

Background

Kimberlé Crenshaw is a Professor of Law at UCLA and Columbia Law school and she holds a J.D. from Harvard, an L.L.M. from the University of Wisconsin, and a B.A. from Cornell University. In 1996, she co-founded the African American Policy Forum (AAPF). The AAPF houses a “variety of projects designed to deliver research-based strategies to better advance social inclusion.” Crenshaw’s work is foundational, and she coined the terms Intersectionality and Critical Race Theory.

In her article *Why Intersectionality Can’t Wait* (2015), Crenshaw describes intersectionality in the following way.

Intersectionality is an analytic sensibility, a way of thinking about identity and its relationship to power. 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.

Intersectionality is important because without it, we are incapable of fully seeing people. From the employees we work with to the students we serve, without the lens of intersectionality we can cause harm to others, or overlook their lived reality completely.

In the context of race and racism, a Black woman, a queer Black nonbinary person, and a Black person from a privileged socioeconomic background all navigate the world differently.

Activity

Watch Kimberlé Crenshaw’s 2016 TEDtalk, [The Urgency of Intersectionality](#) (18:41).

You can also read the full transcript of her talk [here](#) in 18 different languages.

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Reflection Questions

What are your own identities?

What privileges come with those identities? Why is it important to recognize those privileges?

What positions of power do you hold?

What identities are invisible to you?

We need frames to “see how social problems impact all the members of a targeted group” because without them, “many will fall through the cracks of our movements, left to suffer in virtual isolation.” In reading about Intersectionality and watching Crenshaw’s TEDtalk, what social problems have been framed for you? What are you able to see that you didn’t before?

Resources

AAPF. (2020). Kimberlé Crenshaw. Retrieved August 15, 2020, from <https://aapf.org/kimberle-crenshaw>

Crenshaw, K. (2015, September 24). Opinion | Why intersectionality can't wait. Retrieved August 15, 2020, from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2015/09/24/why-intersectionality-cant-wait/>

Crenshaw, K. (2016, October). The urgency of intersectionality. Retrieved August 15, 2020, from https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?referrer=playlist-revolutionary_women

Further learning

Olena Hankivsky, PhD, *Intersectionality 101* (April 2014): http://vawforum-cwr.ca/sites/default/files/attachments/intersectionality_101.pdf

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US Human Rights Network and Rutgers Center for Women's Global Leadership, *Framing Questions on Intersectionality* (2013): http://also-chicago.org/also_site/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Framing-questions-on-intersectionality-US-Human-Rights-Network-2013.pdf