

Bitesized Belonging: Understanding Intersectionality and Why It Matters

A couple of weeks ago we discussed the concept of identities and how our own individual experiences, behaviors, culture, sexuality, race, gender, moral codes, and other aspects inform our identity. Now that we have a rudimentary understanding it's time to discuss **intersectionality**.

Intersectionality, quite simply, is the junction in which two or more identities overlap, intertwine, and/or cross. The term "intersectionality" was coined by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 as a legal concept to describe how different identities and communities overlap and interact. Despite this, intersectionality wouldn't hit the mainstream until nearly 30 years later.

For DEIB professionals, intersectionality is a fundamental concept we used to frame and contextualize the issues and challenges many historically underrepresented communities face, as it focuses on individuals within those communities.

Intersectionality digs even deeper by exploring not just how challenges a person faces for their identity influence their daily life, but also how those challenges can morph and become entirely new challenges when certain identities intersect. Consider this horrific statistic; the community/identity most likely to be targets for assault, violence, and even murder are transgender women. Within that statistic, overwhelmingly, trans-women who identified as Black are most likely to be murdered in the United States.

In this shocking statistic we can see the vital importance intersectionality plays in identifying issues to establish protections for the most vulnerable people within society. Intersectionality plays an important role in the workplace too. In fact, a strong understanding of intersectionality is foundational in driving forward inclusion efforts. As doctor and author Ludmilla N. Praslova writes, in her article "An Intersectional Approach to Inclusion at Work", in order to welcome all talent requires "systemic inclusion that considers intersectionalities, comprehensively addresses all barriers, and embeds inclusion in all talent processes and decision-making mechanisms" ([HBR](#)).

Exercise:

Consider your identities. Like a couple of weeks ago, consider where they overlap and intersect. Does one identity influence another in interesting ways? Are certain challenges present at the intersection of your identities that folks who might share one of your identities but not your intersection might not see?

Consider the tension between certain aspects of your identities. For example, as a cisgender, gay man, I might reflect on the oppression I face as someone identifying as gay but the privileges being cisgender present in comparison to trans- and non-binary/conforming individuals. Consider those privileges you identify. Are there aspects you can leverage to support others?

Additional Resources:

[Harvard Business Review](#) (Multiple Articles)

[What is intersectionality, and what does it have to do with me?](#)