

# **INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE WORKPLACE**

**SSSHL**

**IMPLEMENTING INTERSECTIONAL PRACTICES AT WORK**



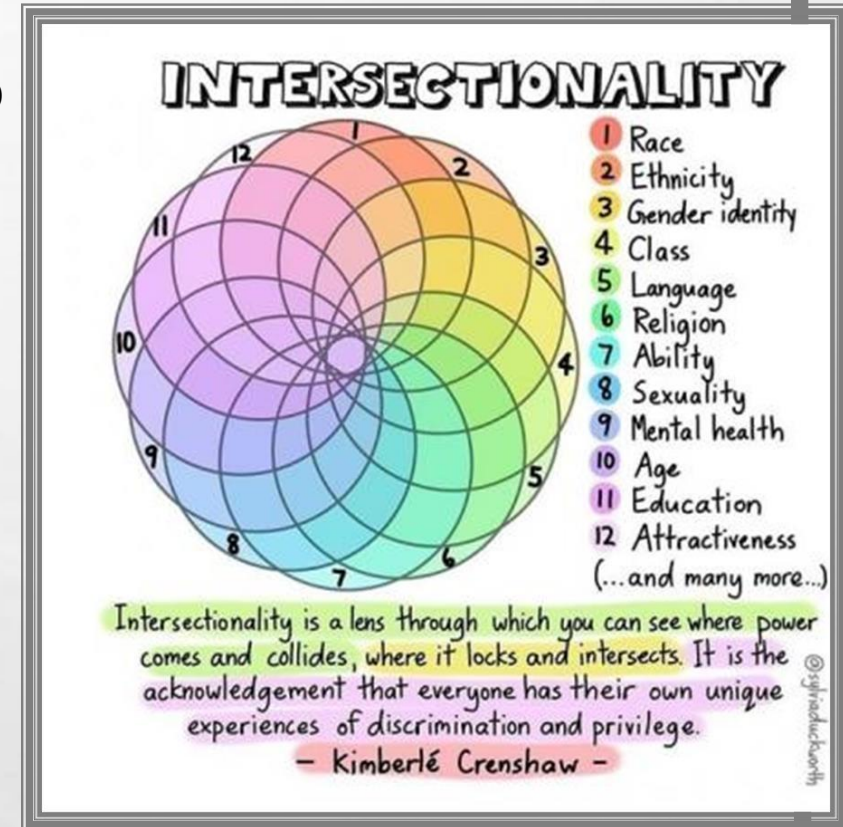
# WHAT WILL BE COVERED IN THIS SESSION?

- 1. WHAT INTERSECTIONALITY IS.**
- 2. A BRIEF GLIMPSE INTO THE CURRENT CONTEXT/CLIMATE IN UK HIGHER EDUCATION.**
- 3. WHAT (SOME) EXISTING RESEARCH STATES.**
- 4. WAYS IN WHICH WE CAN CONDUCT OURSELVES IN THE WORKPLACE (AND BEYOND) (NOT AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST).**

# WHAT IS INTERSECTIONALITY?

Crenshaws focus Black women; racism & sexism

- INTERSECTIONALITY IS A CONCEPT WHICH FOCUSES ON ANALYSING INTERLOCKING MANIFESTATIONS OF OPPRESSION, THE TERM ORIGINATED FROM AN AMERICAN CONTEXT (HASCHEMI YEKANI, NAWICKA AND ROXANNE,2022; GOPALDAS,2013).
- THE TERM WAS NEOLOGISED BY THE BLACK AMERICAN CIVIL RIGHTS ADVOCATE KIMBERLE WILLIAMS CRENSHAW IN THE LATE 1980S, A TERM SHE DESCRIBED AS A 'PROVISIONAL CONCEPT' (CRENSHAW, 2011; CRENSHAW,1991).
- BLACK FEMINIST THEORY WAS CENTRAL TO THE MANIFESTATION OF INTERSECTIONALITY AND TO INTERSECTIONALITY'S CONTINUED EVOLUTION (HILL COLLINS AND BILGE, 2022; ZAKARIA,2021; CRENSHAW,1989,1991).
- INTERSECTIONALITY HOLDS THAT PEOPLE BELONG TO MULTIPLE IDENTIFYING PRISMS. AT THE INTERSECTIONS OF VECTORS NEW FORMS OF SOCIETAL OPPRESSIONS ARE CREATED WHICH ARE IDENTIFIABLY DIFFERENT FROM ONE DIMENSIONAL OPPRESSION SIMPLY ADDED TOGETHER (BERNSTEIN,2020).





# WHY DO PEOPLE OFTEN FAIL TO USE INTERSECTIONALITY EFFECTIVELY?

- OFTEN THE USE OF INTERSECTIONALITY LACKS TRUE MEANINGFUL ENGAGEMENT WITH DEBATES AND LACKS EVIDENCE OF THE TERM'S CRITICAL FOCUS (RICE, HARRISON, AND FRIEDMAN,2019).
- THE TERM DIVERSITY CONCERNS 'DIFFERENCE' AND IS A 'MANAGEMENT TOOL' WHEREAS THE CONCEPT OF INTERSECTIONALITY CONCERNS 'SYSTEMATIC INEQUALITY' (GOUMA AND DORER,2019, P.348).
- WHEN THE TERMS INTERSECTIONALITY AND DIVERSITY ARE CONFLATED, THEY CONSTRUE THOSE WHO BENEFIT WITHIN SYSTEMS AS A 'MONOLITHIC WHITE' MASS (CHRISTOFFERSEN,2022). SUCH A CONFLATION OFTEN CONSTITUTING A MISREADING AND MISREPRESENTATION, LEADING ACADEMICS TO FALL INTO EMPLOYING AN ADDITIVE STANCE (GENTILE AND SALERNO,2019; YUVAL-DAVIS,2006); SOMETIMES REFERRED TO AS 'MATHEMATICAL INTERSECTIONALITY THEORY' (BOHRER,2018).
- A LOT OF DIVERSITY TRAINING COMES WITH THE CAVEAT OF 'NOT MAKING ANYONE UNCOMFORTABLE' – 'NOT DISRUPTING THE (WHITE) STATUS QUO'. THIS CAN BE PROBLEMATIC AS OFTEN THIS TRANSLATES AS "PLEASE ONLY HAVE SURFACE LEVEL CONVERSATIONS AND DO NOT TACKLE ANYTHING OF AN IMPORTANT NATURE"! **E.G. RACISM** - ROBIN DIANGELO- WRITER OF 'WHITE FRAGILITY' OFTEN FOUND IN HER DELIVERY OF DIVERSITY TRAINING THAT WHITE PEOPLE DENY THEIR RACISM AND USE 'WHITE TEARS'/ WHITENESS AS THE 'DEFAULT' INVISIBLE RACE IN WAYS WHICH IGNORE RACIST PRACTICES (DIANGELO,2019).
- **FOR EXAMPLE, WHITE PEOPLE MAY USE DISCURSIVE BUFFERS SUCH AS 'I HAVE BLACK FRIENDS..'.... 'I SUPPORT THE BLACK LIVES MATTER MOVEMENT' AS BOOKMARKS TO THEIR RACIST COMMENTS (MITCHELL,2020)**



**WHAT IS THE  
CURRENT  
CLIMATE IN U.K.  
HIGHER  
EDUCATION?**



# WHY IS INTERSECTIONALITY IMPORTANT IN THE WORKPLACE?

- **RACE:** THERE ARE A NUMBER OF SYSTEMIC WAYS IN WHICH RACISM MANIFESTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION. DISCRIMINATION AGAIN PEOPLE OF COLOUR STILL HAPPENS ACROSS THE IVORY TOWER. 'NO INSTITUTION HAS SUCCESSFULLY ERADICATED RACISM, NOR HAS ANY INSTITUTION SUCCESSFULLY DECOLONISED' (LONDON MET UNIVERSITY, NA).
- IN 2019 DAVID BATTY WRITING FOR THE GUARDIAN NOTED THAT UK SENIOR ACADEMICS AND POLITICIANS HAVE CONDEMNED UK UNIVERSITIES FOR FAILING TO TACKLE ENDEMIC RACISM AGAINST STUDENTS AND STAFF. RESPONSES TO FREEDOM OF INFORMATION REQUEST TO 131 UNIVERSITIES SHOWED STAFF AND STUDENTS MADE AT LEAST 996 FORMAL COMPLAINT OF RACISM FROM 2015-2019 (BATY,2019).
- **SEXUALITY:** A UCU SURVEY, PUBLISHING RESULTS IN 2021 FOUND THAT IN RELATION TO THE LGBT+ COMMUNITY THE REPORT SUGGESTS OVER THREE-QUARTERS (77%) OF LGBT+ STAFF HAVE CONSIDERED LEAVING THE SECTOR. 29% OF RESPONDENTS SAID PROMOTION CRITERIA NEGATIVELY IMPACT LGBT+ STAFF. THREE IN 10 (30%) SAID THEY HAVE EXPERIENCED HOMOPHOBIC LANGUAGE. THE REPORT FOUND THAT 'HOMOPHOBIC, BIPHOBIC AND TRANSPHOBIC DISCRIMINATION REMAIN WIDESPREAD IN UK UNIVERSITIES' (UCU,2021).



# WHY IS INTERSECTIONALITY IMPORTANT IN THE WORKPLACE?

## GENDER:

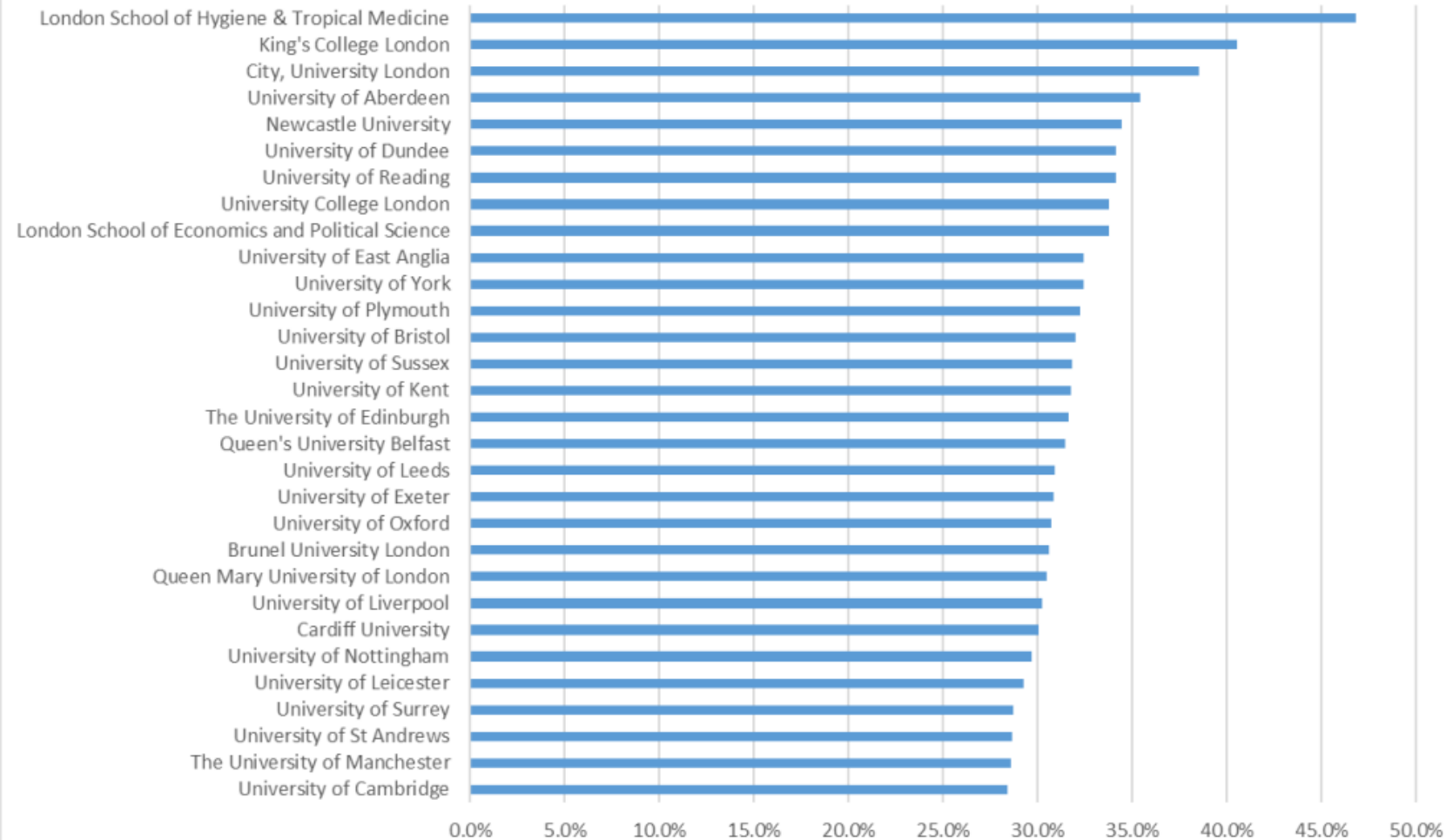
Figure 1 shows the percentage share of female authorship by higher education institution in the United Kingdom. All of the institutions included are below 50 percent.

HOWEVER, NO ONE INDICATOR CAN GIVE A FULL PICTURE OF INCLUSIVENESS. FOR INSTANCE, TRADITIONALLY 'FEMALE' FIELDS SUCH AS NURSING AND SOCIAL WORK, HAVE HIGHER PERCENTAGES OF FEMALE AUTHORSHIP.

HOWEVER- THERE ARE STILL GENDER GAPS IN PRACTICE/PUBLISHING.

Source THE LONDON SCHOOL OF ECONOMICS AND POLITICAL SCIENCE (LSE) (2019)


**FIGURE 1** Percent Share of Female Authorships, Top 30, UK Higher Education Institutions, 2014-2017



# WHY IS INTERSECTIONALITY IMPORTANT IN THE WORKPLACE?

- **ABLEISM:** HIGHER EDUCATION ENCOURAGES STUDENTS AND TEACHERS TO ACCENTUATE ABILITY AND VALORISE PERFECTION AND STIGAMTISES INTELLECTUAL OR PHYSICAL WEAKNESS (LYNCH & MACKLIN,2020). 'IT IS COMMON KNOWLEDGE THAT LECTURERS CAN CARRY OUT MICROAGRESSIONS TOWARDS MINORITY GROUPS (SENSOY & DIANGELO,2017, IN, LYMCH & MACKLIN,2020,P.40)- HINGED ON UNEARNED ADVANTAGES AND ENTITLEMENTS.
- **CLASS:** UCU REPORTED IN 2022 THAT 3 IN 5 WORKING CLASS STAFF SAY THEIR CLASS IS A BARRIER TO CAREER PROGRESSION. ALMOST A THIRD OF RESPONDENTS AGREE OR STRONGLY AGREE THAT THEY HAVE BEEN DISADVANTAGED OR DISCRIMINATED AGAINST IN THEIR CAREER DUE TO THEIR ACCENT (UCU,2022). ALSO, ONE RESPONDENT NOTES THAT FIXED-TERM CONTRACTS AND SHORT-TERM RESEARCH AWARDS SEEM TO ASSUME THAT THE RECIPIENT HAS A 'SAFETY NET': THE FINANCIAL STABILITY TO MOVE AROUND, MAKE ENDS MEET BETWEEN CONTRACTS, CONTINUE REGULAR MORTGAGE/RENTAL PAYMENTS WHILST BEING FUNDED FOR TRAVEL EXPENSES ONLY. THIS MODEL ASSUMES THAT EVERYONE HAS PARENTS/A PARTNER ABLE TO SUPPORT THEM; IT IS A MODEL OF ACADEMIA AS A GENTEEL HOBBY, RATHER THAN A LIVING' (UCU,2022).





PUBLICATION

**WHAT DO EXISTING  
PUBLICATIONS ADD  
TO INTERSECTIONAL  
UNDERSTANDINGS?**



# **PUSHING BACK AGAINST POWER: USING A MULTILEVEL POWER LENS TO UNDERSTAND INTERSECTIONALITY IN THE WORKPLACE THATCHER ET AL (2023)**

- IT IS IMPORTANT FOR WORKPLACES TO LOOK AT HOW VARIOUS COMBINATIONS OF INDIVIDUALS' SOCIAL IDENTITIES INTERSECT AND HOW THESE IMPACT THEIR LIVES AND THE ORGANISATIONS WHERE THEY WORK.**
- THATCHER ET AL (2023) LOOK AT 153 ARTICLES TO PROVIDE INSIGHT INTO IDENTITY COMBINATIONS AND OUTCOMES ASSOCIATED WITH INTERSECTIONALITY EXPERENCES AND VARIOUS ORGANISATIONAL (AND INDIVIDUAL) RESPONSES THAT OCCUR WHEN INTERSECTIONALITY IS EXPERIENCED (PG710).**
- THATCHER ET AL (2023) NOTE THE IMPORTANCE OF INTERSECTIONAL AWARENESS IN THE WORKPLACE, FOR INSTANCE, MEN WITHOUT PHYSICAL DISABILITIES MAY ENGAGE IN SOME WORK ACTIVITIES WITH MORE EASE THAN PHYSICALLY DISABLED MEN, DESPITE SHARING THE SAME GENDER (PG710).**
- IDENTITIES SHOULD NOT BE TREATED AS IF THEY ARE ADDITIVE, AS NOT ALL DIFFERENCES ARE CREATED EQUAL (PG710). HOW IDENTITIES ARE EXPERIENCED, AND THEIR OUTCOMES DEPEND ON THEIR INTERCONNECTEDNESS WITH OTHER IDENTITIES (PG711)**
- ONE MUST UNDERSTAND THE IMPACT OF MULTIPLE IDENTITY INTERSECTIONS BY UNDERSTANDING THE UNDERLYING STRUCTURES THAT IMBUE CERTAIN IDENTITIES WITH POWER OR DISADVANTAGE AND LINK DISTINCT COMBINATIONS OF IDENTITIES TO SPECIFIC OUTCOMES (E.G. DISCRIMINATION, INEQUALITY, CAREER ADVANCEMENT) (PG711)**
- THATCHER ET AL'S (2023) STUDY OF EXISTING RESEARCH FOUND THAT THOSE WITH DISADVANTAGED IDENTITIES STRUGGLED TO GAIN LEADERSHIP ROLES AND WERE NOT BENEFITTING FROM HR PRACTICES. FOR INSTANCE, RIVERA & TILCSIK (2016) FOUND HIGHER-CLASS MEN APPLYING FOR LAW FIRM ASSOCIATE JOBS WERE MORE LIKELY TO RECEIVE JOB CALLBACKS THAN HIGHER-CLASS WOMEN, LOWER-CLASS WOMEN, AND LOWER-CLASS MEN, AS THEY WERE VIEWED AS MORE CLOSELY ALIGNED WITH THE ELITE IMAGES ASSOCIATED WITH LARGE LAW FIRMS (PG726).**
- THERE IS NO DENYING THAT '...POWER IS ASCRIBED TO CERTAIN IDENTITY GROUPS, PROMOTING STEREOTYPING, DEVALUING, AND (PROMOTING) AGGRESSION TOWARDS GROUPS WITH NONPOWERFUL IDENTITIES' (ANDERSON & BRION,2014 IN THATCHER ET AL,2023,P.739).**

# COLOURBLIND & GENDERBLIND PRACTICES, GUNDEMIR ET AL (2019)

- **DIVERSITY IDEOLOGIES ARE OF 2 (INTERRELATED) TYPES, (1) ORGANISATIONAL PRACTICES (2) INDIVIDUAL BELIEFS (PG2). DIVERSITY POLICIES OFTEN LOOK TO CREATE INTERGROUP HARMONY IN THE WORKPLACE.**
- **PRACTICES THAT ARE PROBLEMATIC AND WHY:**

**COLOURBLINDNESS**-this ideology is that categorizing individuals by their social group leads to prejudice and conflict

- **Opponents of colorblindness suggest that suppressing social categories is not possible, as humans have a natural tendency to categorize their environment to be able to process the large amount of information (Rosch and Lloyd, 1978).**
- **Moreover, research shows that demographic group information, like race and sex, is detected in the brain within milliseconds (Ito and Urland, 2003). Opponents propose that colorblindness is not only impossible but also undesirable because it ignores the unique cultural identities and traditions of racial minorities and assimilates them into a dominant power structure (Fryberg and Stephens, 2010).**
- **Further, diversity has the potential to offer positive contributions to companies and the society as a whole (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). As such, opponents of colorblindness argue that differences between demographic groups should not be ignored but recognized and celebrated (PG3)**

**ALTERNATIVE: MULTICULTURALISM** 'multiculturalism is not solely unique to racial minorities, it applies to any group that holds minority, subordinate status within a given environment' (PG4):

**GENDERBLINDNESS**- not "seeing" gender

- **There is some evidence to suggest gender blind approaches in the workplace can 'work' to an extent with martin et al (2016) finding that when men were primed with gender-blindness, they reduced their dominance in interactions, leading women to contribute more to the conversation' (PG 7).**
- **HOWEVER- '...gender blindness can create its own negative side effects. For instance, policies such as "meritocracy," which many companies utilize as a form of the blindness ideology, that ignore factors that shape and bias women's performance at work exacerbate prejudice towards women in occupational domains. Castilla and Benard (2010) show that the presence of meritocratic (i.e., gender-blind) policies prompt both male and female decision makers to offer higher levels of bonus to men than to equally qualified women' (PG 7).**
- **'Thus, there is potential for gender-blindness to prohibit women from behaving in stereotypically feminine ways, which may mute their authenticity' (PG7).**



# ROBIN DIANGELO (2018,2022)- RACISM IN OUR (*WHITE PEOPLES*) OWN PRACTICES

- **THE GOOD/BAD BINARY**
- **THIS BINARY IS HARMFUL:**

<b>Racist=bad</b>	<b>Not racist=good</b>
<b>Ignorant Bigoted Prejudiced Mean- spirited old</b>	<b>Progressive Educated Open-minded Well-intentioned young</b>

**'He's not a racist. He is a really nice guy'**

**'Although individual racist acts do occur, these acts are part of a larger system of interlocking dynamics. The focus on individual indecencies masks the personal, interpersonal, cultural, historical, and structural analysis that is necessary to challenge this larger system (PG73)**

can colleagues: "When a white woman cries, a black man gets hurt." Not knowing or being sensitive to this history is another example of white centrality, individualism, and lack of racial humility.

Because of its seeming innocence, well-meaning white women crying in cross-racial interactions is one of the more pernicious enactments of white fragility. The reasons we cry in these interactions vary. Perhaps we were given feedback on our racism. Not understanding that unaware white racism is inevitable, we hear the feedback as a moral judgment, and our feelings are hurt. A classic example occurred in a workshop I was co-leading. A black man who was struggling to express a point referred to himself as stupid. My co-facilitator, a black woman, gently countered that he was not stupid but that society would have him believe that he was. As she was explaining the power of internalized racism, a white woman interrupted with, "What he was trying to say was . . ." When my co-facilitator pointed out that the white woman had reinforced the racist idea that she could best speak for a black man, the woman erupted in tears. The training came to a complete halt as most of the room rushed to comfort her and angrily accuse the black facilitator of unfairness. (Even though the participants were there to learn how racism works, how dare the facilitator point out an example of how racism works!) Meanwhile, the black man she had spoken for was left alone to watch her receive comfort.

A colleague of color shared an example in which a white woman—



# ROBIN DIANGELO (2018, 2022) - RACISM IN DIVERSITY TRAINING SESSIONS

concerns  
itself, white fragility erupts.

For example, I was working with a group of educators who had been meeting regularly for at least eight sessions. The group was composed of the equity teams for a public school system, self-selected by people who wanted to support equity efforts in their schools. I had just finished an hour-long presentation titled "Seeing the Water: Whiteness in Daily Life." This presentation is designed to make visible the relentless messages of white superiority and the resulting and inevitable internalization of these messages for white people. The room appeared to be with me—open and receptive, with many nodding along in agreement. Then a white teacher raised her hand and told a story about an interaction she had as she drove alongside a group of parents protesting the achievement gap in her school. She then proceeded to imitate one mother in particular who offended her. "You don't understand our children!" this mother had called out to her as she drove by. By the stereotypical way that the white teacher imitated the mother, we all knew that the mother was black. The room seemed to collectively hold its breath at her imitation, which was bordering on racial mockery. While the teacher's concluding point was that, on reflection, she came to realize that the mother was right and that she really didn't understand children of color, the emotional thrust of the story was her umbrage at the mother for making this assumption. For the room, the emotional impact was on her stereotypical imitation of an angry black woman.

As this story came to a close, I had a decision to make. Should I act with integrity and point out what was racially problematic about the story? After all, making racism visible was literally what I had been hired to do. Further, several African American teachers in the room had certainly noticed the reinforcement of a racist stereotype. To not intervene would be, yet again, another white person choosing to protect white feelings rather than interrupt racism—a white person who billed herself as a racial justice consultant, no less! Yet I would be taking the risk of losing the group, given the likelihood that the woman would



# ROBIN DIANGELO'S RACISM (2018,2022)

*The equity team has been invited to a meeting with the company's new web developer. The team consists of two women, both of whom are black, and me. The new web developer, who is also black, wants to interview us so that she can build our page. She starts the meeting by giving us a survey to fill out. Many questions on the survey inquire about our intended audience, methods, goals, and objectives. I find the questions tedious and feel irritated by them. Pushing the survey aside, I try to explain verbally. I tell the web developer that we go out into the satellite offices to facilitate antiracism training. I add that the training is not always well received; in fact, one member of our team was told not to come back. I make a joke: "The white people were scared by Deborah's hair" (Deborah is black and has long locked braids). The meeting ends and we move on.*

*A few days later, one of my team members lets me know that the web developer—who I will call Angela—was offended by my hair comment. While I wasn't paying attention at the time, once I am informed, I quickly realize why that comment was off. I seek out a friend who is white and has a solid understanding of cross-racial dynamics. We discuss my feelings (embarrassment, shame, guilt) and then she helps me identify the various ways my racism was revealed in that interaction. After this processing, I feel ready to repair the relationship. I ask Angela to meet with me, and she accepts.*

*I open by asking Angela, "Would you be willing to grant me the opportunity to repair the racism I perpetrated toward you in that meeting?" When she agrees, I continue. "I realize that my comment about Deborah's hair was inappropriate."*

*Angela nods and explains that she did not know me and did not want to be joking about black women's hair (a sensitive issue for many black women) with a white woman whom she did not have a trusting relationship with, much less in a professional work meeting.*

*I apologize and ask her if I have missed anything else problematic in the meeting.*

*"Yes," she replies. "That survey? I wrote that survey. And I have spent my life justifying my intelligence to white people."*

*My chest constricts as I immediately realize the impact of my glib dismissal of the survey. I acknowledge this impact and apologize.*

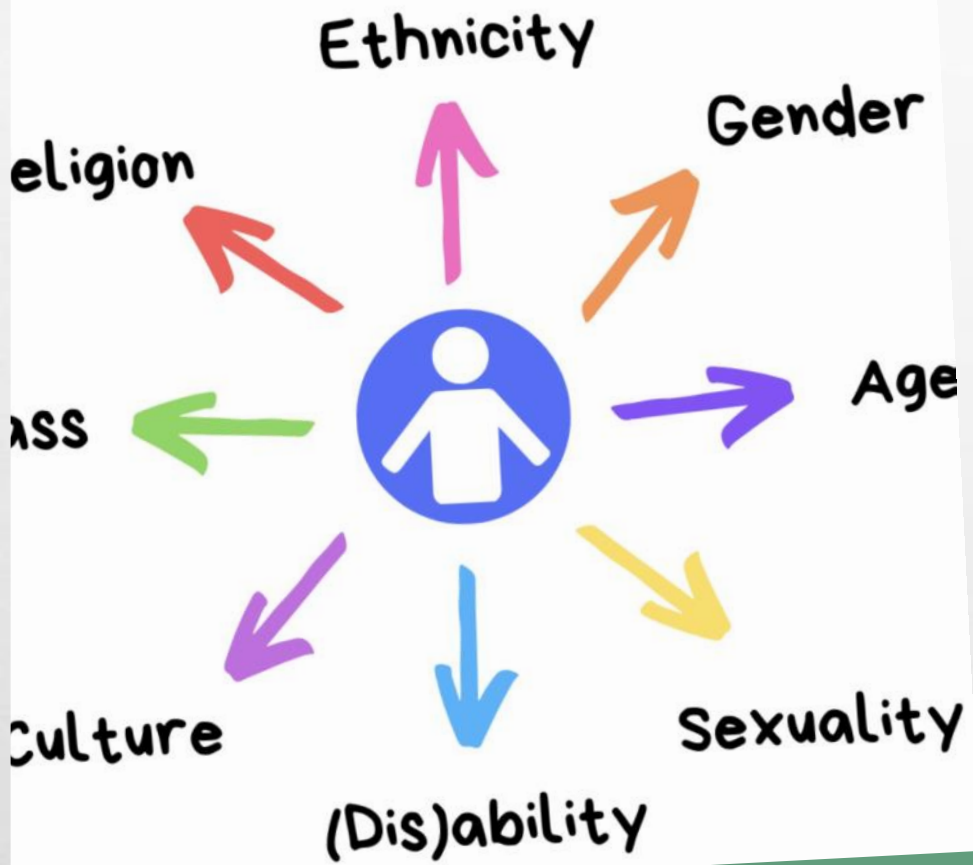
*She accepts my apology. I ask Angela if there is anything else that needs to be said or heard so that we may move forward.*

*She replies that yes, there is. "The next time you do something like this, would you like feedback publicly or privately?" she asks.*

*I answer that given my role as an educator, I would appreciate receiving the feedback publicly as it is important for white people to see that I am also engaged in a lifelong process of learning and growth. And I could model for other white people how to receive feedback openly and without defensiveness.*

*She tells me that although these dynamics occur daily between white people and people of color, my willingness to repair doesn't, and that she appreciates this. We move on.*





# WHAT PRACTICES CAN BE USED (& AVOIDED) IN THE WORKPLACE?



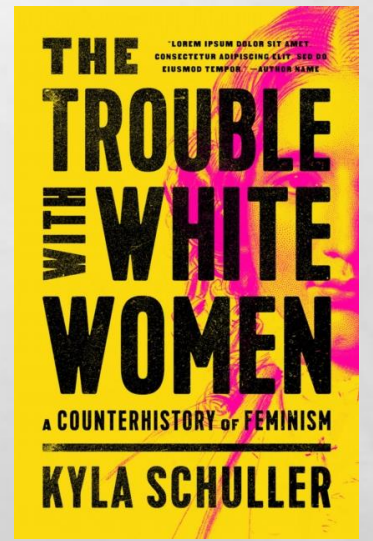
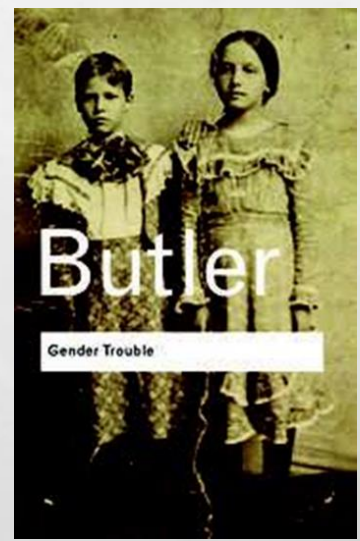
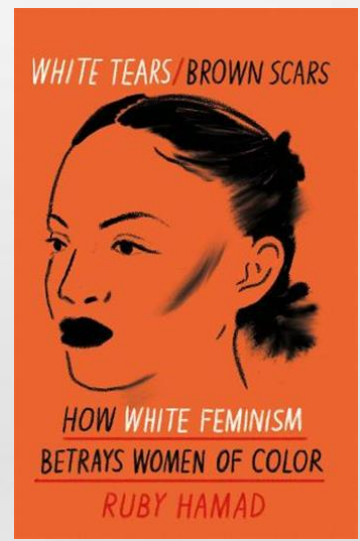
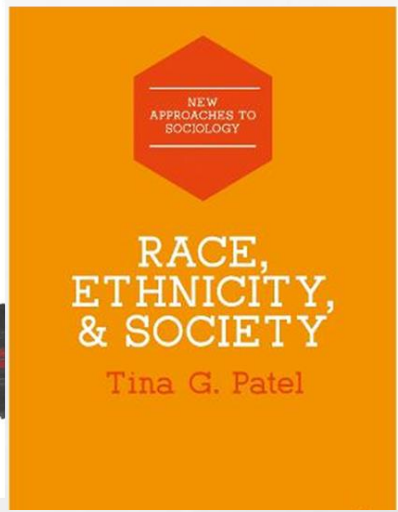
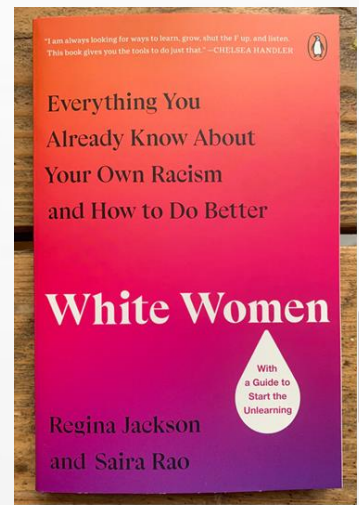
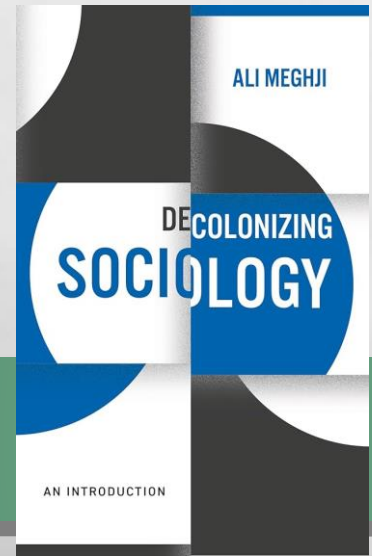
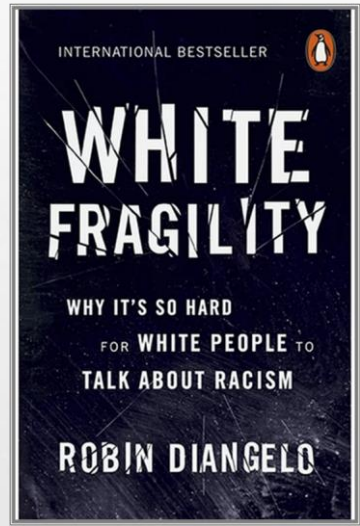
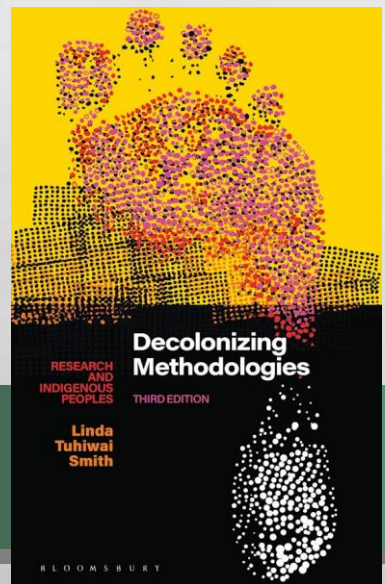
# WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES DO TO FOSTER AN INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH?

- **AVOID COLOURBLIND (CB) APPROACHES**
- **AVOID GENDERBLIND (GB) APPROACHES**
- **FACE RACISM – AVOID DISCURSIVE BUFFERS (DB) AND/OR WHITE TEARS (WT)**
- **DO NOT THINK OF RACISM AS SOMETHING WHICH IS ONLY EVER DONE BY ‘BAD PEOPLE’ (I.E. GOOD/BAD BINARY) (CONSIDER THE EFFECTS OF COLONIALITY ON (WHITE) PEOPLE’S SOCIALISATION & EDUCATION)**
- **AVOID EUROCENTRIC AND HETERONORMATIVE PRACTICES (REQUIRING BEING AWARE OF HISTORICAL PRACTICES).**
- **WHERE APPROPRIATE LOOK FOR SUITABLE MEDIATOR(S) FOR ISSUES AT AN INTERPERSONAL LEVEL E.G. CONSIDER PEOPLES POSITIONS OF POWER (WITHIN AN ORGANISATION) AND IDENTITY SIGNIFIERS (SOME OF WHICH MAY HOLD PRIVILEGE, AND OTHERS’ OPPRESSIONS)- CREATE A WORK ENVIRONMENT THAT FOSTERS A CULTURE OF OPENNESS & COLLABORATION & UNDERSTANDING VIA LETTING EVERYONE SPEAK (AND AVOIDING NEGATIVE PRACTICES-SOME OUTLINED ABOVE CB;GB;DB;WT)**
- **ALL OF THE ABOVE REQUIRE CULTIVATING SELF REFLEXIVITY, SELF AWARENESS & EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE**



# RECOMMENDED READS (ALONGSIDE THE 'REFERENCES SLIDE')

- FOSS & ELLIOT. (2017) ACTING TO ALTER PRIVILEGE BY MAINTAINING THE STRUCTURAL-PERFORMATIVE PARADOX [HTTPS://WWW.SONJAFOSS.COM/WP-CONTENT/UPLOADS/2017/09/ACTINGT OALTERPRIVILEGE.PDF](https://www.sonjafoss.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/ACTINGT OALTERPRIVILEGE.PDF)





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