

Intersectionality: The New False God

by: Rabbi Jeremy Rosen

When young people arrive at college, nowadays, they are likely to be confronted by a new, dogmatic orthodoxy. It has nothing to do directly with religion, but has all the negative hallmarks of fundamentalism: my way or no way. It is the theory of intersectionality. This says, in a nutshell, that every form of oppression must unite us all in trying to eradicate it. That sounds fair enough. I would agree with that in principle. But then you read the small print.

Intersectionality is now the commonly accepted theory to explain why one should never be exposed to a contrary point of view for fear that the very fact of its existence is an assault on someone else's sense of identity, security, and well-being. Once the marketplace of ideas—good, bad, and ridiculous—was a free and open. Now it has become a restricted, closed shop of mentally challenged, psychologically limited cowards who don't even dare to listen to the other side.

Typical of this new orthodoxy is the logically nonsensical proposition that all colonialists and imperialists were white males, therefore all white males are oppressors, therefore let us not allow any male literature or male opinion be heard unless it explicitly condemns all examples of oppression. So, America is a white-male-dominated imperialist power. America supports Israel. Israel is oppressing Palestinians. Therefore, Israelis are imperialists and sexist. As if there were no Asian, African, Arab, Asian oppressors or imperialists...ever. As if Jews never had a homeland or a right to return to it. One man's imperialist is another man's freedom fighter and vice versa.

Here is what Professor [Alan Dershowitz recently wrote](#) about intersectionality:

“What do the terrorist group Hamas and the anti-violence group Black Lives Matter have in common? What does the democracy of Israel have in common with the anti-Semitic Ku Klux Klan? What does the Islamic Republic of Iran, which throws gays off rooftops, have in common with gay rights activists? What do feminists have in common with radical Islamic sexists who support the honor killing and genital mutilation of women? Nothing of course. Unless you subscribe to the pseudo-academic concept of intersectionality – the radical academic theory, which holds that all forms of social oppression are inexorably linked – which has become a code word for anti-American, anti-Western, anti-Israel and anti-Semitic bigotry.

Nowhere has adoption of this radical paradigm been more pronounced than on college campuses where, in the name of “identity politics” and “solidarity,” intersectionality has forced artificial

coalitions between causes that have nothing to do with each other except a hatred for their fellow students who are "privileged" because they are white, heterosexual, male and especially Jewish."

Intersectionality started out as a theory to explain black disadvantage and then migrated into feminism and has now metastasized into almost every corner of the non-scientific academic world. It maintains that multiple identities intersect to create a common whole that is different from the component identities.

During [a recent interview on PBS's Charlie Rose program](#), Jonathan Haidt (Professor of Ethical Leadership at New York University's Stern School of Business) said:

"...There is a good kind of identity politics, which is, if black people are being denied rights, let's fight for their rights, that's the good kind. But there is a bad kind, which is to train students, train young people to say let's divide everybody up by their race, gender, other categories. We'll assign them moral merit based on their level of privilege is bad, and victimhood is good. Okay, now let's look at everything through this lens. Israel, the Palestinians are the victims. So therefore, they are the good and the Jews or the Israelis are the bad... here is one totalizing perspective. All social problems get reduced to this simple framework. I think we are doing them a disservice. I think we're actually making students less wise."

All simplistic slogans sound good. Make love not war. All humans are created equal. Resources must be shared. The devil is in the detail and how you apply it. Marxism sounds good superficially. But there has never been a Marxist society that either you or I would want to live in. Religions sound good too, but in pursuit of their fine ideals they have all committed crimes against individuals who dissent or challenge.

Gender, race, social class, ethnicity, nationality, sexual orientation, religion, age, mental disability, physical and mental disability, as well as other forms of identity can all intersect. Intersectionality proposes that each element or trait of a person is inextricably linked with all other elements, and this must be taken into account in order to fully understand a person's identity. Think of the Torah saying: "You must know (understand) the feelings of a stranger because you too were strangers in Egypt." (Exodus 23:9)

But there is no singular experience of an identity. For example, rather than understanding health solely through the lens of gender, it is necessary to consider other social categories such as class, ability, nation, or race, to have a fuller understanding of the range of health concerns. That is legitimate. But it is not legitimate to decide who should be excluded without the right to defend their position.

Such a theory when applied by people with bias will inevitably be biased itself. It does not just apply to the traditional categories of oppression. It now includes "questionism", "doubtism", any -ism that disagrees with yours. The problem with intersectionality is that it is ambiguous, open-ended, and lacks a clear-cut definition or even specific parameters. It can exclude or include anyone arbitrarily.

All radical movements, coming from a leftist and a rightist position, carry with them biases, and both extremes do indeed justify violence from different ideological standpoints. I am neither right nor left. I find neofascist Nazism particularly abhorrent, and there is a special case to be made to ban it altogether, as they do in Europe, because it incites hatred and violence. Violence is its reason for existence, whereas on the left violence is a means to an end. I hate both, even if one certainly strikes me as worse.

In truth, there are two kinds of intersectionality, **exclusive and inclusive**. The inclusive side is similar to the Torah's. We should, as students, as Jews, feel for anyone oppressed, the stranger, the widow, the orphan. Regardless of race, sex, or creed. Only those who actively try to destroy us or our way of life are excluded.

When students with inquisitive minds get to college, they should explore and possibly identify with groups trying to improve the world and humanity. But on many campuses, they are being forced to choose. Nowadays on campuses they will tell you that you cannot be pro-Israel (warts and all, and who has no warts) and strive to solve the problem of say, Muslim Rohingya or other victims around the world. This cannot make sense or be just. To make matters worse, often the issues cannot even be discussed, because some pathetic, gutless, ninny feel threatened simply by having to face the possibility of another point of view. How is it ever possible to hope for a resolution if discussion is forbidden and howling abuse is supposed to be an argument??

This exclusionary kind of intersectionality has morphed into the politics of sectional identity instead of focusing on law to protect our rights and prohibit discrimination. We have seen blacks exclude Jews as if Jews had never suffered; lesbians exclude Zionists as if Zionists have never been discriminated against, oppressed, killed, or tortured. Citing intersectionality, they give free passes to those from religious and ethnic communities whose very communities oppress lesbians, gays, and atheists or refuse other religions equal rights, simply because they count as oppressed. Black Lives Matter preaching intersectionality will feel comfortable with Hezbollah, Hamas, and the PLO, fundamentally racist as they are, simply because they have decided that Jews are the sole oppressors.

This is the kind of poisonous exclusionary intersectionality we must reject, because instead of helping bring peace and understanding it simply forces the different sides further apart and leads to retrenchment, not openness.

There might be a lot that is wrong with religion nowadays. But there's just as much wrong with the secular world too.