

CREATING ALLIES WITHIN SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS THROUGH INTERSECTION


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GOALS

- ▶ By the end of this presentation, participants will be able to:
 - ▶ 1) Explain how social justice movements intersect.
 - ▶ 2) Respond to criticisms of social justice movements.
 - ▶ 3) Learn methods of empathy to prevent “blindness” towards other oppressed groups.
 - ▶ 4) Apply empathetic reasoning to strengthen social justice movements.
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HOW DO SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS INTERSECT?

- ▶ First, we must always acknowledge intersectionality.
 - ▶ the theory that the overlap of various social identities, as race, gender, sexuality, and class, contributes to the specific type of systemic oppression and discrimination experienced by an individual
- ▶ Social Justice Movements intersect because many of them face the “sympathy” vs “empathy” problem.
 - ▶ Many are sympathetic to the movement but not empathetic to the movement
 - ▶ Sympathy matches with equality
 - ▶ Empathy matches with equity.

DEFINITIONS

▶ Sympathy

- ▶ “the feeling that you care about and are sorry about someone else's trouble, grief, misfortune, etc”

▶ Empathy

- ▶ “the feeling that you understand and share another person's experiences and emotions : the ability to share someone else's feelings”

DEFINITIONS (CONT.)

- ▶ Equality
 - ▶ “the quality or state of being equal”
 - ▶ Equal: “not changing : the same for each person”
- ▶ Equity
 - ▶ “ fairness or justice in the way people are treated”
- ▶ Altruism
 - ▶ “unselfish regard for or devotion to the welfare of others”

SYMPATHY VS. EMPATHY

- ▶ So what does sympathy do/not do?
 - ▶ Sympathy DOES NOT involve a shared perspective or shared emotion.
 - ▶ Sympathy DOES convey caring and concern.
 - ▶ Sympathy DOES NOT convey shared distress.
- ▶ What does empathy do/not do?
 - ▶ Empathy DOES involve seeing someone's situation from that person's perspective AND sharing that person's emotions, which includes that person's distress.
 - ▶ Empathy DOES require imagining oneself as that person in the particular situation.
 - ▶ Empathy DOES NOT involve abstract or detached feelings.
- ▶ So why is empathy so important?
 - ▶ Because empathy can often lead to COMPASSION, which can lead to ALTRUISM!

EMPATHY TO COMPASSION TO ALTRUISM

- ▶ With empathy, I am sharing your emotions.
 - ▶ Empathy often leads to compassion.
- ▶ With compassion, I am sharing your emotions AND “elevating them into a universal and transcending experience”.
 - ▶ Compassion often leads to altruism.
- ▶ Compassion is a motivator for altruism.
- ▶ With altruism, we will be able to care for other people and devote ourselves to helping others, regardless of race, sex, gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.

SYMPATHY VS EMPATHY EXAMPLE

Two people are running a 100 meter race.

- ▶ The race officials give Runner #1 (hereafter R1) gets a 50 meter head start before Runner #2 (hereafter R2) can start.
- ▶ R1 begins and gets 25 meters from the starting line. Then, she stops...
- ▶ **Scenario #1:** R1 feels bad about the head start that she gets over R2 and acknowledges that it is wrong.
- ▶ **Solution #1:** She (R1) stops 25 meters in and decides that the two should start from where they are BUT the start time is the SAME for each

SYMPATHY VS EMPATHY EXAMPLE

Two people are running a 100 meter race.

- ▶ The race officials give Runner #1 (hereafter R1) gets a 50 meter head start before Runner #2 (hereafter R2) can start.
- ▶ R1 begins and gets 25 meters from the starting line. Then, she stops...
- ▶ **Scenario #2:** R1 feels bad about the head start that she gets over R2 and acknowledges that it is wrong. **Additionally**, she also understands the emotions and feelings R2 would have from being treated unfairly. She works to put herself in the shoes of R2 to accurately understand what she is feeling.
- ▶ **Solution #2:** She (R1) stops 25 meters in but tells R2 to come up to her new starting point (or both go back to the start). From there, the two will run their race.

Which solution is desirable and why?

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO REAL LIFE?

- ▶ Two Mindsets

- ▶ Mindset #1/Solution #1 (Sympathy):

- ▶ The person acknowledges previous injustices.
 - ▶ The person feels bad about previous injustice and doesn't want to continue it.
 - ▶ HOWEVER, R1 has not put herself in R2's shoes so she is not sharing in the distress, emotions, and perspective.
 - ▶ **What can happen:** Person acknowledges wrongdoing and decides that things should be equal (the same) from here. This is a result of **caring and concern** related to sympathy.
 - ▶ **100 meter example:** R2 is still 25 meters behind R1!

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO REAL LIFE? (CONT.)

- ▶ But isn't there a problem? Things can be equal or the same now, but what about that head start?
 - ▶ Because of the discrimination, prejudice, and oppression (whether through legal or illegal means), certain demographics received an advantage over others.
 - ▶ So, treating everyone exactly the same without accounting for the past just means that some get a head start/advantage.
- ▶ So, the question becomes: how do we account for the past?
- ▶ We want a result that does three things:
 - ▶ Acknowledges the past.
 - ▶ Pledges equality going forward.
 - ▶ Rectifies the past.

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO REAL LIFE? (CONT.)

- ▶ Mindset #2/Solution #2 (Empathy):
 - ▶ The person acknowledges previous injustices.
 - ▶ The person feels bad about previous injustices and doesn't want to continue it.
 - ▶ The person places self in position to understand and relate to victim's feelings, emotions, and experiences.
 - ▶ **What can happen:** Person both acknowledges wrongdoings, decides things should be equal but also equitable/fair. This is a result of **empathy, compassion, and altruism.**
 - ▶ **100 meter example:** R2 is now at the same place as R1!

HOW DOES THIS RELATE TO REAL LIFE?

(RECAP)

We are more likely to get the desired result of **acknowledging the past, getting a pledge for the future, and rectifying the past** with *Mindset/Solution #2* because R1 exhibits empathy, compassion, and altruism.

If we take Mindset #1, even though things are now “equal”, R2 is still playing catch up!

If we take Mindset #2, things are now just and equitable.

TRACK EXAMPLE SUMMARY

- ▶ Sympathy is what many people exhibit, which creates EQUALITY.
 - ▶ They may care and show concern in addition to acknowledging certain injustices in the past.
 - ▶ **However**, a disconnect between the past and the present can occur.
 - ▶ Because parties do not put themselves in the shoes of the oppressed, they are able to separate the past and the present.
 - ▶ Example: “What happened is in the past. Let’s worry about the future.”

TRACK EXAMPLE SUMMARY

- ▶ Empathy is what people need to exhibit to be allies, which creates JUSTICE.
 - ▶ It allows parties to understand the interconnection of the past and the present by viewing the injustices and distress through the emotions and perspective of those who were harmed.
 - ▶ The evolution of empathy to compassion to altruism will increase the possibility of not only acknowledging certain harms/injustices but rectifying them.
 - ▶ Example: “What happened in the past directly impacts what is happening now. We need to reconcile what happened then if we are to fix what’s happening now.

SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENT INTERSECTION RECAP

- ▶ Social Justice Movements all face the “sympathy” vs “empathy” problem.
 - ▶ Most recognize that there was some inequality for different races, genders, sexualities, etc.
 - ▶ However, there is a disconnect between the past and the future
 - ▶ Many are not able to understand that what happened in the past directly impacts the future.
 - ▶ People are sympathetic, which leads to talk of “equality”
 - ▶ People are not empathetic, which would lead to talks of fairness.

CRITICISMS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

- ▶ Black Lives Matter Movement Criticisms

- ▶ “Don’t all lives matter?”

- ▶ Feminist Movement Criticisms

- ▶ “What about the men?”

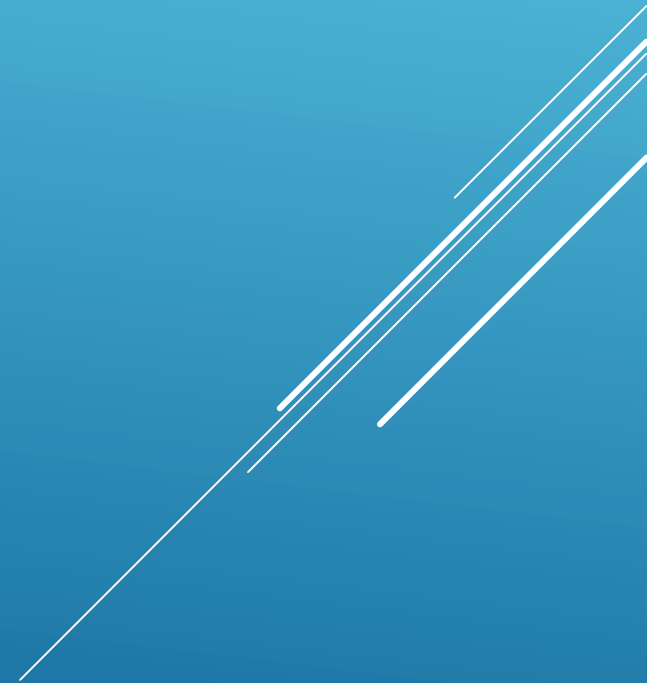
- ▶ LGBTQ Movement Criticisms

- ▶ What about straight people?”


- ▶ Criticisms of all movements.

- ▶ Can’t we all just be equal?

What do these criticisms all have in common?



CRITICISMS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

- ▶ Why is this problematic?
 - ▶ Because it ignores that “head start”
 - ▶ Because it emphasizes equality but not equity/fairness.
 - ▶ These criticisms are trying to minimize the specific experiences of a certain group in order to highlight the experiences of everyone
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RESPONSE TO CRITICISMS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE MOVEMENTS

- ▶ “Some people ask: “Why the word feminist? Why not just say you are a believer in human rights, or something like that?” Because that would be dishonest. Feminism is, of course, part of human rights in general—but to choose to use the vague expression human rights is to deny the specific and particular problem of gender. It would be a way of pretending that it was not women who have, for centuries, been excluded. It would be a way of denying that the problem of gender targets women.” - **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**
- ▶ Social justice movements are trying to highlight the specific experiences of a certain group.

SOCIAL JUSTICE BLINDNESS

- ▶ “I actually learned quite a bit about systems of oppression and how they can be blind to one another by talking to black men. I was once talking to a black man about gender and he said to me, “Why do you have to say ‘my experience as a woman’? Why can’t it be ‘your experience as a human being’?” Now this was the same man who would often talk about his experience as a black man. Gender matters. Men and women experience the world differently.” - **Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie**
- ▶ Why do you think this blinding happens?
 - ▶ In this case, the black man expects empathy for his status as a black man but gives sympathy for her status as a woman
- ▶ How do we solve this blindness and become allies?
 - ▶ We must do a better job of embracing intersectionality.
 - ▶ We must become more empathetic.

HOW DO WE BECOME EMPATHETIC?

- ▶ Focus on welfare (happiness), interests (desires/goals), and needs (physical) of others
 - ▶ It's not just empathizing with a person; we emphasize with a person ABOUT something.
- ▶ Shared Values
 - ▶ Try to understand shared values across different spectrums or “interpersonal contexts and cultures”.
- ▶ Suspend your own judgment and critiques
 - ▶ Many people just want those to understand what they are going through (fixing comes later).
- ▶ Establish a connection
 - ▶ Try to see the truth and logic in what the person is saying and connect with shared values to appreciate where person is coming from.

HOW DO WE BECOME EMPATHETIC? (CONT.)

- ▶ Utilize Reflection
 - ▶ The aim is to enhance both yours and the person's own understanding and achieve deeper meaning.
- ▶ Listen to the Person
 - ▶ Use active listening, where you ask open-ended questions.
- ▶ Utilize self-disclosure
 - ▶ Using your own experiences can help promote shared experience and connect with shared values.
- ▶ Distance yourself to and from person's subjective world
 - ▶ Do not be too occupied with your own personal life issues/values, and do not become too involved with in person's world that you cannot reason.

HOW DO WE BECOME EMPATHETIC? (CONT.)

▶ Practice!

- ▶ This is probably the most important step for being empathetic!
- ▶ None of this is easy, so figure out what works for you.
- ▶ Look at the guidelines and see what you're doing well and not so well.

Questions?



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