

Equity, Diversity & Inclusion

AN INTRODUCTORY GUIDE FOR PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING

Milaun Murry
Board President

EXPERIENCE WRESTLING | 609 E. MAIN ST. ARLINGTON, TX 76010



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INTRODUCTION

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) are core values to Experience Wrestling and we believe that they should be core values in any reputable industry, including professional wrestling. It is important that every professional, entertainer and fan feels that their identity is valued, recognized and respected. We want to build a culture of inclusion, respect and empathy within the professional wrestling community and highlight the efforts of others with a common cause.

We know that underrepresented groups in the industry face unique challenges. We know that we as a community could do more to champion for change. We are committed to speaking out for change, educating ourselves and our partners, and taking deliberate action to achieve a more equitable, diverse and inclusive community. We join many others in taking that first step to a better wrestling future by identifying the deficits that exist and taking active efforts to address them.

WHY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT EQUITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION IN PROFESSIONAL WRESTLING?

The professional wrestling industry has been a growing area in sports entertainment in countries across the world. From Japan, the UK, and the United States, professional wrestling has seen recognizable growth. Individuals from a wide variety of backgrounds have made their debuts in the ring or behind the scenes and created an impact on the fan base that continues to support it. However, despite this growth, the industry has historically been wrought with inequality.

We recognize that underrepresented groups face unique obstacles that can hinder their ability to succeed in a way that their counterparts may not experience. This can be reflected in the presences that certain social groups have in organizations, how they are portrayed, the creative and logistical staff employed and the income gained.

In the Spring of 2020, the #SpeakingOut movement highlighted many of the discriminatory practices and harassment that some individuals have endured due to the lack of a culture of equality and organizational oversight. Women have been a primary focus in this social movement but the issues presented are not unique to this group. Women, BIPOC and other social identities have often suffered from being overlooked, underpaid and mistreated.

In addition, creative decisions have been known to perpetuate long standing stereotypes and prejudices towards specific social/identity groups. In mainstream professional wrestling this can be easily seen in the “Americans are the good guys, foreigners are not” trope that routinely exist in storylines. Or the practice of having a persona with clearly offensive undertones that, at times, undermines the sentiments of the performer. Or, lastly, the expectation that women must abide by gender norms and beliefs of female vs male athleticism. These are just a few of the examples that are prevalent in the industry.

Inequality and divisiveness exists in the professional wrestling industry, that is why we must have these conversations.

WHAT IS EDI?

While EDI is a blanket/simplified term, the elements within it are complex with multiple facets to consider. “Very simply, diversity is about difference, inclusion is about voice, and equity is about understanding differing needs and supplying differing resources in ways that are equitable and that get people to equal levels” (NIRSA, 2019).

WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

Diversity describes the range of individual and group differences, including race/ethnicity, class, gender, sexual orientation and gender identity, political, religious, or other affiliations, ability, national origin, veteran status, learning styles and economic background.

WHAT IS EQUITY?

Equity describes the ability of historically under-represented populations to achieve results consistent with full participation. This includes the creation of opportunities for such populations to have equal access to and participate in professional and educational programs that close the achievement and outcome gaps between populations. In professional wrestling, equity can be achieved by eliminating disparities of opportunities, resources and outcomes for historically under-represented populations in ways that are consistent with the industry commitment to full representation.

WHAT IS INCLUSION?

Inclusion refers to a set of proactive policies that enhance diversity in all aspects and levels of the community.

SOCIAL GROUPS AND OUR INTERACTIONS WITH THEM

We live in a diverse society and the professional wrestling industry reflects that. There is no changing of the fact that professional wrestling is diverse. What we need to reevaluate is how to identify, interact with and support the diverse populations that exist within the community. In order to do that we have to gain a thorough understanding of what those groups are and how our interactions have an impact.

SOCIAL IDENTITIES

Social identities are groups that have been created based on social constructs where individuals find belonging. “Social identity groups are usually defined by some physical, social, and mental characteristics of individuals. Examples of social identities are race/ethnicity, gender, social class/socioeconomic status, sexual orientation, (dis)abilities, and religion/religious beliefs” (SEARLE Center, 2020).

Stereotypes	Prejudice	Discrimination
Oversimplified generalizations about a social group. This can be about ANY characteristic/above mentioned social identity. Stereotypes can be positive (usually when describing one’s own group) but is often negative and harshly critical of another.	Refers to the thoughts, attitudes, beliefs and overall preconceived notions held about another social group/identity. It is important to emphasize that prejudice is not based on experience but is a prejudgment originating without experience.	When biased thinking (prejudice) turns into active behavior or actions towards a specific social group/identity it becomes discrimination.

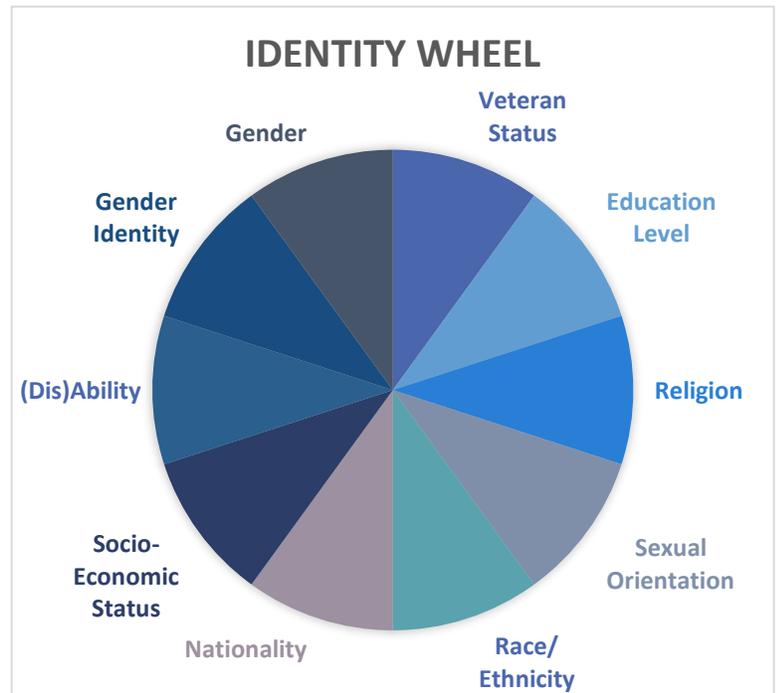
IDENTITY WHEEL

The visual representation provided is referred to as an identity wheel (Adapted from “Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Guide”, NIRSA and “Voice of Discovery,” Intergroup Relations Center, Arizona State University). An identity wheel can have an infinite number of identities included within it and is a great tool for gaining a better understanding of your own identity and how you recognize others. Each piece of the pie can be resized in relation to the whole depending on the amount of importance each individual places within the identity.

CHECKPOINT

Fill in the identity wheel with your personal social identifications, answer the following questions:

1. List the identities you think most often about
2. List the identities you think least often about
3. Why do you think more about some of your identities over others?
4. List the identities (and individual social groups within) that you see represented most often in professional wrestling? Least often?
5. Were your responses the same or different from what you expected?



A ROADMAP FOR CHANGE

The Roadmap for Change Model highlights how each tier builds into the next. Without the foundational understanding and awareness of societal issues an organization/individual will not be able to build a firm understanding of the next tiers. Without those understandings, you cannot and will not be able to effectively advocate for change.

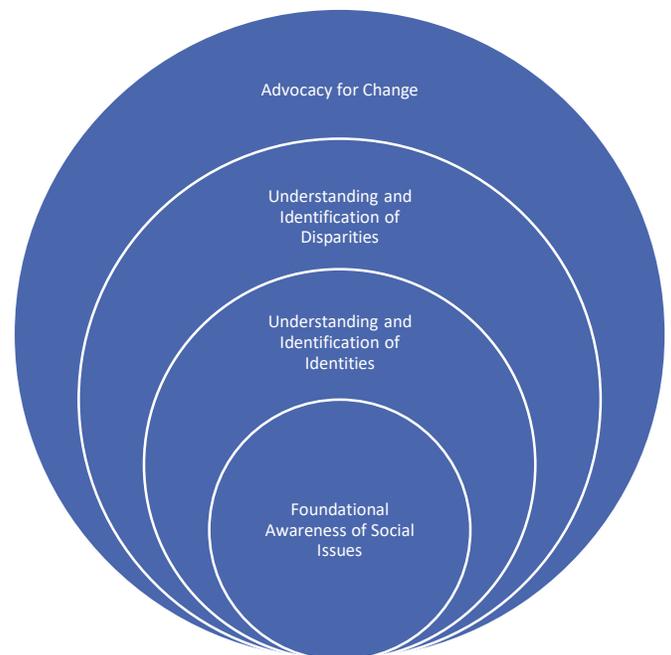
Step 1: General Awareness

Step 2: Self- Awareness

Step 3: Inclusion

Step 4: Advocacy

Making yourself aware of the issues that exist and building an understanding of identities are the first steps to understanding diversity in order to advocate for change.



CHECKPOINT

Have the individuals in your organization or team complete the identity wheel. (Important: Be sure to make this an optional activity and encourage team members to complete fields that they are comfortable with) Create an individual wheel for each identity to map out the different social groups that exist within your organization.

Answer the following questions:

1. Based on your answer to question #4 above
 - a. Are the groups that you identified as being represented the most a reflection of the population?
 - b. Are the groups that you identified as being represented the least a reflection of the population?
2. Are there social identities that exist within your group that you had not realized or considered?
3. If an underrepresented population exists within your group, how can a more equitable presence be created?
4. If an underrepresented population does not exist within your group, why?
 - a. Are there stereotypes, prejudice or instances of discrimination that limit this social group?

Talking about equity, diversity and inclusion is difficult with the complex topics, ideas and terminologies involved. Gaining a thorough understanding and creating an environment of equality and inclusivity will not happen overnight. The Identity Wheel and Roadmap for Change Model both provide a solid foundation for starting these conversations and creating pathways for change. Experience Wrestling is dedicated to assisting with facilitating that change and finding unique approaches to creating the type of community that professional wrestling deserves to be.

RESOURCES

NIRSA (2019). *Equity Diversity and Inclusion*. A resource guide for Leaders in Collegiate Recreation. Retrieved from <https://nirsa.net/nirsa/wp-content/uploads/nirsa-equity-diversity-inclusion-resource-guide-for-campus-recreation.pdf>

SEARLE Center for Advancing Learning and Teaching (2020) Social Identities. Retrieved from <https://www.northwestern.edu/searle/initiatives/diversity-equity-inclusion/social-identities.html>