

WHY YOU CAN'T HAVE ACTIVISM WITHOUT INTERSECTIONALITY.

A deeper look into the concept of intersectionality and the role it plays in activism

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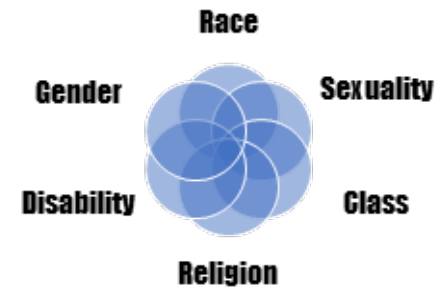
Michael Brown. Tamir Rice. Eric Garner. These are all names most of us have heard and recognize as Black Americans that have fallen victim to police brutality. But what about Tanisha Anderson? Meagan Hockaday? Or Michelle Cusseaux? The second set of names also contains Black Americans that have fallen victim to police brutality. The only difference? They are women.

Professor, lawyer, and American civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw uses this exercise in her 2016 TEDTalk, 'The Urgency of Intersectionality', by having her audience members sit down once they hear a name they do not recognize. A majority of the audience was seated by the time the first woman's name was spoken.

So, what does this mean?

Crenshaw's exercise proves that the awareness of Black women's experience with police brutality is extremely low. Black women face issues that are different from Black men because they are women, and different issues from white women because they are Black. "Emma DeGraffenreid was an African-American woman, a working wife and a mother," Crenshaw said. "Emma, like so many African-American women, sought better employment for her family and for others... But she applied for a job, and she was not hired, and she believed that she was not hired because she was a Black woman."

DeGraffenreid's case to a judge of her discrimination as a Black woman was dismissed since the employer had hired both African-Americans and women. The judge, much like many others, failed to realize that Black women were not being hired. "The African-Americans that were hired, usually for industrial jobs, maintenance jobs, were all men. And the women that were hired, usually for secretarial or front-office work, were all white. Only if the court was able to see how these policies came together would he be able to see the double discrimination that Emma DeGraffenreid was facing," Crenshaw said. This is when intersectionality comes into play.



The word intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw in 1989, represents "the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage," (Oxford Languages).

Activism without intersectionality dismisses the overlapping discrimination individuals who identify with multiple minorities face on a day-

to-day basis. But those who do not encounter this type of discrimination remain oblivious to their own ignorance.

Dating back to the first wave of feminism, when women were fighting for the right to vote, women from all over the United States were a part of the women's suffrage movement. In 1920 when the movement achieved the remarkable success of the right to vote, this large step in society seemed to leave out an important group of people: women of color. It wasn't until 1965, when the Voting Rights Act was passed, that Black women finally gained their fundamental freedom to vote.

While this was more than a century ago, women of color continue to be left behind in acts of progress for the women's rights movement. Marginalized groups endure the challenges of systemic abuse as well as environmental complications. UN Women, the United Nations organization dedicated to the empowerment and equality of women writes, "While issues ranging from discrimination based on gender identity to disparate environmental burdens may seem separate at first, intersectional feminism illuminates the connections between all fights for

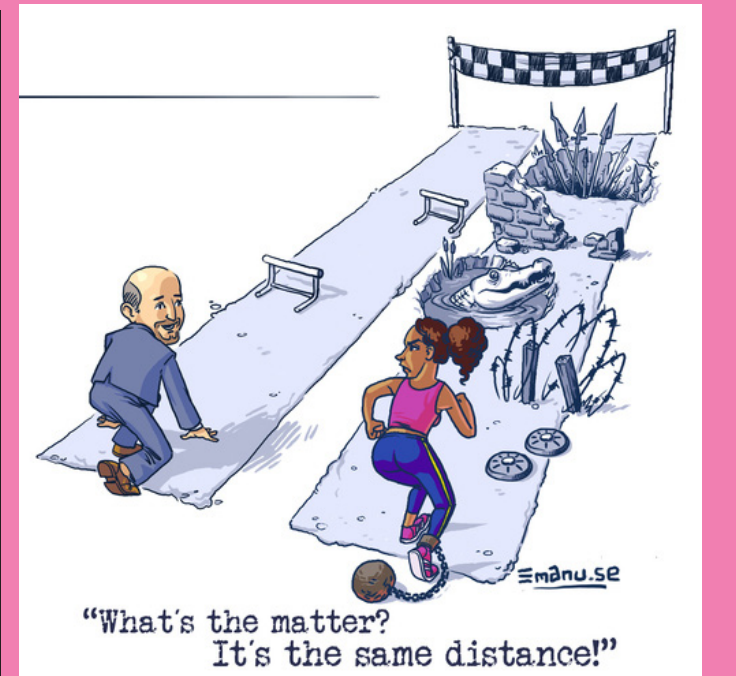
justice and liberation. It shows us that fighting for equality means not only turning the tables on gender injustices but rooting out all forms of oppression."

As a white woman, intersectionality is something I do not directly experience. As a young, self-identified feminist, I was unaware that my feminism was only focused on success for myself, and not every other woman in the world. The first step of becoming a better ally and activist begins with the acceptance and understanding of your privilege. As stated by the International Women's Development Agency, "You may not know what it's like to live as a person with a disability or have never had to deal with racism. But a woman who has, may not have experienced discrimination that you have, like homophobia. Checking your privilege isn't about creating a sliding scale of who's worse off - it's about learning and understanding the views of other feminists and remembering that we're all in this together. True equality leaves no one behind."

With an intersectional mindset and awareness of other people's discrimination, we can reduce the amount of ignorance and hate towards minorities.

intersectionality
[in(t)ərsekSHə'nalədē]
NOUN
the interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage.

Definition courtesy of Oxford Languages.



Cartoon courtesy of Swedish artist, Emanu.

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