that come out of your conversation in terms of what centring, intersection, and EDI mean. Sorry to voluntold you, but yeah, any from that room?

JENNY: I don't mind sharing a little bit.

MOUSSA: Yeah, Jenny, go ahead.

JENNY:
We talked about that the word "centring" is a nice reminder to decentre what is often, maybe unreflectively centred Euro-Western norms. The word "intersectional" being a reminder about the dynamics and that these are about relationships and positionality and how we come together. And that it's not only about static identity markers, but about, yeah, the power dynamics among us. And being mindful of that.

MOUSSA:
Excellent, thank you so much, Jenny, if you want to share some of these in the chat, it will be helpful for the notes later. What about room number two? We have two people there.

PARTICIPANT:
I'll speak for our group. We talked about the importance of including EDI within the context of what we do and also in terms of the resources. I'm a librarian and working primarily with non-English language resources. Thinking about ensuring that we're looking beyond a particular context, like a North American context, in terms of what EDI is and what it means to different folks in different languages and cultures. Then also thinking about the participants and making sure that we have participants who reflect... We're talking, I missed the name of one of the committee members, not committee members, the breakout room members who left. But she was talking about making sure that there are participants within the committees that she develops and making sure that there's good representation or thinking about the materials that she's developing and making sure there's input from folks from different areas. Even though she works with Indigenous communities, thinking about the intersectionality there in terms of people who may have mobility issues and also be from Indigenous communities, those intersectional points, making sure that the folks that she's talking to, they have those issues reflected. Those concerns are reflected in when she's making choices on who to speak to and who to include?

MOUSSA:
Yes, definitely. Thank you so much for this. What about room number three?

PARTICIPANT:
I guess I'll speak so I don't know if you can see it because Navarra was having problems with the microphone, so they put some of their information into the chat. But I thought what was in the chat actually encapsulated some of the description that we had talked about. Let me scroll back up in case you can't see it. So what she was saying, what they were saying, it was thinking about it from every aspect in a project, from beginning with design and questions to team formation, how you collect data, how data is presented. Then also thinking about barriers at any of those particular stages. And thinking about how those might be addressed. Specifically, they work with online research. There was a discussion about web access and accessibility and some of those challenges because that resonated within our group.

MOUSSA:
Excellent. Thank you so much. What about we go to room number two?

PARTICIPANT:
Yes, we discussed a few things. One was in relation to qualitative studies and some of the nuances that come with conducting research on and with equity. The serving communities that we can explore some intersectional identities, power relations, and other processes. But in addition to that, there's a lot of complexity when conducting particularly big or population-level

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quantitative studies. The complexity in data collection, data analysis, and the possibility of using advanced statistical methods or even new technology as machine learning or artificial intelligence to help in those complex analysis.

MOUSSA:
Yes, that's definitely something to keep in mind. And the last, not the least group.

PARTICIPANT:
First of all, we realize that we're all from different professional space, and intersectional EDI is discussed a little bit differently, but on a high level we agree that intersectional approach to recognize complex mix of identities that researchers, but also the communities hold is a necessary step. Also intentionally stay away or move away from the traditional, homogeneous research approaches that we currently have is again the important step. Additionally, I think some of us, we talked about how to create space intentionally to recognize voices from members who belong to marginalized groups. And anyone else, please jump in to add additional points.

MOUSSA:
Excellent, thank you so much, and thank you all for sharing this. I do think that for me it is important to give the mic back to all of us to be able to talk and share and resend or redefine this concept.

When we talk about intersectional EDI, it is important first maybe to come back and look at what do we mean by "intersectionality." I think although most of us know what it means, it is important how we articulate this in our research. Intersectionality, as you know, the term was coined by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in a paper that she wrote to the Chicago Legal Forum, which was entitled, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex." A Black feminist critic of anti-discrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and anti-racist politics. This approach or lens is the best practice and it assists researchers to better understand and address the multiple barriers and disadvantages that individuals with intersecting social identity, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, and class, face. It is critical to understand that our research, even ourself as a researcher and our research subjects are people with intersectional and intersecting identities. That they are also impacted by the context. They are also impacted by their personal circumstances. This is important to look at research through that.

Dr. Crenshaw, Kimberly Crenshaw herself, she went to develop this framework where she listed some of those individual characteristics of individuals. And she added that intersectionality is a lens to which you can see where power comes and collides, where it locks and intersects. It is the acknowledgment that everyone has their own unique experiences of discrimination and privilege. Not only do you talk about social identities, but what is important is that in the research, we need also to be acknowledging about power, the impact of power, power within, and power over. Also, another element we need to understand is privilege, which oftentimes

we try to say as a researcher we have a privilege. But that privilege goes beyond just the research. It goes even the way we frame the questions and the way we interpret the answers.

Therefore, intersectional identity, I like oftentimes when I talk about intersectional EDI principle and values to use this framework developed by Chris Burnett, with the consultant and public speaker. What I like is that Chris Burnett talks about intersectionality. Their point was to design, to frame it has been inclusion, equity, diversity, and in between what they call belonging. What I added to this framework though, is for me, I feel like intersectionality or EDI need also to add accessibility. You will see that the frame about accessibility is mine. I added that. Plus at the end of the day, if we do all this and we don't look at the lenses of cultural competency, we will be missing a lot. The communities we work and interact with, their cultures oftentimes have been demonized. Many EDI projects forget to look at intercultural communication and cultural competency. That's a flaw in our approach because the cultural piece is oftentimes where our research, which is coming from a Western lens, deny or try to absolve and pretending that we are all the same. We're not all the same. Two things that I want to add to this framework.

Now someone will ask me, what is equity? You all have come across this by Tina Q. Tan. Tan's definition of equity is one definition, but what she says is that equity is a principle. It is a condition, and a process, and an outcome that is rooted in human rights and the inviolability of human dignity. She got to say that equity is also integral to the legal principle of justice and the ethical principles and practices of fairness and doing the right thing. She added that equity requires identifying the pattern of inequalities and making change to system culture and processes that obstruct members of the community from achieving their full potential. Therefore, we understand that if we're doing research to the length of EDI, intersectional EDI, we need to really work with this principle. We need to look at the systems, the cultures, again, the intercultural piece coming in. But also the processes. We need maybe to even deconstruct the language of our own research. And recentre it in this kind of framework.

Tina Q. Tan also goes to talk about diversity. But her taking diversity is that it is not only a variety in a characteristic of people. But she insists that in effort to increase representation of numeric diversity are enabled by institutional commitment to EDI. So diversity is not just it exists; it is also a commitment. As researchers, we need to make that commitment. And it should be a conscious commitment and should be a commitment that is aligned with the priorities of the institutions, but those alignments should be courageous enough to also challenge the institution.

Inclusion, like I heard a very famous politician in B.C., we say that for them inclusion is to be invited to the party and be able to dance. I recall and I told them, see, what if I don't like your lousy music. If your inclusion is to invite me and play whatever music you want, that is problematic because maybe in my values I'm not interested to go to a party to begin with. For me inclusion is co-created. That you sit with me. We plan together. However, we know that traditional research is not that. Oftentimes researchers go with a framework that is already prepared, questions that are already prepared, and they already have almost 90% of the

answers in their head. They just want validation. That's not inclusion. Inclusion therefore encompasses the norms, the practices, and institutional action to promote participation. Active participation, equal participation, engagement, empowerment, and a sense of belonging for members of the historically underrepresented and disadvantaged group in all aspects of their life. When we talk about inclusion, again, it is about promoting an institutional culture and practices to ensure or can experience the welcoming space of fairness, dignity, and human flourishing. But do we have that institutional culture to start with? In some of the institutions where we work, what is that culture? That culture we know is fraught with power and privilege, and that culture marginalizes certain people. Again, you can see the work we need to do here.

Finally, when we talk about accessibility, and this is a definition from the University of Calgary for the EDI office. They say that accessibility is a foundational principle necessary for the removal of barriers to equitable participation in all aspects of life by people who live with diverse visual, motor, auditory, learning and cognitive abilities. Also, accessibility will require designing the environment— the program, the service, and the product from the outset, so they are accessible to people living with various abilities. If we take this definition and we look at our research and the context and the structures that define that research and our approaches, then we know that we have a lot to do. Oftentimes you hear about universal design, but I will say to look at universal design, but maybe go beyond the universal design.

My question then to you is based on those principles and definitions I just gave. I'm curious to hear from you, how do you centre intersectional EDI principles and values in your research? How do you centre this principle we just discussed now? Should we go again for another 10 minutes, Gwen? Yeah, I've conflicted here. Let's go for another 10 minutes.

GWEN:
Yes, so Kelsey will open the rooms for us. But this is to facilitate the sharing in size in the small group. But if you would rather stay in the main room with us, you're welcome to do so as well. Thanks, everyone.

MOUSSA:
I recognize the challenges because depending on our institution, depending on the committees we work with, there is a lot of tensions that can arise when we want to bring in EDI, principles and values. Because we are confronted with what is called "traditional research," whatever that means. But let's recognize the white elephant in the room. Also recognize that the people who trained us or supervise our work, or read and adjudicate our work. There is still this generation who are stuck with so-called traditional research.

The reason why it is important is that when we increase our understanding of EDI, intersectional EDI, we are less likely to make assumptions or generalize. We decrease the likelihood of acting based on bias and stereotypes. We also are less likely to unintentionally offend someone or miso cues, or misunderstand a cultural viewpoint. Another thing that we are

better able to include the diverse contributions of others in our communities, places of work, education, lives, and research projects we are working on.

It is very important for us then to understand the importance centring intersectional EDI. Research from SSHRC has argued that research has shown that a diversity of perspectives and experiences is fundamental to achieving research excellence. Let's be clear here. Research excellence is embedded in intersectional EDI practices, values, and principles. For that to centre intersectional EDI as researchers and practitioners, we have to commit to disrupt the false dichotomy between so-called traditional research and other research. We also need to challenge the inconsistent understanding of what is intersectional EDI in research. Research failure oftentimes is due to lack of centring intersectional EDI. I will also add that research, and this is on us, must commit to a more action- oriented community advocacy and change program. As I say, research should not be neutral. We say research is not a politic, every research is political, it is not neutral. We should really change our way of thinking about research. Centring intersectional research is also, will require from us, to rethink research by recognizing the specific experiences of equity-deserving groups and the ongoing struggle of systemic discrimination that researchers have often contributed to promote, whether consciously or not. I will also add centring intersectional research is that research that is embedded and that embed intersectional EDI. This research will openly and courageously challenge and commit to changing the oppressive system in structure. Not only talk about them, but give concrete action items to what to do about it.

According to the Urban Strategies Council, I like what they say when they talk about centring intersectional EDI. They say, "Equity is fairness and justice achieved through systematically assessing disparities in opportunities, outcomes, and representation and redressing those disparities through targeted action." Again, the action is important, the responsibility to really challenge the system but also the responsibility to look at our research through different lenses.

Another piece that is important is SSHRC also insisted that a best practice in EDI in research is to acknowledge that all individuals who participate in our research ecosystem must develop a strong understanding of the systemic barriers faced by individuals from underrepresented groups. This is speaking to us as researchers, as practitioners, our graduate student and the student we bring into doing the research with us. We have the responsibility to help every single person to understand the systemic barrier that is faced by underrepresented groups. And to put in place impactful measure to address these barriers.

Centring research is also what my good friend and classmate Tanya, Manning-Lewis said in her last presentation to BCcampus. Tanya in 2022 was here again talking to some of you. And she insisted that equity in research is when participants have equal opportunities to assess and to benefit from research. She added that shifting from research "on" to research "with" participants is a best practice in implementing EDI in your research as well as to share the research work with the community. How often we see researchers, once they get the data,

they're gone. Even if they go back to the community, they write the report in a way, in a way that no one in that community can read and comprehend what they're talking about. Another piece Tanya insisted on is one that makes room for diversity in perspective and lived experience for both the participant but also the researcher. There needs to be communication there beyond your research question. I will even say to have communication about those research questions. Finally, Tanya added that all team members are valued and respected for their contribution to the research. That debunks the concept of expert. You, the researcher, might be an expert in the framework you design, but the real expert of the content that will determine your research is the people you are researching. But how often we give that expertise and that acknowledgment and recognition? These are things that I want to just quickly say.

I will finish with this slide that I think some of us have to go back to the drawing board when we're talking about centring EDI in our work. It is first and foremost to deconstruct some of the things that we all carry on. It is bias. It is to be able to look at our bias and deconstruct it and ask where it comes from. It is to be able to look at the stereotypes, the set image we have of ourself and our research participants, and be able to deconstruct it. It is also the prejudgment that goes into our research when we prepare to analyze the data. We think already we know what they're going to say and how it's going to look like because we have prejudged those people. It is to go towards the issues of discrimination in our research reporting and finally, to look at the systemic. Systems policies and practices that support this mindset we have when we go through our research or our work as EDI practitioners. I will say, and this is another ask. I will say is there anyone of us doing this work? We need to maybe get more EDI training. When I say EDI training, I'm not shying away to talk about Indigenous acumen training. I'm not shy to talk about systemic racism training. I'm not shy to talk about as an easy training. I hope that SSHRC defines this, makes this a priority for anyone doing research on any equity-seeking group that they have, first and foremost, get this training before we let them go to those communities. Otherwise they will just keep hurting. That the research, when it is done, before it is published, should be brought back to those communities to look through the lenses of EDI principle and values and vetted by the communities before its release. I know it will be a lot, but maybe if we start here, we may be able to really have research that is no longer called "traditional research," but it will be research that will centre the intersections of EDI.

This is what I was sharing, I was going to share with you. Thank you so much. Danke schön, obrigado, mercie, sukriya. Thank you for being part of my life and my day. Back to you, Gwen.

GWEN:
All right. Yeah. Thank you so much, Moussa, for a very inspirational and powerful talk. You're right. We leave this session with more questions than answers. But yeah, we take it as the very first step. Everyone, thank you very much for staying with us till now. Our last session is going to be on Creative Methods for Participants with Disabilities. I think it is a very nice continuous talk related to how we can centre intersectional EDI in research as well. So please stay tuned with us. Also stay tuned with our next series, the winter Research Speaker Series on continuous topics related to storytelling, digital arts, as well as harnessing artificial intelligence in research.

Stay tuned with us on this one. As I mentioned in the chat, as a researcher, I will take one step at a time. And the very first step is I will do positionality as my daily practice as a researcher. Our next FLO Micro-course and FLO Friday, going to be Where to Position Our Positionality in the Work. If you are interested in this, please check out the registration information on our site. Thank you very much, everyone, for staying with us till now. Have a great afternoon and see you soon. Thank you.