



BRINGING YOUR WHOLE SELF TO WORK:

Unpacking Covering & Intersectionality in the Workplace

DIVERSITY
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INCLUSION
BELONGING

About the Series

Increasingly, Out & Equal's member companies recognize that, while necessary, standard DEI efforts fall short in addressing the most vital component of retention and growth: feeling like you belong. Developing an organizational culture of belonging is hard – especially right now. COVID realities, Gen Z and Y redefining the workplace, and increased racially charged bias and violence all are driving the urgency and importance of establishing cultures of belonging now. *Practitioners for Change* brings critical conversations about racial equity and mental health and wellness to the forefront of DEI praxis.

Powered by [Capital One](#), the series is designed to help sustain practitioners both as professionals, and as people by weaving together critical conversations about racial equity, mental health, and well-being.

[Visit our website to learn more about the series and to access other sessions.](#)



About the Session

“Bring your whole self to work” is a phrase you’ve likely heard time and again in DEI spaces. But what does it really mean in practice? The secret? It all starts with learning more about our identities, and the ways they interact with the spaces and people around us.

Based on our popular Intersectional Allyship courses, Out & Equal has released this guide to support internal conversations on intersectionality in the workplace.

To start, watch our webinar walking practitioners through an Identity Tour activity and exploring key concepts: intersectionality, power, privilege, and marginalization. Then use this guide, which provides you with instructions to facilitate a version of this conversation virtually or in person with your colleagues.

Key Concepts

Covering:

The way people downplay aspects of their identities

Researchers Kenji Yoshino and Christie Smith found that approximately 61% of people reported covering along at least one axis (appearance, association, affiliation, and advocacy) while at work.¹

Intersectionality:

A theoretical framework articulated by scholar and writer, Kimberlé Crenshaw, in 1989. The theory was designed to express the unique intersection of marginalization experienced by Black women in the workplace, though its application expands to include many intersections of identity.

Crenshaw defines intersectionality as, “a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What’s often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts.”²

¹ Kenji Yoshino & Christie Smith, “[Uncovering Talent, a New Model for Inclusion](#),” Deloitte University Press (2019).

² Katie Steinmetz, “[She Coined the Term ‘Intersectionality’ Over 30 Years Ago](#),” Time (2020).

Key Concepts

Power:

At its core, power is about the ability to achieve the outcomes we want. Power is relational and situational - whereas we may have power in one context, we may be powerless in another. Power is unevenly distributed in our society. In order to produce the change we want to see in the world, allies need to recognize their power in any given context and harness it for good.

Privilege:

A collection of earned and unearned advantages—both visible and invisible—based on a person's social identity or group membership. As with power, privilege is relational and situational. While everyone has some degree of privilege, the corresponding advantages a person receives are based on where they are and who they're with.

Marginalization:

The conscious or unconscious process of keeping a person or people from positions of power and/or influence based on their social identity or group membership.



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Unpacking Your Identity

The Identity Tour Activity:

This highly interactive activity is designed to help participants start thinking about their own dimensions of diversity and how their unique identities show up in the workplace.

Conversations about identity often—whether intentionally or not—neglect the one subject that each of us is an expert on: our own identity experiences. It is only through understanding our own identities that we can start acting as empathetic and effective allies to others. Use the Identity Tour exercise to kickstart your group or team’s personal identity exploration with this fun, low-stakes exercise.

This activity was adapted from the [Safe Zone Project](#).
Source: “Identity Signs,” *Safe Zone Project*, (2022).



The Identity Tour: *In Person*

Begin by setting up signs around the room with 6 or more identity categories that you would like to highlight. Examples are listed below:

Sexual Orientation	Religious Affiliation
Gender Expression	Physical Ability/Health
Race/Ethnicity	Mental Health
Class	Other/Not Listed
Gender Identity	

Next, introduce participants to the session by giving a quick overview, and reviewing the identity signs. Example Language:

Today, we're going to go through an activity called an Identity Tour, designed to get us each to start thinking about our own dimensions of diversity and how we engage with that diversity in the workplace. As you can see, we have set up a series of signs around the room which list different categories of identity.

-Introduce the categories-

I am going to ask a series of questions relating to identity, and you will move to the sign that corresponds with your answer.

For example, if the question is 'What part of your identity do you think about first when you wake up,' and your answer is 'Race or Ethnicity,' you would move close to the 'Race/Ethnicity' sign. 'Other/Not Listed' can be used if you think of an answer that does not match any of the signs currently hanging around the room.



The Identity Tour: *In Person*

Then explain the logistics of the activity. Example Language:

“After we ask each question and you have moved near your corresponding sign, we will take a few moments for you to discuss why you chose this identity with the others at your sign. Then we will take a few moments for each group to report what they discussed to the room.”

-Answer any questions that arise-

*From here, you will begin the activity by reading a series of statements.
Participants will answer by moving to the corresponding sign.*

Example questions:

“The part of my identity that I am most aware of on a daily basis is _____.”

“The part of my identity that I am least aware of on a daily basis is _____.”

“The part of my identity that was most emphasized or important in my family growing up was _____.”

“The part of my identity that provides me the most privilege is _____.”

“The part of my identity that I feel is most difficult to discuss with others who identify differently is _____.”

“The part of my identity that I find most difficult to discuss at work is _____.”

*After each question, give participants a moment to choose their answer and move to the correct sign.
Once there, ask them to discuss with others at their sign why they chose this answer.*

After 2-3 minutes, ask the groups to share out with the entire group.



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The Identity Tour: *Virtual*

To run the Identity Tour activity in a virtual setting, you will need access to an online polling platform that allows for/accommodates the following:

- Live polling with visualizations that both the presenter and audience can see
- A multiple-choice option that allows for at least 6 answer options to be displayed at the same time
- An option that allows for short answers (at least 250 characters)
- A platform (or license) that can accommodate your expected audience size

We leverage the platform Mentimeter, but other common options are Slido and Poll Everywhere.

Add the question prompt ([same list as the live activity](#)) to the title section of each slide and list the identity options in the multiple-choice categories. Allow—at minimum—three minutes to debrief each prompt with the audience.

Verbally note the answer trends that you're seeing throughout the session

Example Language: *I'm noticing that racial identity, age, and gender have the largest groupings/percentages here, and that ability and religion have the smallest. Take note of where your answer falls in relation to others. Are you in the majority? The minority? What feelings are coming up for you?*

Debrief as a large group instead of break out rooms.

*Ask the group to share verbally or through a chat function: **What came up for you during this activity?***

Read answers aloud as they come in, and draw connections between the trends described earlier, and anything that could deepen your conversation about intersectionality, power, privilege, or marginalization.

The Identity Tour: *Considerations*

Often people find it difficult to choose between two or three different categories, however, we strongly encourage you to ask participants to choose one identity per question. Use this as an opportunity to explore the ways it can be difficult to isolate how one aspect of our identity affects us. Reinforce how we need to apply an intersectional lens to all facets of our lives.

As participants are discussing their choices within their chosen identity categories, we recommend the facilitator float from group to group to offer guidance, pose additional questions, or just listen in to what they're saying. If an identity only has one person, start with that sign so everyone has someone to engage with. This level of facilitation will not only keep attendees engaged but will also give you a chance to hear particularly insightful answers that you can request the individual shares out to the group.

This activity asks your participants to be vulnerable and honest about their identities. It is important to assist them in processing any difficult feelings and provide resources as well as support options during and after the activity.

Concluding the Session

After watching the webinar, discussing the key concepts, and completing the activity, debrief with the group about the experience.

Example Questions:

What did you learn about your coworker's identity experiences in the workplace? Did anything from the activity surprise you?

What would you need to feel safe enough, or comfortable enough, uncovering fully in the workplace?

If we understand that privilege grants us greater access to create change, how can we start to leverage our privileges in order to do so?

Where do you see an intersectional approach being actively woven into your ERG, initiative, or program's events, leadership, or strategic planning?

If you do not see evidence of an intersectional approach, what would need to change in order to see a recognition and practice of intersectionality in these spaces?



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