

# Reflections on IDEA from an NSERC C-EDI member

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







CAP Congress 2025, Saskatoon, SK  
Division for Gender Equity in Physics || session  
Tue.10.Jun.2025 @ 14:15-15:45 CST

“My humanity is bound up in yours, for we can only be human together.”


“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality.”

– Desmond Tutu

# Positionality

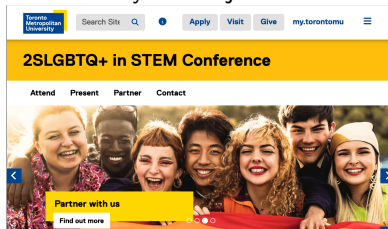
- I hail from , have {, , , } ancestry, and am {, , , }.
- Served on APS CSWP from 2011-14; currently serving on NSERC C-EDI. First in my department (university?) to openly transition while professoring.
- As a tenured full professor in STEM, I want to be clear that I openly value other disciplines, including social sciences, humanities, and the arts, as well as knowledges held by other longstanding communities outside of academia.
- The University of Toronto is situated in Treaty 13 territory, on the traditional lands of the Huron-Wendat, the Seneca, and the Mississaugas of the Credit. From [native-land.ca](http://native-land.ca): today I am on Treaty 6 land, the traditional territory of the Blackfoot, Plains Cree, Stoney Nakoda, Métis, Sioux, and Cree nations.
- As a white settler immigrant, my aim is to become a better relative to living Indigenous people(s), lands, waters, air, creatures. Focusing on relationality is a key Indigenous insight that radically changed my thinking on IDEA.
- In the year 2025, we are facing a coordinated effort across international borders to get rid of trans people, reduce bodily autonomy of uterus-havers, ignore settler responsibilities to Indigenous and Black people(s), nuke effective programmes for improving inclusivity in academia, etc. Scary times! 🙄🙄

# Lorentz transformations

- What does it mean to respect people?
  - People in power tend to mean “respect my authority!”, while
  - Marginalized people tend to mean “respect my humanity!”.
- White identities and cultural assumptions are not the universal defaults. We should learn to *de-centre* them, e.g. through reading diverse authors.
- Many physicists from rich countries like the US, UK, Canada, NZ, Australia, and Scandinavia assume we are the most advanced on gender equity in the world. Data from 7 IUPAP conferences on Women in Physics since 2002 show that many other countries actually do significantly better! Also, transmisogyny (the primary ingredient in transphobia) is currently on the rise in .
- White cis women have been the primary beneficiaries of university EDI policies, and they are used to being in charge of them. During gender discussions, they need to cede the mic more often to BIPOC cis women and trans people.
- It is neither necessary nor desirable for non-disabled folks to temporarily don ‘disability encounter suits’ to certify that ableism exists. Schemes like this are counterproductive: they centre the non-disabled, who gain a false sense that they understand disabled life. Instead, listen to those with lived experience.

# Trans/queer axis I

- Humans love to binarize every damn thing in order to simplify it cognitively. Resist binaries. And take heart: being inclusive is not a binary either. What we should aim for is continuously improving our batting average over time.
- There are extremely few openly transgender physics professors worldwide. I get quite a few mentoring requests from ECRs in other universities/countries!
- I also serve in the String Theory Mentoring Programme, an international effort prioritizing mentees from underrepresented groups.
- In 2019 the 2SLGBTQ+ in STEM conference series began, which fosters Canadian queer+trans community. I was just at the 2025 one at TMU. 👍



- Another success story: UofT's name change project. So much easier now!

# Trans/queer axis II

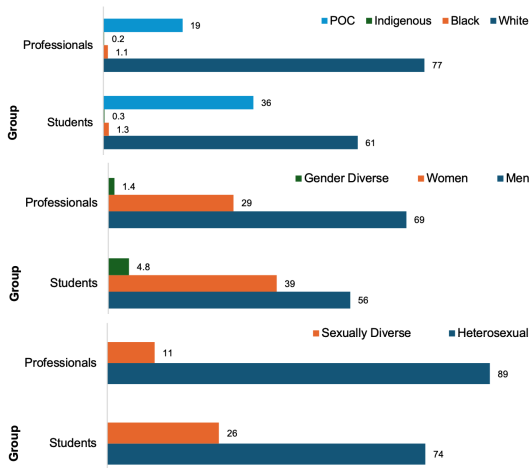
- One of the tiring things about cisheterosexism is that coming out is not a one-time event. I got bored with repeating myself to colleagues so I wrote a web page for them to read on their own time. Others make business cards.
- Pro tip: in deciding whom to be out to, I probe how sexist a person is first.
- Most colleagues were initially awkward but eventually OK with my coming out as trans and nonbinary and transitioning at work. A few have been really supportive - those darlings have been like my oxygen supply.
- Let's not limit ourselves to looking at gender inclusivity through a white lens. Anti-racism is an inherently important part of 2SLGBTIQ+ advocacy work. In Canadian physics and astronomy, we have a lot of work to do on anti-Indigenous racism and anti-Black racism in particular.
- Figuring out exactly who we are is important, as our identities inform how we move through the world. To make systemic change, Indigenous thinkers have inspired me to focus on building relationality, first at grassroots level, rather than thinking only in terms of individualistic top-down remedies for problems.
- To move the needle on inclusivity for trans+queer people in physics, and cis women, we need to show up in solidarity for struggles along intersecting axes.

# Accessibility axis

- Many abled profs don't provide accessibility accommodations, using a bogus excuse of academic freedom. Many disabled don't disclose to our employers: abled colleagues tend to assume disability anti-correlates w/ intellectual merit.
- It has been galling to witness how willingly online accommodations were provided during the pandemic because suddenly *abled* people needed them, which were then withdrawn when *they* no longer did.
- Physicists fostering accessibility should be expected as a core competency.
- A big issue in academia right now is the uses and abuses of AI, as in Artificial Intelligence. Their broad availability threatens AI, as in Academic Integrity. There has already been huge disruption in how we assess student knowledge, and many of us are also changing how we train graduate students and postdocs. Insisting on pen-and-paper-only exams in proctored exam rooms affects disabled students more than non-disabled students.
- Academia sans ego or competitive rushing would be superior. Why is academic ableism so rampant? Because it deeply intertwines with academic capitalism.
- Pro tip: if you are ever confused about why university Administrators do what they do, in IDEA circles or otherwise, it always pays to follow the money.

# Statistics I

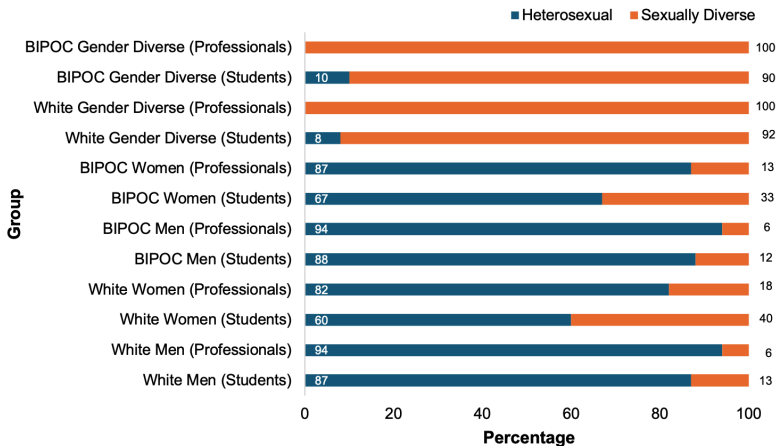
- The first EDI survey of Canadian physicists found interesting results, reported in [arxiv.org/2403.04679](https://arxiv.org/2403.04679).



- Students are less white, more gender diverse, more sexually diverse than pros.

# Statistics II

- Sexual diversity statistics from the survey show some interesting patterns.

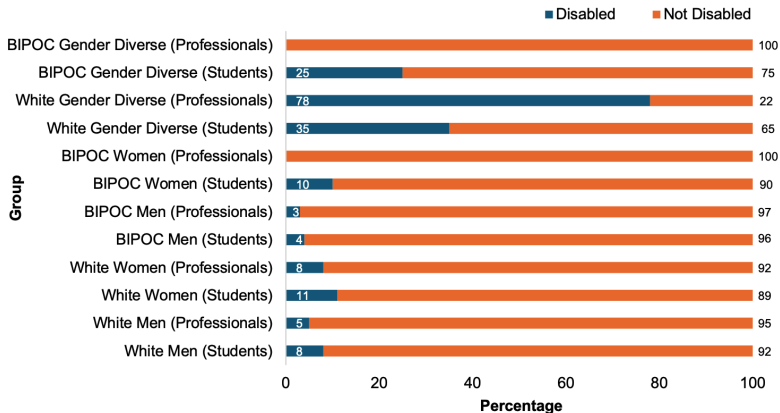


- White and BIPOC men self-identify in very low numbers, even for students.



# Statistics III

- Disability statistics are a study in low numbers, well below population levels.



- Gender-diverse professionals who are white have a whopping percentage who are disabled. Perhaps this represents only white gender-diverse professionals getting sufficient support to stay in the field? More research is needed!