



## **Raising Equity with Systemic Change**

**Guest: Dr. Kira Banks**

**Alex Howard:** Welcome everyone to this session; where I'm really pleased to be talking with Dr. Kira Banks. Firstly, Dr. Banks, welcome and thank you so much for joining me.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Thanks for having me.

**Alex Howard:** So in this conversation we're going to be talking about raising equity and particularly looking at systemic change.

One of the things that's become clear at this point, we've had a lot of dialog around the impacts of trauma, the consequence of trauma, how we can help heal trauma on an individual level. But, of course, the systems, the environments, the world that we live in has an enormous impact. And if we don't also address and deal with that, we're just dealing with the consequences. So I think this is an important conversation.

Just to give Dr. Banks background, Dr. Kira Banks is an associate professor in the Department of Psychology at St. Louis University.

She's published in journals such as American Psychologist, Cultural Diversity and Ethnic Minority Psychology, Journal of Diversity in Higher Education and the Harvard Business Review and popular media outlets such as Huffington Post and The Atlantic as a consultant.

She has worked with schools, communities, institutions of higher education and corporations to improve diversity and inclusion efforts and to engage people in productive dialog and action.

She served as a racial equity consultant for the Ferguson Commission and the ratio equity catalyst for Forward through Ferguson.

So Dr Banks, thanks. I think a helpful place to start this dialog is just to define a few of the things that we're going to be talking about. I think actually just defining what we're talking about, raising equity. What do we actually mean by equity? What is equity, This is not a great phrase, but what is equity well raised? What does that actually look like? How would we know that we'd achieve that?

**Dr. Kira Banks:** So equity means, basically, the state where people's social identity doesn't predict their outcomes. So when we talk about racial equity in particular, we shouldn't be able to predict who's shot by the police or who's in the C suite on the basis of race. But we can.

The reason why we shouldn't be able to predict that is because there's actually more genetic variability within what we call racial groups than across. And so we have to understand that the way that we have shaped opportunities and experiences and access on the basis of race and other social identities as well, is what has shaped those experiences, not because of something inherent about who they are.

And so equity is that state where those social identity factors can't predict outcomes. And so that raising equity would be the process of having people be able to analyze systems, understand themselves and others and their full humanity so that they can be interrupters of those inequitable systems and creators of more equitable spaces.

**Alex Howard:** So we're recording this sort of late June and one of the things that has obviously happened, there's been a significant rise in awareness of Black Lives Matters and I think that's really helped put this dialog on the map in a new way. And I think people are having some different conversations to what they've had previously.

But I think one of the things that, and I somewhat speak from personal experience here, is that, as I talked about in my interview with Nkem, that we recognize that we made some mistakes in the planning and the putting together of this conference that we weren't representing the black community in the way that we really should on topics such as this and in the broader conversations of the conference.

And I think part of the problem is, and my own reflection of this, is we don't see that lack of equity if we're in positions of privilege, and that's part of the challenge that I think there are people that think, well, there is no issue. Because to put it bluntly, in their life, they are not the ones experiencing the issue. And I think this then creates some difficult evolution, let's say, that needs to happen for people to get on the same kind of level, to have a conversation where people can recognize that there are still, in modern society, major issues around equality.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Well, and even that reality that like a fish in water, you don't know you're wet. There are lots of folks who use that analogy. It's about proximity and the way that we have segregated our lives and that is very much shaped on policies. And that's part of the understanding when I talk about raising equity.

I started because I had young people in my classroom. I was a college professor for over 15 years and I would teach psychology of racism or understanding racism in whatever year it

was and I would have young people who were floored, literally floored when they learned that there were laws about segregation as late as the 1950s. So they learned about Brown vs. Board of Education. They understood, we said 'separate but equal' is no longer OK. But what they didn't know is the state that I am in, Missouri, that we didn't agree on a desegregation agreement until the 80s.

**Alex Howard:** I mean, I'm shocked to hear that.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** And most states are that way. So what that says, is that structurally we had to fight to say we will no longer have laws that allow 'separate but equal'. But then actually getting that implemented took decades and some would argue, and I would agree, that even today, even today in St. Louis, Missouri, there's still a struggle for having truly integrated schools.

So we have segregated our lives in a way racially. And I know the United States is not unique. I've talked to folks in the UK who talk about the same dynamics and in France. So there are ways in which we've created these separate bubbles. And what we don't realize is that those were often shaped by policy. And so oftentimes we think, oh, well, that's just the way it is. Or, you know, that they just want to live there. When actually, usually it's something around restrictive covenants or policies or people being forced to live in certain neighborhoods or not allowed systematically to live in other neighborhoods.

And so we look around and we think, oh, this is just the way that it is. But in reality, that's where you have to think about the dynamics of structural stigma and what's happened in our systems that have created the reality. And so to talk about the trauma of being within oppression is essential, but I think it's responsible to understand the structures that are around why someone is experiencing that trauma, because if you can interrupt there, you can not only help them navigate the trauma, but you can keep it from happening.

**Alex Howard:** I think that's really important. And I think it would be helpful, in a little bit we'll come into a bit more about what we mean by systemic change. I think it'd be helpful to just define a bit more what are some of those structures, what are some of those sort of ways things are set up in society which get in the way of having equity.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, and so some of that is around housing; so where people are able to live. So post-World War Two really, but there was this era in the United States in particular, so I don't mean to sound like a history professor because I am not, but this is a point when I talk about raising equity needs. One of the big things is educating yourself about the backstory of how we got here, so wherever you're sitting, you should be curious about how you got here.

And so then in the United States, when we look at the ways in which we have very segregated living spaces after World War Two, when people came back from the war, we created the G.I. Bill that basically allowed people who had fought in the war to have access to education. They subsidized their home buying. So it was actually cheaper to buy a house in the suburbs than it was to live in an apartment in the city. So that's, you know, 'Oh, great'. Yeah. You fought for the country to get this benefit.

But wait, it was not accessible to anyone other than white veterans. So black veterans, veterans of color came back, they said, 'oh, I have access to this GI Bill because I fought for my country. Let me go buy this house'. And the housing places would say, 'oh, no, we haven't decided to sell to black folks yet'.

So our government basically subsidized, if you can think about it that way, they subsidized the birth of the suburbs by providing these opportunities for veterans on a federal level. But they also didn't stop people from discriminating on the basis of race. So there was this opportunity that was available to white folks that was not available to black folks and folks of color and so that essentially baked in the housing dynamics that we even see today.

So while billions were put into the suburbs, a fraction of that was put into developing the cities and so that's why we see the disparities in terms of infrastructure. So that's housing is one of those structures.

Education, as I mentioned, is another one which is impacted here in the states by housing in terms of how much money is coming from property taxes. So housing, education, health care is another one as well. Access to health care.

So those major systems that impact how we do life, that aren't always tangible in our everyday lives but are definitely present.

**Alex Howard:** I think one of the things that the people often forget is how difficult it actually is to escape the trap of of poverty and the different forms of poverty there could be, because if one, as you mentioned, doesn't have access to good education or good healthcare or good sort of environmental support, it becomes very difficult, over generations, for people to have more opportunity and the sort of self propelling impact that that can have.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, it's definitely a cycle and it can feel like a trap. People who have privilege, so speaking from my class privilege, I can easily look at someone in that situation and say, well, why don't they just 'insert blank'? Right? Why don't they just? If only they...? And that sort of judgment, because I'm speaking from my position of being highly educated and having access and opportunities in terms of health care and all sorts of other things, and so what happens is we end up creating this very negative deficit narrative about people who are in those situations.

I think that is a trap that we have fallen into in my field, is that we look at people's condition and we individualize it and we blame them or their circumstances rather than look at what's happening in the built landscape around them.

So when I talk about equity, people often say, well, you know, is it about giving everyone the same? No, it's about giving people what they need.

But here's the thing. We also have to be really honest with ourselves about **why** people might **need** more in a certain scenario.

If we think about educational opportunities, I'm in the city of St. Louis, I mentioned some of our educational struggles. So my husband and I are highly educated and are doing well and so when opportunities come through the school for kids who are lower socioeconomic status, you know, I don't grab those up for my kids because if need be I can get my kids those opportunities. And so that kid who doesn't have that access, who might have landed in a similar school but doesn't have access and opportunity in terms of other ways, they need that, but they don't need it because they're 'less than', they need it because we have created dynamics, we've divested in their neighborhood, their parents have had barriers in terms of education and economic opportunities.

And so we have to see what's around individuals rather than say there's something about that individual.

**Alex Howard:** I think that's a really important point, it's interesting, I find myself reflecting on it a bit as you're speaking, because I consider myself someone that didn't have an easy childhood for a number of reasons, beyond the remit of what you are talking about now.

And I sort of have, I realize, a sort of certain self-identity of someone that came from adversity and turned it around and created what I consider a very happy, good life.

But what I realized, as you were talking, is despite the difficulties that I had, what I did have was a good education. I might not have liked it, it might have been a source of many battles between me and my grandmother and various other people. But nonetheless, when it came to wanting to turn certain things around in my life, I had that foundation that allowed me to do that. What I realize is, if I hadn't had that, everything else that I sort of want to take ownership of wouldn't have been possible.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Right. And I think it's really important for folks to be willing to be reflective in that way. I similarly, but in a different way, have realized how education has propelled me. My parents paid for my college education outright and that is not a common thing. So I was able to go to college, not have to work. I could do extra research projects that meant I could work with researchers not only at my university but other universities, which then made me

more competitive for graduate school. So then I get into a graduate school that pays me a stipend to think, so then I'm not paying for graduate school.

So I think it's important to be honest, because oftentimes when we think about privilege, we think about it as being like skipping through the field of daisies with a silver spoon in your mouth and being an awful person. It's like down with other people, but it's not. It's that you had that system working for you and you didn't have those same barriers. And it might not be that all systems are working for you depending on your social identity but in terms of class, things were working for me. And so it's not that I haven't worked for what I've gotten, but there were a whole set of barriers that I did not have to entertain because I had class privilege, because my parents could just write that check and other people had to work multiple jobs, which meant they didn't have those research experiences.

So you look at our resumes and you say, oh, Kira has done so well. She's had these experiences. Well, it's because I could afford to.

And again, what was my built landscape? Class privilege.

So it's not that you don't work for what you get. But there are barriers that are not in your way. And that's what privilege is.

**Alex Howard:** Yeah, it's interesting because, I suppose it's that massively oversimplifying a highly complicated thing here, but it's sort of like on the left side of the political spectrum, it's sort of, it's one's opportunity. One's environment is the social support and structure.

On the right, it's all about the individual. And I think when we get into these kinds of almost kind of political wars over this, that people want to believe that we're all the master of our own destiny.

And yet, if one doesn't have those opportunities, if one doesn't have that foundation, you can be the most determined, the most self-motivated individual and just simply not have the opportunity to capitalize on that.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, we love to tell the stories of the exceptions, the people who made it out, the, you know, pull yourself up by your bootstraps or I came here with a dollar bill in my pocket. Like, we love those stories, but they're not the norm. And I don't say that to dismiss those stories. I say that for us to be really honest, that it's complicated, that it's not either/or. It's a 'both and'. And we have to be willing to have those nuanced conversations rather than stay polarized in our camps.

**Alex Howard:** So let's turn the direction slightly towards what we touched on a little bit earlier, this idea of systemic change. So it may be helpful to define what that is. Then we can come into some of the things that help birth and support that.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** So systemic change is about creating an infrastructure. So policies, practices, norms, patterns of behaviors that support equity. So incentives towards that and disincentives away from inequities. So it's important to think about, like, how might we change not just one individual's situation, but change the rules so that everyone has access?

So I mentioned the example about education and I was able to take unpaid internships because I could. So a systemic change would be...

Well, individual change would be you have people apply and if that person needs support, that you give them support and then, OK, there's no class, it doesn't matter here, anyone gets it. But a systemic change would be to think about how, before people apply, before people have to ask, how do you make it clear that people who either get a stipend or people who are under a certain income level, get a stipend. Right? Because I think in those scenarios, you also want to think about, in terms of equity, yeah, it'd be great if I got it, but I didn't have to have that stipend. If that could mean someone else could have the opportunity, that's great. I was gonna get the opportunity anyway, I was going to make it happen.

So Systems Change thinks about the broad dynamics, not just what one individual needs. But the great thing is, by understanding individual stories and individual's experiences, you can understand what we need to solve. And so it's not that we don't care about individuals, it's that we want to make change that will affect more than just one individual.

**Alex Howard:** I think one of the reasons why people struggle with this area is, it's so complicated. And I think what you're already doing, and I'm hoping we're going to get more of this, is making this feel more accessible and that people feel more empowered. And I think the point you just made is a really important one.

But as much as we're talking about what may appear like faceless systems and structures, really what they're just made up of is lots and lots of individuals that have their own personal stories and their own personal sufferings.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, I mean, systems definitely are bigger than people. I'll give this example; unfortunately, if every professor at my university, if something happened and we were all gone, you know, the university would continue. It is a system outside of individuals. But we are the ones that make up those bodies inside the system. And so as individuals, we can understand our own story and other people's stories, we can shape the system. We can shape the policies and practices and norms within the system, even if we're not the president and the leaders. We can still create patterns. We still have a sphere of influence.

And I think that for me, I just founded the Institute for Healing, Justice and Equity at St. Louis University with several colleagues that are across multiple disciplines. And part of why we wanted to create that is, we felt like our institution has the potential to be a place

that is innovative because of their mission, they have a Jesuit institution, and so they think about how they can be people for others and service.

But that I think that's a good example of how individually, we have this work that thinks about systems and so now we've come together to say, OK, we need to be thinking about not just equity and not just within the university, but broadly, but also this idea of healing justice. And I think it really pulls in the individual and the institution because we can change systems but if we haven't healed individuals to be able to step into those systems, our work has been for naught.

And so that's why I say it's a both / and. You want to help individuals in their own psychological pain and trauma and to stay in touch with their resilience and their joy so that as we shift the systems, the policies, the practices, the norms, they can step into those into their full selves.

**Alex Howard:** And how do we do that, I guess on a sort of individual level, but also how do we do that better on a collective level?

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, I think on an individual level, it's really a matter of being reflective of your own position, of understanding your own identity and that of others, that oftentimes, I think on an individual level. Like I said, we can fall into a deficit narrative about other people.

So in psychology, it's that fundamental attribution error. So if I make a mistake, oh, that was just a mistake I made today. If someone else makes a mistake, they are a mistake. And so I think on the individual level, we have to really interrupt those narratives that we've been told about people. And those really rigid stories and narratives that, what happens when more information with - cognitive dissonance - more information comes in that fits, that it fits right in. Information that comes in that doesn't fit that narrative bounces out because we can't reconcile it. And so for us to do a lot of metacognition, of meta thinking, thinking about how we're thinking and in practice, interrupting ourselves is essential on an individual level.

On a systems level, I think it's important for us to collectively do that work when we are in positions of power; to be asking ourselves, rather than being scared to ask, be asking ourselves how we are replicating inequities, to aggregate our data, to look at the patterns.

So if people are leaving your organization and they're all women, they're all people of color, then there's something going on. And so rather than be scared to ask or figure it out, to work to figure it out.



So I just had a piece in the Harvard Business Review that was basically asking people, like with all these statements about Black Lives Matter, if it's your company, is your company really fighting racism or are they just talking about it? To say that you care about police brutality is great. But what sort of racism and brutality is being enacted inside your own company, inside your own institution?

And so being willing to reflect, when I was with the Ferguson commission, consulting with them and afterwards we were convening a group of leaders in the region and so these were executive directors who wanted to make change in their agencies and in the region. And some people didn't come back because they're like, why would I want to sit here and air my dirty laundry? And my response is always, we we all have dirty laundry. Like, where are we pointing to that doesn't have racism? And so if we can't, we are building something that doesn't yet exist. And so we have to be humble and honest to try to make things more equitable. We can't assume that it's all nice and neat and figured out.

So I think in some ways we have to be leaders who are willing to learn in public for passionate talks about this idea of learning in public. Because we want to make these broad statements, we also need to be able to be just as loud about how we're trying to figure it out and how we've made mistakes and how we're rectifying things.

**Alex Howard:** I think that takes a level of humility in people to do that. And I often think of people; I was saying in my interview with Nkem; that my initial reaction when we had some pushback around the lack of diversity in speakers in the conference was one of defensiveness.

And thankfully, several friends of mine helped me move through that, to come to a place of realizing kind of the real issue that was going on.

But I think that was one of the things that I noticed on social media, which is not a good place to observe these kinds of dialogs, but one of things that I noticed, even in the comments written on our own social media posts around the conference, is the sort of polarizing nature of comments and the sort of war of words that people get into.

There's something that strikes me about making the dialog more human and more personal and I'll just give an example of what I mean by that. That one of things that's interesting. And I'm not sure how it is in the US, but in the U.K., as a business owner or a self-employed person, you effectively write, you know, you send your tax money to the government. It's not taken out before you get it, you actually have to send the payment.

And I noticed over a few years that I was making my tax payments, part of me was just like this is not fair, they are taking my money. And then I started to realize, well, hang on. Where is my money actually going like, well, I pay tax, what am I actually paying for?

And then starting to notice things like schools and hospitals. And then it, for me, it totally shifted my relationship to paying tax. Suddenly feeling like it was a privilege to be in a position to be able to pay tax, to contribute to the things in society that I love and care about.

The point I wanted to make is something about making it personal and making it human, as opposed to just making it about ideas. And I wonder what helped support that, what helped move people out of those war of words. Actually, I guess what I'm really saying is, what helps people move out of their minds and into their hearts to actually have real dialog?

**Dr. Kira Banks:** So I have a few thoughts there. I mean, I think that you're right, we've got to practice being non defensive when people bring us feedback, and see that feedback is a gift.

On the broader issue of equity, I actually am not interested in changing all hearts and minds. I would be great if we could. But I'm not gonna hold my breath and say, you know...

**Alex Howard:** You're a pragmatist.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah. I need you to understand that if you're in a position of power, that you can change the rules, the norms, the incentives. Just like we elect officials to, you know, in our political and our political spheres to be our representatives in some way and to make laws. So there's incentives and disincentives for speeding for... Right? Like, we have these; these are the ways that we've shaped civilization.

I need people in positions of power to understand equity and to create that dynamic, because people often say, oh, you know, it's just a bad apple in the barrel about whether it's police or any person in an industry. And it's like, well, but how is the barrel rotten? Like to not just think about it on the individual level.

So for me it's great when people can make it personal and real and I think that there's a lot of opportunity for growth. But it's not always the goal.

And I'll give an example, because I think in the trauma and the trauma field, I remember being earlier in my career, reaching out to a colleague of mine whose main area was trauma and talking about developing a theory for thinking about racism as trauma, that it is a chronic trauma. And we think about things like PTSD and post traumatic events. But with racism, it's a chronic injury. It's still happening, we're not post.

I remember talking to this person about this idea and was quickly dismissed - 'That's not trauma, when we look at the criteria. It doesn't fit'. They were very adamant that that was a silly idea and I shouldn't pursue it. And not long after, Carter and other folks start writing and they're more senior in their career. So they didn't really have to vet their ideas. And I

didn't really either but I was just talking to this colleague. Just a colleague of mine, in my sphere of colleagues.

And it made me really think about how on a systems level, the field of trauma needs to think about, how does it signal that it understands that oppression is trauma?

Because there's this whole history of trauma psychologists who I think rightfully fought for trauma to be understood and valid and in the DSM and seen as important and felt like this is too nebulous. Like, if we include that, we'll look like we're not substantive scientists.

And that was the feeling that I got when talking to this other scientist.

And so I'm saying all that to say like, I think individually, we're having this conversation and that's great. But I think systemically the field of trauma needs to think about what it looks like for us? Not just on a one on one basis. To say, gosh, we really see how racism and other sorts of oppression is a form of trauma. But like to signal en mass, does that make sense?

**Alex Howard:** It does, and I think it's a great point that you make. And I think it's something that I feel like I'm observing happening somewhat. I think it's embryonic and I think it's early, but it appears to be rippling and happening in the trauma - at least in pockets of - the trauma community at the moment.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** But what's interesting, though, is that it's happening. I agree with you, I see it happening, but it's late right? There are folks who have had to go outside of the trauma field to develop these ideas and this thinking, who have not been integrated and in some way, it's not welcome. Because the field at large has been dismissive of thinking of how do we integrate this thinking? And so I'm glad that is emerging.

But I would push you and other folks who are leaders in the field to think about what it would look like for us, on a systems level, as leaders in this field, to make clear that our conceptualization needs to catch up?

**Alex Howard:** Well, I think it's partly a reflection, in and of itself, of white privilege, isn't it? But if one looks at the, for want of a better word, the sort of founding thinkers of modern trauma psychology, it's primarily relatively privileged white men, actually. And in a sense, the thinking is a sort of product of that history in that generation.

And I think it sort of comes into another point, which I think is important to explore, which is what catalyzes this change.

So I think, you know, because I agree with you, I think it's one of those things that one looks back at in hindsight and goes, this community has done a poor job and it's one of the

communities that should have done a better job given that it's sensitized to trauma and it's sensitized to impacts of things on people's bodies and hearts and lives, it should have done better. So I think that that's an entirely valid point.

The question then becomes, this is a really interesting way of exploring this, let's take the case study of the trauma community. How does the trauma community do better?

You sort of touched on it and you made a few points around it, but how does a community like this, I think if we can talk about it in the microcosm of the trauma world, those principles also will hold for other communities somewhat as well.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, I think you have to do a power analysis; who holds the power, where is it? If you think about the conference, for example, you all have responded by integrating these other interviews. Right? But what would it look like from the beginning of thinking about a conference, to integrate it?

Or who are the leading voices that might need to write in partnership with a person who's in the field or who's adjacent to the field, because they might not have been as integrated, who's a person of color or who is a member of a historically marginalized group or group marginalized by the field, to do some some partnering? To share the table, to share the power.

What would it look like to have papers written or like to think about where the power lies? So it might be through conferences or might be through papers. Maybe it's an edited book. Again, I'm completely making this up right now. But about where the power is.

**Alex Howard:** But yeah, I think the point you're making is that, like you were doing in other situations where you recognize that something has been poorly dealt with, that you prioritize the improvement of that issue; as opposed to it dragging along at the same speed of other progress, you actually put a spotlight and go 'this issue requires attention and therefore it needs to progress faster than other things that are moving'.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yes. And so that would be equity, right? Like, to say that in terms of what this needs. It needs more attention to this than this other initiative at this point, because that would mean us actually injecting and infusing innovation into the field and creating opportunities for us to be leaders rather than laggards.

**Alex Howard:** It's interesting, what I notice, we're sort of coming back a little bit here, is that as much as we need systemic change, that systemic change also comes down to personal accountability of individuals.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yes, it does. It does. And that's an iterative process. So it's not as if someone is done as an individual and ready to engage in systemic change. You can engage in that change from where you are and you're constantly working to deepen your understanding.

Bryan Stevenson, who wrote *Just Mercy*, talked about the power of proximity and so part of why we often don't know about the experience of others is because we don't have proximity. We don't have a relationship. So how do you have proximity, genuine proximity and relationship with people whose life experience is completely different than yours?

So for me, I kind of think in a way that, over time I have different growth edges, the areas where I need to push myself. And so trans rights and the experience of being transgender is something that for the past, I'd say five or six years or so, I pushed myself to read more or learn more because if I don't attend to it, I just won't know, because it's not my experience. And so I now have done enough work and done enough engagement, that I have people in my life who identify as trans and so that's been cultivated over time.

So I'm just sharing all that to say, yes, that personal experience is iterative and even as someone who's studied oppression and dynamics of how it impacts mental health for over 20 years, I still have growing to do.

And so I would remind people that we're all growing and learning and it's a constant iterative process not to make it sound overwhelming, but to make it sound like 'jump in where you can.'

**Alex Howard:** I think it's an interesting point, and I was reflecting actually with my wife on this the other night, particularly on the trans issue. Because, I think you and I are probably similar generation. I think our generation considers ourselves more liberal, compared for example, to our parents' generation. I think about, for example, one of my best friends, who was my best man at my wedding, is gay. And that was kind of a thing for certain people in my wider family. To be openly gay and that I would choose a gay man as one of my best friends and to be my best man.

And I remember at the time, my wife and I thinking, this is just, like this is ridiculous, like who's got an issue with homosexuality in you know, in kind of, the modern era. And then I sort of noticed that in our generation there at least is much more familiarity, let's say, with homosexuality than there is perhaps in our parents' generation.

I know I'm making generalizations here, but when we look at the issues of, for example, being trans, I don't feel well educated about that. I know of a few people that have gone on a journey with that. But what I notice is that it's very easy to think that we are open-minded and liberal because we are compared to perhaps previous generations. But that doesn't mean anything about how far we still got to go in terms of that journey.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, and it doesn't mean that our laws and policies have caught up. So it wasn't until the Supreme Court decision just this past week that I could even say that gender protections were in place in the state of Missouri. Because it is in the same Missouri, you could be fired because of your sexual orientation or your gender identity.

**Alex Howard:** Is that right? Wow. Wow.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** That was legal. So we can talk about how open we are, but have we changed our policies and our practices?

And that's the piece around raising equity that I think I want people to make sure we raise kids and as adults, that we understand our systems and that it's not just about what we think or feel, that it is about how we are creating policies and practices that ensure equity for everyone.

**Alex Howard:** What strikes me is that one of the things that is a really important ingredient here is one; being able to step outside of their comfort zone and both in terms of going into places where one doesn't know what they're talking about and needs to learn, where one might feel uncomfortable because they feel defensive around their beliefs, and they're trying to hold on to the sense of familiarity, of how they know things to be.

And I guess as we sort of, I'm mindful of time, but as we sort of come towards the end of the interview, what helps on an individual basis? Where can an individual start, like someone that is watching this, listening to this, and is hopefully feeling inspired and recognizing the importance of the principles they're talking about, but feels like, well, what difference can I make? And anyway, where do I start?

What are some of the practical starting points people can work with?

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, I think you need to start with understanding yourself, so understanding your own position; aspects of yourself that you maybe don't think about on an everyday basis. So your gender, your race or ethnicity or nation of origin, your class background, your physical ability status. And so these are things that you might not think about.

So I didn't have the awareness of my class privilege when I was in college. That took me reflecting on it. I didn't realize I had privilege with my U.S. passport until I lived abroad.

And so that understanding of yourself is essential, because we know from research that our biases are in group biases. And those are ones that we can't interrupt unless we know. So I know people often jump to having bias against groups, which is important to interrupt. But we also see bias about understanding our bias that we have for people in our groups. And we can't know that unless we are deeply reflective. And that is a growth process.

And then I'll just briefly share the raising equity need's framework. Is that you name it, you name what systems are operating. Too often we skirt around it. Name it. Is it racism? Is it classism? Is it ableism? What's happening? And then you educate yourself. Educate yourself about it, about the backstory. How did we get here?

Start to understand that there is a lot of information about systems of oppression that gets omitted from our learning in traditional spaces, so do your homework. And then once you do your homework, you can usually reframe it.

So like, for example, the police brutality that's happening. Yes, George Floyd should not have been murdered. But if we reframe it and understand how we got here, we know that that's part of a larger pattern. To reframe it from just this individual isolated incident to understanding how this is systemic, how this is systemic and how policing happens.

And then you dream up solutions. Let's think about what it would look like to have a place where people were not being disproportionately killed by police. And there are all sorts of solutions that are being floated around that. And I think that kids are often an amazing source of this because they are not stuck in what is, and as adults, we're stuck in that.

And then you start to act. So what's the next smallest possible step you can take towards that solution? And that framework is one that I use with adults who are trying to figure out how do I break this down for kids? But I think it works for adults as well. It's an iterative process to think about how we can be equity nerds.

**Alex Howard:** It's really interesting. I like that framework, and I just, it just triggers something in my mind as well that I remember. Like a lot of people, my wife and I've been having conversations with our kids around racism in recent weeks.

And I was out walking one evening with our nearly nine year old who is in a very multicultural school, we live in a pretty multicultural part of London. And I was trying to explain racism to her, you know, as a little girl who sort of lives in a very protected environment.

And I was actually struggling to help her understand it, because to her, she was like, so is that like saying that for the color of someone's hair or the color of someone's eyes? It is just the fact that there could be people who could be treated differently depending on the color of their skin. It was so absurd to a nearly nine year old that there was something about that, that for me that was just very, very striking.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** And yet we owe it to them to help them understand the systems that we've created, as broken as they are, so that they can interrupt them. Right?

We put them in the best schools and the best sports, the best extracurricular activities. We should be just as rigorous about helping them understand what's happening around them so that they can be interrupters.

**Alex Howard:** Yeah, for sure.

Dr Banks, for people that want to find out more about you and your work. I know you're doing an amazing job right now, doing a lot of interviews and really getting these ideas out there.

What's the best place for people to go that want to follow you and find out more about how they can learn from you?

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Yeah, they can follow me on social media, so on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#). I'm Dr. Kira Banks. And on [Twitter](#), I'm Kira Banks. We also have a YouTube channel. And Raising Equity has a presence on all the social media as well.

**Alex Howard:** Fantastic. That's Kira Banks. Thank you so much. I think you've taken a very, very complicated issue and you've made it practical and sensible. And I really appreciate that. Thank you.

**Dr. Kira Banks:** Thank you