

How Does Who You Are Connect To How You Communicate Science?

What is identity?

Identity can mean many things to different people. Social psychologists split it into two types; social and personal identity. As it sounds, social identity derives from our membership to social groups, while personal identity derives from our unique characteristics. What links both is that they are about our self-definition. How do we see ourselves? How do we define ourselves? What parts of ourselves do we consider important?

We sit in multiple identities at once, their intersection and interaction creating the person we are. Identities are fluid and can change over time.

We, as people, grow and change, and our identities change with us.

What is the impact of identity?

Our identities colour every facet of our life, impacting how we perceive and interact with the world. This can be in obvious ways, such as the way men move through the world is different from the way women move through the world. It can also be in more subtle ways with non-visible identity, such as being gay or having an invisible disability. Because of this, we can never separate ourselves from our identities and they influence us in all kinds of ways.

We carry our identities with us everywhere, in every context, and in every situation. We are not apart from our identity. It is with us at all times.

So, what is positionality?

Positionality requires a level of self-awareness and willingness to tell the truth of who we are and where we've come from. Through carefully considering our own identities we can begin to understand the influences and impacts on how we think and do. We need to think about where we are placed within our own identities, how they interact with each other, and how they shape us. It requires self-reflection without judgement of ourselves, allowing us to know ourselves more completely with kindness and care, while acknowledging how our identity impacts us.

Why does this matter?

With our identities impacting every facet of our lives, it's no surprise they would follow us into our lives as science communicators. How we communicate, with who, and on what are all things that our positionality influences. If we can understand our identities and our positionality, we can begin to think about how we can be more intentional as science communicators.

By facilitating this discussion and offering the chance to do some self-reflection, we're hoping you might gain a better understanding of your own identity, and how your positionality impacts your work.