

Understanding Intersectionality and Avoiding Bias

What is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality is a topic that either students are either aware of or not. It is crucial to understand it since the issue is displayed in our peers' lives every day. Intersectionality, or intersectional thinking, refers to the interconnected nature of social groups, such as race, class, and gender, resulting in overlaps of discrimination systems. Disadvantage is one of the many results of intersectionality. Kimberle Crenshaw, who coined intersectionality, has been known to "myth bust" the term. This is crucial because many people are afraid to understand the word and face the harsh truth that it tells. Intersectionality accurately depicts how most people live in this world, while the other half have not met the same type of discrimination. Social hierarchy is not the goal when it comes to spreading intersectional thinking, but demolishing them as a whole

How to Think Intersectionally:

So, with this background, how can YOU think in an intersectional way that will better not only your understanding but help spread a new way of thinking? Here are a few ways you can take a step.

1. Understand that there are multiple struggles

Be aware that there are multiple ways equality is blocked in this country instead of one that dominates. These can include discrimination based on sexual orientation and identity, gender and gender identity, race, economic status, immigration status, national origin, ability, etc.

2. Acknowledge how these different types of discrimination present unique struggles, mainly when multiple oppressions occur at once.

Vox writes, "An intersectional approach might include focusing on the unique challenges that those who sit at the intersections of overlapping systems of discrimination face, such as Black immigrants (who face both racial discrimination and discrimination because of their immigration status) or homeless transgender young people (who face discrimination because of their gender identity, age, and housing status)."

3. Incorporate different perspectives, center those voices into the conversation

Let those who face multiple struggles voice them, listen to their goals, and promote and support them. Appreciate their direct experiences, and let them tell *their* story. Understand now that there is no singular way of thinking. Take all of these perspectives and bring them with you in your future.

How to Avoid Bias when thinking Intersectionally:

Now, with a better understanding of multiple parties' points of view, you can see there are endless ways to think of an issue and endless amounts of unique experiences. Let go of assumptions and generalizations. Do not group people together. Be self-aware of your own biases, especially if being from personal experiences. Recognize that you are one person, and think of how you can rewrite this bias. For example, some biases tend not to be antagonistic but overly sympathetic towards a specific cause, putting it on a pedestal. This is the exact opposite of what one should do when thinking intersectionally. Be sensitive towards others, and continue to always incorporate other points of view and experiences into your thinking, as redundant as it can sound.

Hearing From Others:

You can practice this thinking right now, wherever you may be. Listen to the voices of others and implement these strategies. These accounts expressly incorporate the workplace. Note how some people consist of different social categories and notice how these experiences are heightened.

Bias hurt me when...

"I had a meeting with my boss where she announced a new hire. My white supervisor asked, "what's her heritage and ethnic background" because the email that the new hire wrote was written, "so eloquently." The new hire was black."

After the experience in Finance

I eventually quit.

- Non-disabled, black, cisgender woman

Bias hurt me when...

"The firm removed me from a long-term corporate client and placed me with a nonprofit one solely to present a "Black face" after another police killing of an unarmed Black man. I was the only Black person on the team."

After the experience in Communications

I kept it to myself.

- A non-disabled, black, cisgender man

Bias hurt me when...

"I was asked by executives to specifically remove people of my skin color and cultural heritage from company marketing materials."

After the experience in Technology

I kept it to myself.

- A non-disabled, mixed-race, cisgender man

Turning Bias into something positive:

Acknowledging bias and the corrupt systems still in place and recognizing that they need to change is a step of its own. If you or others have implemented discrimination onto others or into situations, acknowledge this fault. Acknowledge that these comments and ways of thinking hurt most likely multiple social categories. If you can recognize the wrongdoings, you can re-wire this bias. With a new mindset, one can help change others' ways of thinking. As a young generation, we have so much ahead of us. This is a priority when it comes to carrying certain aspects with us into our futures.

Positive Bias= Understanding Intersectionality:

With a re-wired mindset, intersectional thinking can flourish for our communities.

Vox writes, "Intersectionality should highlight the importance of community. Community is a salient value for many Americans. Intersectionality recognizes this connection to the community and amplifies the importance of ensuring that all community members are respected and enjoy access to opportunities. We should strive to include everyone in our work toward promoting social justice. We are all in the fight together and should develop narratives to ensure that we are left behind. Building community and encouraging alliances, coalitions, and looking out for each other will help us solve problems."

Sources used to refer back to:

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<https://www.biashurts.com/>

McCall, Leslie. "The Complexity of Intersectionality." *Signs*, vol. 30, no. 3, 2005, pp. 1771–1800. JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/10.1086/426800. Accessed 19 Aug. 2021.

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