EDI RoundTable: Intersectionality
Panelists: Shalini Sinha and Kelly Buckley
Moderator: Emma Wallace

What is Intersectionality?

A Human Understanding
"I want you to imagine that you're standing on a road and you're facing something. **There's a road coming in front of you**, and you're facing something and what you're receiving there is all the experiences that all the ways that society is thinking about or misinforming or confusing or just coming at you. And I'm going to pick one identity; I'm going to pick that I am a woman with brown skin. And that connects to a racialized woman. I come from a heritage of post colonization, so I'm a woman there with brown skin and I'm standing here with all of this stuff is coming at me. And **then I want you to imagine that there's another road in front of me coming at me; you'll notice I'm standing at an intersection.** And this other road is coming at me with all the stuff that society is bringing at me around me being a woman; it's bringing slightly different things, and it's bringing these things at me, depending on, you know, my identity is actually I'm also a brown skinned person, and I'm also colonized. And **I want you to open up another road here**…I'm also a member of the LGBTQ community, so I want you to imagine there's a whole bunch of other stuff coming at me, in terms of all the misinformation and things that people or society is bringing at me around queerness. I also have a hidden disability, a neuro divergence, that that's coming at me. So, if I'm to think about me and understand my experience, I need to hold in my mind an understanding of what it is like for all these things to come at me and how they slot in for me specifically, and **that's the space of intersectionality**. And while it may seem complex or confusing, **there's a lot of joy** that comes out of it." (Shalini Sinha)

An Organizational Understanding
The City of Edmonton defines intersectionality as the **multiple identity factors that overlap and contribute to the ways in which we experience our workplace and city**. And depending on how those identity factors overlap**, some of us will experience multiple and compounding barriers to inclusion**, which can limit our options, opportunities, and participation. Intersectionality compels us to look at those barriers to inclusion, and **identify equity measures and strategies** to create that opportunity and those options.

"Intersectionality isn't static; how people experience those intersections of privilege, power, and oppression can shift and change based on the environment or the social location or the circumstance they find themselves in." (Kelly Buckley)

"We need to understand that we have created in our society, systems of power which unfairly include and exclude different identity markers in certain ways. It's not enough to start to try and include more identity markers…we need to understand [where people are coming from] in order to create a safe environment to include them. And when we include them, things will change." (Shalini Sinha)

How do you apply an intersectional lens in work and in life?
Intersectionality is a practice; it is critical thinking, it is always asking questions:
<u>Of your clients or community</u>
- Who is excluded? Who is being left behind? Who is impacted?
- What do we know about the folks who are being excluded/left behind/impacted?
- Why are they impacted? Where does this exclusion come from (my own biases, my organization's biases, or something else)?
- What is the impact?
- What are we going to do about it? How are we connecting with folks being excluded?
- How do we make sure this doesn't happen again in the future?

<u>Of your staff, board, and members</u>
- Are we set up in a way that allows for individual and organizational growth?
- Do we encourage a culture of inclusion? What does that look like?
- What are our organizational values? Do they reflect our desire to think in an intersectional way? How are we evaluating our progress and evolving our values accordingly?
- How can we consciously encourage, support, and elevate those humans who are challenging dominant thinking? What does it look like to encourage growth on a human or individual level, not necessarily related to work development?

 "These are questions that can be asked every day; it's a way to transform what we would understand as traditional responses to social or economic issues, and address the complexities that different groups of folks experience." (Kelly Buckley)

City of Edmonton has defined their process as mindset, heartset, skillset:
> Mindset – *What do you need to challenge in your mind in order to be able to apply an intersectional lens? What assumptions do you need to identify, what biases do you need to clarify?*
> Heartset – *Work to challenge your privilege, to challenge the status quo; encourage disruption and be willing and wanting to create change.*
> Skillset – *What do we need to do in order to make change happen? What access to resources and what support do we require to do this?*

"It is a constant process; it is never finished. I used to say all the time…it should leave you with more questions than answers, because if you are doing the work, you will always identify more questions than you have answers for; and that is okay." (Kelly Buckley)

And remember: It is also very important in this process to bring in independent support; you need someone who can look at your organization from an outside perspective, someone who can help identify things, listen to people, create ideas and it is critical that this person is external so that they do not feel at risk in terms of their workplace and their salary. And going even further, hire the very folks who are often excluded (but who always have much more experience, knowledge, and understanding) to do this work for you – and pay them the leadership wages they are worthy of!

Dealing with the tension of trying to include folks in problem solving without adding burden
1. **Have a plan** for what you are doing with the information/learnings you gain from having conversations with folks who are often excluded.
    a. And remember that our society is set up to train people and confuse people so that it is hard to listen and hard to hear. Understand that a lot has already been said – so the struggle is not

necessarily about needing more to be said, but about practicing active and engaged listening; process what has already been said.

2. Recognize that you are asking people for their emotional labour, their lived experience, and for their intellectual expertise – there needs to be a **relationship of reciprocity** in place.

3. Be willing to accept **that what people are telling you might not be what you want to hear** or expect to hear – if this is the case, be okay with that, and make sure you are still following through on your promises.

4. **Stop adapting non-Western ideas to fit into Western ways** of work and leadership.

    a. "One of the things that has been hurting me a lot…is how often I will hear leaders now, people who are leading in organizations, turning to ideas that were in my culture around mindfulness, around collaboration, around Buddhism, around connection, or turning to ideas that are in other cultures around friendship and partnership and equality, and promoting those ideas from their leadership authority point of view. What I am not seeing, is people from my culture and other cultures leading; I am not seeing the people from my cultures who are not assimilated, who are within our cultural think and our cultural practices being recognized as leaders." (Shalini Sinha)

    b. Work with people from other cultures, who are experts in this area, pay leadership wages, and allow them to lead you in this work!

Additional Resources

[Are You Consciously Creating A Culture Of Respect? | Shalini Sinha | TEDxDunLaoghaire](#)

[The Urgency of Intersectionality: A TED Talk by Kimberle Crenshaw](#)

[Gender-Based Analysis+: What is it and Why? (Presented by the City of Edmonton)](#)

[Gender-Based Analysis+ (Government of Alberta)](#)

[Gender-Based Analysis+ (Government of Canada)](#)

[City of Edmonton Anti-Racism Advisory Committee](#)

[Intersectional Edmonton](#)