

THE INTERSECTION OF AGE, RACE AND SEXUALITY

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Intersectionality: Coined by Dr. Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989, intersectionality helps us to understand the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage are compounded and create interlocking systems of oppression.¹ In other words, intersectionality is a lens through which you can see where power comes and collides, where it interlocks and intersects.²

For example: A black same gender loving woman who is 68 years old may experience racism, homophobia, and ageism that work together to negatively impact her. These -isms may lead to compounding negative experiences such as social isolation, houselessness and financial insecurity which are exponential in comparison to a person that may only experience one -ism in their lifetime. It's not simply that there's a race problem here, a gender problem here and a class or LGBT problem there.³

Social service programs that serve LGBTQ elders can be a challenge to access for black and brown LGBTQ elders due to increased isolation, lower income and discrimination.⁴

Intersectionality helps us to look at systems/ larger structures that exist but how does ageism, racism, transphobia and homophobia show up on an interpersonal level?

Micro-aggressions are defined as the everyday, subtle, intentional — and oftentimes unintentional — interactions or behaviors that communicate some sort of bias toward historically marginalized groups. They are often rooted in assumptions and stereotypes.⁵

- Making sly comments about a person's age, race, gender identity or sexual orientation to suggest they do not belong.

Discrimination is the unfair or prejudicial treatment of people and groups based on characteristics such as race, gender, age or sexual orientation.⁶

- In a 2021 study of Black LGBT Adults: 82 % of Black LGBT and 79% of Black non- LGBT adults reported experiences of everyday discrimination.⁷

Exclusion is the act of not allowing or creating space for someone to take part in an activity or have access to something.⁸

- Only having culturally significant events or activities catered to one group of people

- Exclusion also shows up in our healthcare system. According to a study on Black LGBT Adults participants reported that they concealed their sexual orientation or gender identity and experienced internalized homophobia or transphobia to some degree. ⁹

Our 1:1 interactions impact systems just as systems impact our 1:1 interactions, so it is important we make changes within ourselves and the circles we interact with.

What you can do ¹⁰

Consider cultural context, think about your personal and cultural experiences. What impact have these experiences had on your ideas or beliefs? Such experiences may be rooted in racism, transphobia, homophobia, classism, ageism, etc, and when we share these experiences out loud they can be triggering to others.

Lead with compassion & seek to understand, we all know what it feels like to not be met with compassion or understanding. When this happens, we can become defensive and stop listening to someone. It can be impossible to completely understand where a person is coming from, but we can understand a person's feelings (anger, sadness, grief).

Intent vs impact. It is not always about what you said, but how it was received. For the most part we assume good intentions, but because we all have varying experiences and backgrounds, intention and impact are not always in alignment.

Use your voice to make a positive difference. You can use your voice to apologize, to advocate, to learn and to help others understand.

When we take action to end racism, we take a stand against violence, discrimination, and exclusion. Being in community with each other means being aware and accountable. It means ensuring that LGBT BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities do not have to question their safety or well-being in community spaces.

How will you use your voice?

References

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- ¹⁰ Adomako, Frances. “African American Older Adults and Race-Related Stress How Aging and Health-Care Providers Can Help.” *American Psychological Association*.

A special thank you to *Tomme Faust, M.A. Sociology* for preparing this fact sheet for the National Resource Center on LGBT Aging. Learn more about Tomme’s work at: <https://www.connectwithi3.org>