



Stereotypes and Intersectionality

Gender and Sex Diversity Resource



Setting the Scene

“One of the hardest things to get my head around as a member of the LGBTIQA community has been the presumption of heterosexuality and everyday play-outs of heteronormativity. Very often presumptions are made that I (and others) do not identify as a member of the LGBTIQA community.”

- *Isabel (law-graduate, lesbian)*

“Time and again in family law I come up against this idea that women are either mad, bad or wasted”

- *Katy (lawyer, lesbian) [paraphrased]*

“The hate mail I get will often focus on either my gender, sexuality or race. Interestingly, in my early days it was mainly race and more recently it has been sexuality. Gender has been the constant.”

- *Anonymous Australian politician [paraphrased]*

“If I’m dating a boy, I’m straight. If I’m dating a girl, I’m gay. I don’t know what people think when I’m single.”

- *Anonymous OFA member*

“All participants felt that being a lesbian was something that they had to think about in relation to their work. The majority, however, felt that being a woman was of greater importance and significance to their experience of the workplace. Their sexual orientation was secondary, and they could hide their identity as a lesbian if they wanted to.”

- *The double-glazed glass ceiling: Lesbians in the workplace. Stonewall (UK), based on interviews conducted in 2008*



Intersectional Identities

Members of the LGBTIQ community highlight that concepts such as sex, gender and sexual orientation are not restricted to binaries of male/female or gay/straight but, instead, identity and expression can be fluid and anti-categorical.

Moreover, members know that these concepts form just one part of a person's identity, as additional factors such as race, class and dis/ability also intertwine.

For example, “Sophie” is a law student at Sydney University and a woman of colour who identifies as bisexual. Adopting an intersectional approach acknowledges that all of these elements are interconnected and will impact Sophie's lived experience.

There is a large body of academic work surrounding the concept of intersectionality and a typical place to start is with Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term while she was still a university student (though the concept itself has been around for much longer).

Crenshaw primarily explores the intersection of race and gender, seeking to trace these categories to their intersections and, in doing so, hopes “to suggest a methodology that will ultimately disrupt the tendencies to see race and gender as exclusive or separable.” Crenshaw acknowledges that the concept “can and should be expanded by factoring in issues such as class, sexual orientation, age, and color.”

- *Crenshaw, Kimberle. 'Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color'. Stanford Law Review, July 1991 43, 1241, 1245-1246.*



Intersectionality and the Workplace

How do our members counter incorrect assumptions and challenge reductive labelling?

Being Out?

Discussions surrounding whether people should be “out” at work, and how they go about doing that, regularly arise at our events. While expression of identity is a personal choice, we often hear that people feel they cannot share parts of their experience that they otherwise would because of the particular setting they are in. For those who do come out, the consensus appears to be that it is easier to do so from the beginning.

Models and Mentors

One of the ways Out for Australia seeks to overcome such hesitation is through fostering mentoring relationships and hosting events where members of the community can meet role models. Role models and mentors also exist beyond these settings, so we encourage everyone to stay attuned to opportunities and have the confidence to approach these people. All our members agree that they would warmly respond to an email or get a coffee with someone seeking support or advice.

Mentors vs. Sponsors

Sam Turner (Chair of Westpac’s GLOBAL network) has extensive experience as a mentor and mentee. When it comes to professional development, however, Sam is keen to point out the core importance of a ‘sponsor’. A sponsor is a senior member of staff who has seen your work and acknowledges your professional abilities. Your sponsor does not have to identify as LGBTIQ. Your sponsor is someone who will “go into bat for you” when, for example, a position is open and a shortlist of candidates is being constructed.



Intersectionality Resources

Out for Australia's Gender and Sex Diversity Program regularly hosts events focusing on issues such as intersectionality.

If you'd like to get involved please reach out to gsd@outforaustralia.org.

If you're interested in getting involved in our mentoring program please contact mentoring@outforaustralia.org.