

This week's question to consider:  
**What even is intersectionality, and why is it important?**

*Pro tip:* Some people are affected in several ways and others are affected on fewer levels to the same crummy event. The intersection of our identities plays an important role here.

Consider the following scenario:

Three people are outside in the winter: Zed, Ali and Wyn. Zed has tripped on ice and is falling directly on their derriere. Ali sees this happen and laughs to the point of tears. Wyn frowns while approaching the two.

Here is a very professional artistic rendering of the situation that I have made for you:



Although I have illustrated the situation, I have given you very little context about any of the people in this scenario. They are drawn as stick figures of indeterminate age, gender, race. I didn't even give them any scarves. (Don't worry, it's a mild winter day, just above freezing, and they're all warmly dressed. Probably.)

Let's do an exercise in perspective taking.

**in-ter-sec-tion-al-ity**  
/in(t)jəsekSHə'nalədē/  
*noun*  
The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Consider that Zed is a tall white man of about 28 years old, and when he fell it was part of an elaborate pantomime, which he was doing to amuse Ali, his two-year-old daughter. Wyn just happened to be walking by and only caught the fall. This provides some context. How might Zed feel? How might Zed react next? What about Ali, or Wyn?

Now, instead let me provide you with the following context. Zed is a young woman who has fallen. Ali is her partner, and Wyn is a passerby who has taken out their smartphone to take a photograph or video of the fall. All are of roughly the same age. It paints a bit of a different picture. Where is Ali's empathy? Is Zed all right? Why is Wyn taking out their phone while frowning? Did they get the fall on camera? What do you think happens next?

Shifting once more, let's say instead that Zed is an elderly Black man in a skating costume wearing black skates, and Ali is also wearing a skating costume but carrying ice skates rather than wearing them. Let's add that Wyn has fibromyalgia, a little-understood invisible condition that for Wyn, means that they experience debilitating pain that flares up without warning all the time. Is there another reason for Ali's laughter? How might Ali's laughter land with Zed? With Wyn? How does Wyn's frown read to you now?

When people talk about intersectionality, they are often talking about the intersection of their identities, in such a way that it colours how they perceive any given event. Often, in activist circles, people discuss how it must be intersectional. For example, when advocating for trans rights, people are effectively advocating for trans black women's rights. If they are not considering black women in context of their activism, they are not considering the full scope of the problem, and effectively disregarding how it affects people with different identities. The problem cannot be entirely addressed without those considerations.

These intersections in identities play a part in how severely an injustice will affect a person. There is occasionally a comparison of a death by a thousand paper cuts. One paper cut is one tiny unpleasant thing, but a thousand paper cuts is very different. This analogy is often used to illustrate the effect of the sum total of many microaggressions. It can also serve here, to illustrate intersectionality.

Ultimately, intersectionality is about acknowledging the multifaceted aspect of a person's experience. It amounts to an extra layer of care and consideration and cannot be disassociated from the experience. It provides context.

*Recommended Reading:*

Vox.com Article (May 2019) | [The intersectionality wars](#)

At the intersection of a road with countless directions,

Your friendly neighbourhood Anti-Racism & Equity Coach  
Therese Trofimencoff (*she/her/they*)