

YOU ARE NOT AN INTERSECTIONAL FEMINIST

INTERSECTIONALITY NOW

**“I am not free while any woman is unfree, even when her shackles are very different from my own.”
- AUDRE LORDE**

Although coined by legal scholar and critical race theorist **Kimberlé Crenshaw** back in 1989, the term intersectionality has only recently become a part of everyday feminist discourse. **But can you call yourself an “intersectional feminist”? What does intersectionality look like in practice?**

"Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power," Crenshaw wrote in 2015 for *The Washington Post*.

"Originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them. Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more. Intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion."

Although intersectionality can be a blueprint for inclusion and for more nuanced thinking about identity, it is primarily a means for critiquing privilege and power.

In recent years — google searches for “intersectionality” spiked following the Women’s Marches of early 2017 — intersectionality has finally crossed into the mainstream as an alternative to White Feminism™. The assumptions of White Feminism™ — that women are a monolithic group with universal experiences and political agendas — have shaped a movement around access to abortion and paid maternity leave, or on the right to be slutty and to free our nipples. (Liberal feminists work towards reforms of the existing system; cultural feminists conflate personal choice with liberation — a neoliberal response.) With an intersectional framework, it becomes our work as feminists to dismantle the structural and social hierarchies that exist both within and beyond the feminist movement.

“You have to think about how there are multiple barriers for equality for some women. That it’s not just gender. It’s also sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, ability. And we have to take these things into account. We have to realize that just because we’re women does not mean we’re equal.” - ROXANE GAY

At the same time, intersectionality guides us away from a feminism that is primarily concerned with gendered oppression (patriarchy, male dominance) and towards a feminism that sees oppressive power structures as interconnected (hetero-patriarchy is also white supremacist, capitalist, and ableist).

Intersectionality is a way to acknowledge and understand the way institutions (like capitalism, like anti-blackness, like heteronormativity) function to benefit some of us at the expense of others. As Crenshaw pointed out in the same WaPo article:

“...intersectionality is not just about identities but about the institutions that use identity to exclude and privilege. The better we understand how identities and power work together from one context to another, the less likely our movements for change are to fracture.”

Whereas White Feminism™ insists on unity (which is often a call for marginalized women to adapt to an agenda set by the women with relative power), intersectionality works towards solidarity (diverse groups working in tandem to end multiple forms of oppression). It's the foundation of our coalition building.

“We must stop using the term unless we’re being faithful to the originator’s critique of power and oppression, particularly centering and emphasizing race as a central operating principle in the oppressive project that is Western capitalism. If we are using intersectionality as a frame for understanding difference rather than for understanding power, we are participating in the colonization of the term.”

- JAMIE UTT / “HOW INTERSECTIONALITY IS BEING COLONIZED BY WHITE PEOPLE”

“[The accomplice finds] creative ways to weaponize their privilege (or more clearly, their rewards of being part of an oppressor class) as an expression of social war.”

— ACCOMPLICES NOT ALLIES: ABOLISHING THE ALLY INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX (AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE & PROVOCATION), Version 2, May 2014, indigenouaction.org

INTERSECTIONALITY ISN'T AN IDENTITY; INTERSECTIONAL ISN'T A LABEL YOU CAN APPLY TO YOURSELF. IT IMPLIES A SET OF CONSIDERATIONS FOLLOWED BY REAL ACTION: IT MEANS RECOGNIZING AND REJECTING HIERARCHIES. IT MEANS WORKING TO END OPPRESSION THAT DOESN'T DIRECTLY AFFECT YOU. IT MEANS ACKNOWLEDGING YOUR PRIVILEGES (YOUR PLATFORM, YOUR ACCESS, YOUR VISIBILITY, YOUR WEALTH, YOUR EDUCATION, YOUR RELATIVE POWER) AND THEN USING THEM FOR GOOD. LIKE BY AMPLIFYING THE PERSPECTIVES OF THE MOST MARGINALIZED WOMXN, THEN WORKING TO IMPROVE THEIR MATERIAL CONDITIONS BY SIPHONING RESOURCES FROM WHERE THEY EXIST IN EXCESS AND FUNNELING THEM TO SOMEONE WITH IMMEDIATE NEED. IT MEANS RECOGNIZING YOUR OWN OPPRESSIVE BEHAVIORS AND ASSUMPTIONS, AND THE WAYS YOU'RE COMPLICIT IN MAINTAINING HIERARCHIES — AND THEN DOING THE WORK TO DIVEST FROM THEM. IT MEANS SHOWING UP EVEN WHEN IT'S NOT CONVENIENT.

“Because without anger and without righteous indignation and without the deep, relentless demand for change, my feminism, YOUR feminism, everyone’s feminism will fail. It will be bullshit.”

- FLAVIA DZODAN

Our feminism will be intersectional or it will be bullshit, because real change will only follow large-scale shifts in the distribution of social and economic power. Decolonization is necessary and possible, and multicultural coalitions pose real threat to the status quo. The time for intersectionality is right NOW. It is beyond time for White Feminism™ to die.

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