

Introduction:

This activity asks participants to write an essay defining, applying, and critiquing the term intersectionality. The term was first coined in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw, a law professor and social theorist, in her paper, "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: The Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics."

To prepare for writing this essay, participants will read several documents. In the first part of their essay, participants will juxtapose these readings and do a bit of research to discuss the history of the term "intersectionality" and to demonstrate how the concept is applied in a current social justice movement. They will then read critiques so that, in the second part, they can discuss their own position on the possibilities and limits of intersectionality for advancing the goals of a social movement they care about.

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Define intersectionality and briefly trace the history of the term.
2. Describe how intersectionality is mobilized in Black Lives Matter and one other contemporary social justice movement.
3. Identify a critique of the concept and reflect on whether they would apply the concept to a movement they care about.

Time:

5 hours.

Group Size:

Entire group.

Materials:

Perspectives on Intersectionality Participant Instructions; three required readings (all in [Downloads](#)).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Curiosity

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.

- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

Openness

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.

Other Skills:

Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion.

Activity Instructions:

1. Instruct participants to read the following before beginning their essay (all PDFs in [Downloads](#) for this tool):
 - "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: The Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics" by Kimberlé Crenshaw
 - *The Combahee River Collective Statement*
 - "About the Black Lives Matter Network"
2. This essay has 2 parts. In the first part, participants will answer the following questions:
 - What is intersectionality, according to Crenshaw? How does she use it in her essay?
 - What are the beliefs/principles of the Combahee River Collective, and how might Crenshaw be building off their work?
 - What are the beliefs/principles of the Black Lives Matter movement? How is intersectionality embedded in its principles?
 - What is another contemporary social movement that applies a framework of intersectionality? How is intersectionality embedded in its principles? *Note:* This will require participants to do research beyond the three readings. You can encourage participants to bring in their own relevant experience to the essay as well.
3. Instruct participants to locate and read at least one critique of intersectionality. (There are suggestions in [Links](#), but they are welcome to find others.) In this second part of their essay, they should answer the following questions:
 - Why do you think intersectionality has become such an integral component of social movements – specifically, social justice movements?
 - What are some critiques of the concept and/or how it is used?
 - Do those critiques apply to the contemporary social movement you discussed in the first part of your essay? Why or why not?
 - What do you find useful about the concept of intersectionality, and where do you see its limits? Would you use it to further a social movement you care about? (This does not have to be a social justice movement.) If so, why and how? If not, why? You are invited to speak to your lived experience and commitments in this section.

Related Tools:



- [COVID-19 & Intersectionality](#)
- [Hidden America: An Intersectional Perspective](#)
- [Intersecting Identities: "Coming Out Meatless"](#)
- [Intersectionality Exercise](#)