

The Importance of Recognizing Intersectionality

The term “intersectionality” was coined in 1989 by professor Kimberlé Crenshaw to describe how race, class, gender, and other individual characteristics “intersect” and overlap with one another. One example she used in her paper that defined intersectionality (called “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics”) was *DeGraffenreid v General Motors*, a case in which 5 black women sued General Motors for compound discrimination they were receiving which was excluding them from employment opportunities. Since they could not sue on discrimination against black women (the law did not recognize that two separate issues could intersect and create specific issues towards that sub-group), they had to sue for gender and racial discrimination. The problem was that General Motors already hired white women in office and secretarial jobs and black men in factory jobs (in practice, the positions for women were only given to white women) which disproved the claims of gender and racial discrimination since the court weighed these allegations separately and declined to consider compound discrimination. Although these black women experienced discrimination, the lack of recognition on how these two identities intersected with each other and created specific problems for the intersected sub-group blocked them from getting the justice they deserved. Over the past few decades, the recognition of how different communities intersect with each other and affect each other has increased (but there is still a lot of work to be done). And at this current time, it is more important than ever to recognize the intersectionality between social movements/identities such as the feminist, BIPOC, and LGBTQ+ communities.

Although the feminist movement fought and continues to fight for women's rights (as well as equality/equity for all genders and the dismantling of the patriarchy in more previous years), it is notorious for the amount of discrimination it had in the past and continues to have against the BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities (however, this type of discrimination and other forms of hatred are less common and most feminists condemn these types of beliefs). In the first wave of feminism (which mainly fought for a woman's right to vote, to education, and to divorce), the majority of the feminists were middle-class, educated white women who mainly concentrated on issues pertaining to them, and there were few BIPOC activists (two notable American activists were Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth) and little outcry on the struggles of BIPOC women (black feminists were alone in the fight against sexism and racism to get the same rights that white feminists were trying to get). In the second wave of feminism (which focused on topics like body positivity, civil rights, abortion rights, economic equality, and sexual freedom), it was similarly shaped by middle-class, educated white women and did not tend to consider the issues of BIPOC women. Third wave feminism was much more intersectional than the previous waves (since this was also the time when the term was created) but it wasn't the main focus (this wave involved LGBTQ+ rights, environmentalism, body positivity, sex positivity, an increase in punk subcultures like riot grrrl, and more labor rights). Fourth wave feminism (which is the wave that we are currently in) focuses much more on previous issues and is much more intersectional. Feminism has evolved heavily to be more intersectional and fight for the equality of the sexes but there continues to be feminists such as TERFs (who are transphobic) and white feminists (who don't recognize or act upon intersectional issues that affect BIPOC, LGBTQ+, disabled, etc. people). It must also be brought

to light that communities such as the LGBTQ+ and BIPOC community are known for having a lot of misogyny and sexism and we must work to fix the faults of each community and strengthen the ties between them.

The BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities have both had tremendous impacts on each other but there continues to be little to no recognition on how much these two communities and movements involved with them are connected with each other. One example of this is how the Greensboro sit-ins helped inspire the Mattachine Society's sip-ins (which were protesting the refusal of service against homosexuals in bars). A large number of BIPOC/Civil Rights activists and icons such as James Baldwin, Angela Davis, Billie Holiday, Bayard Rustin, Langston Hughes, Alice Walker, Malcolm X, Luther Vandross, and Bessie Smith were/are a part of the LGBTQ+ community. There are also a large number of LGBTQ+ activists and icons that were/are a part of the BIPOC community such as Marsha P. Johnson, Audre Lorde, RuPaul, Sylvia Rivera, Laverne Cox, Michael Sam, Lena Waithe, and Alexya Salvador. These communities have had such large impacts on each other but they continue to discriminate against each other due to the lack of recognition on how intertwined these two communities are.

Although I only talked about three communities, there are many more communities and movements that intersect with each other. Groups of people such as immigrants, the disabled, the poor, the mentally ill, Muslims, and Jews face a lot of discrimination and have intersectional problems that we need to educate ourselves on and address. Recognizing and addressing intersectionality and intersectional issues will allow us to help make society a safe and more accepting place for everyone and it is important for us to do so, especially due to the current state that our society is in.