

ISSUES IN PERSPECTIVE

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Intersectionality: The New Postmodern Religion?

In early March, the controversial author of *The Bell Curve*, Charles Murray, was invited to give a lecture at Middlebury College in Vermont on his newest book, *Coming Apart*. His lecture was shut down by an organized effort to drive him from the campus. Loud, boisterous chanting made it impossible for Murray to deliver his lecture. The lecture was then delivered in another room and livestreamed. When Murray and his faculty sponsor, Allison Stranger, left to go to their car, they were surrounded by a mob. In the melee, Stranger was grabbed and her neck so twisted that she ended up in the emergency room. They then attempted to have dinner at a local restaurant, where they were attacked by another mob. They left town.

All people in America who are interested in fair and open discussion, even of provocative topics and ideas, should find what happened to Murray and Dr. Stranger reprehensible. In my reading on this tragic event at Middlebury, I kept coming across the term “Intersectionality.” This term is currently the latest academic craze sweeping the college and university campuses of our nation. In this *Perspective*, I seek to explain and then critique this newest intellectual fad in America.

Intersectionality is a neo-Marxist theory that deals with the various aspects of social oppression (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation, class, etc.) interconnected in the various hierarchies of power in America. Several points of clarification about Intersectionality:

1. The *Oxford Dictionary* definition: “The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.”
2. Who came up with the term Intersectionality and why? The term Intersectionality itself is attributed to legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in her 1989 essay “Mapping the Margins: Intersectionality, Identity Politics, and Violence Against Women of Color,” though the actual notion behind Intersectionality extends into the early 19th century. Crenshaw coined the term to express the particular problems that immigrant women of color face and why their issues were being ignored by both the feminist and the anti-racism movements. Crenshaw contends that there are overlapping or *intersecting* social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination. “Intersectionality is the idea that multiple identities intersect to create a whole that is different from the component identities.” These identities that can intersect include gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental disability, physical disability, mental illness, and

physical illness. These aspects of identity are not "unitary, mutually exclusive entities, but rather...reciprocally constructing phenomena." The theory proposes that we think of each element or trait of a person as inextricably linked with all of the other elements in order to fully understand one's identity. This framework, it is argued, can be used to understand how systemic injustice and social inequality occur on a multidimensional basis.

Intersectionality holds that the classical conceptualizations of oppression within society—such as “racism, sexism, class, homophobia, transphobia, xenophobia and belief-based bigotry”—do not act independently of each other. Instead, these forms of oppression interrelate, creating a system of oppression that reflects the "intersection" of multiple forms of discrimination. Such oppression is cyclically perpetuated.

Andrew Sullivan, in a brilliant article in *New York Magazine*, comments on the “religious-like” nature of Intersectionality. Consider these points:

- It posits a classic orthodoxy that explains all aspects of human experience and “through which all speech must be filtered.”
- Its version of original sin is the power of some identity groups over others. “To overcome this sin, you need first to confess, i.e., ‘check your privilege,’ and subsequently live your life and order your thoughts in a way that keeps this sin at bay. The sin goes so deep into your psyche, especially if you are white or male or straight, that a profound conversion is required.”
- Intersectionality controls language and the very terms of discourse. It enforces manners. It has an idea of virtue—and is obsessed with upholding it.
- The “saints” of intersectionality are the most oppressed who nonetheless resist.
- Life is simply an interlocking drama of oppression and power and resistance, ending only in death. There is no future hope or release. Sullivan: “It is Marx without the total liberation.”
- Perhaps the most salient observation Sullivan makes is its power to control: “If you happen to see the world in a different way, if you’re a liberal or libertarian or even, gasp, a conservative, if you believe that a university is a place where any idea, however loathsome, can be debated and refuted, you are not just wrong, you are immoral. If you think that arguments and ideas can have a life independent of ‘white supremacy,’ you are complicit in evil. And you are not just complicit, your heresy is a direct threat to others, and therefore needs to be extinguished. You can’t reason with heresy. You have to ban it. It will contaminate others’ souls, and wound them irreparably.”

This is why Middlebury students forced Charles Murray off campus and physically threatened him and his sponsor. He needed to be banned, to be silenced. Academic freedom and academic discourse have no place in the Intersectionality worldview! In the words of Andrew T.

Walker of the Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission, “intersectionality offers a cosmogony of sorts (a theory of everything). It explains the world and supplies progressives with a comprehensive account of justice *devoid* of any transcendent account. Further, and importantly, according to Intersectionalists, the here and now are both necessary and sufficient conditions for approximating perfect justice and redressing all social ills. So Intersectionality functions in the role of Divine Judge and Divine Mediator, but displacing divine judgment and mediation altogether and places it in the hands of non-divine beings attempting to execute judgment and mediation for the sake of justice in the present.” Intersectionality is thoroughly intolerant, manipulative and controlling.

In conclusion, permit me several observations about Intersectionality:

1. Intersectionality provides an understanding of how progressive college campuses and progressive tenured professors can institutionalize intolerance in places once known for the tolerance of all ideas.
2. Intersectionality is posting a set of absolute ethical standards without any absolute framework for those standards. It promotes universal judgment and justice without any appeal to that which is universal.
3. In the pursuit of ending oppression and exploitation, Intersectionality promotes oppressive and exploitative methods to accomplish its seemingly just ends. For the intellectually honest, this is absurd!
4. Genuine, biblical Christianity has the solution to the serious social and cultural problems raised by Intersectionality. It is of course Jesus Christ, for He alone can solve the problems of social injustice, discrimination and oppression. And we, as His disciples, must model that love, humility and compassion sourced in Him and His indwelling Holy Spirit. In doing so, we, as His disciples, cannot wield the same sword of intolerance that Intersectionality wields. As we point out the shortcomings and bankruptcy of Intersectionality, we must show respect and honor to these image-bearers of God who are advocating these positions. We are apologists, we are ambassadors and we are representatives of the Lord of the universe. We cannot allow ourselves to become intolerant bigots as Intersectionality advocates are becoming. As John Piper concluded in 2002: “. . . since Jesus Christ alone, the Creator and Lord of history, has the right to wield the tolerance-ending sword, we dare not.”

See Steve Williamson, “What Is Intersectionality and Why Is It Important?” in www.care2.com; “Intersectionality” article in *Wikipedia*; Andrew Sullivan, “Is Intersectionality a Religion?” in *New York Magazine* (www.nymag.com), March 2017; and Andrew J. Walker “‘Secular Religion’ and the Impossibility of Religious Liberty” in www.thefederalist.com (14 March 2017).