

The Future of Intersectional Feminism

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The concept of intersectional feminism is still one that is rather new and one that many people are still grappling to comprehend. Understanding its' basics is key to knowing why we need it and how to work towards achieving it. Intersectional feminism is a theory coined by the great Kimberly Crenshaw in an attempt to explore the challenges of being a woman and simultaneously Black. For too long feminism has only focused on women's rights centered around the experiences of middle-class white women. It has failed to explicitly oppose racism and address how barriers such as the gender wage gap or educational opportunity affected women among different races, classes, sexualities, etc. Intersectional feminism offers a lens in which one can examine how discrimination faced by women and the overlapping systems of oppression affects them, not solely based on gender, but among all their other identities. Countless studies show that women are more susceptible to being displaced, affected by climate change, sexually assaulted, victims of violence and to have human rights violations than men. But looking deeper, all these issues affect women differently depending on many other circumstances. Disproportionately, Black women, Indigenous women, Queer women, and women of color are greatly affected by all of these. Crenshaw's theory has, in turn, become a movement in which intersectional feminism is needed and being used in order to make changes and progress towards a future that is truly dedicated to the liberation, safety, and equity of all women.

In reality, nearly any issue that affects a woman is a feminist issue. To many, this is overwhelming to think about but simply making feminism about “women’s rights” is superficial. It not only continues to exclude and not highlight the many oppressions and challenges faced by *all* women but is an ineffective approach in the fight for equality. We need to examine not only how it affects middle-class white women, but *every* woman across different abilities, religions, races and socioeconomic backgrounds. This includes but is not limited to, transgender women, women who are caregivers, poor women, immigrant women, and sex workers. Looking forward, there are many things that must be done for the future of intersectional feminism.

One: Making the message clear: Feminism Is for Everybody! Feminism has largely been pinpointed as a female affair and a women’s fight. The truth is though, anybody can be a feminist, and everybody should be. The male allyship is critical to the women’s movement going forward. In our current world, men continue to dominate positions of power and we have seen historically how these power structures, whether unintentionally or not, have come to have profound effects on the lives of women. For many men, the message of feminism has become a “for you to have more, I must have less.” Another example is how whenever women speak about equal rights, the first topic men rush to comment on is on the accounts of violence and how with equality, they’d be allowed to “hit women back”. Time and time again, men continue to undermine women’s efforts in the fight for equal rights. Counter movements like the “meninist” movement are just one example of this. A “meninist” is someone who believes men are victimized by feminism and want their

struggles of being a man in society to be highlighted. What was created in a satire attempt to be funny, although some men have come to sincerely identify with the message, has played an extremely harmful role in having the feminist agenda be taken seriously. Men need to take accountability and understand how their elite roles in society directly affect women; they must educate themselves on how to encompass positive allyship in the feminist movement. Everyone has an active role to play in overcoming inequalities in society in order for the future of feminism to evolve.

Two: Letting Women of Color and Marginalized Groups Lead the Conversation. The future of feminism is going to be led by Queer, Black, Indigenous, women of color. I once read something that has stayed with me since. The piece explained that the 21st-century feminist agenda must go beyond wanting a female president or fighting for abortion rights. We must also collectively assess and tackle obstacles in intersectional feminist circles, and that means giving power to women of color and letting their experiences be heard. Privileged able-bodied women need to be aware of the many battles underprivileged women are facing in their day to day lives. For example, nothing is being done about the fact that Black mothers are dying at an alarming rate in the hands of our healthcare system. We need people to be upset about the lack of political representation of Native, indigenous and Asian women and we must fight to protect transgender women. Women of color and marginalized groups are completely capable of speaking their truths but we need to work towards providing them a platform and safe space in which they can do so. White women, like men, must recognize the privileges that come with their whiteness and learn how to be a progressive and genuine ally.

Three: Decolonizing Feminism. When dismantling and decolonizing oppressive systems concerned with the feminist agenda, we need to be careful about not viewing them from solely a Western colonialist perspective. One of the easiest examples to show just how colonial feminism can play out is to take into consideration women who wear hijabs. White feminists will see a woman wearing a hijab as a form of oppression because they are being “forced” to wear one and all women should be allowed to show their skin and dress how they please. Not only is this a close-minded statement, but it aligns itself with strictly White feminist concerns. In contrast, decolonized feminism would see a woman who is freely choosing to wear a hijab for religious and cultural reasons. If she was being forced against her own will to wear it, that is a different story. Female liberation is not just about letting all women wear revealing clothes or stepping out of traditional gender roles in an attempt to smash the patriarchy. It is about giving women agency to do what they please with their own bodies and lives. Moving into the future, we need to continue to understand that our world is occupied by many cultures. When decolonizing feminism, we need to consider, and often put aside, our own biases and experiences and examine feminist issues from a culturally diverse lens.

These are only some of the hopes for the future of feminism. The contexts concerning feminism are vast and the people they affect are many. Advancing this movement means a greater push for changes at a systematic level; demanding economic opportunity, political representation, and power distribution for all. Specifically in the U.S., we must demand policy change and work towards creating a

democracy and economy that equitably serves all. In this battle, we must protect and uplift the most vulnerable among us. We all need to practice effective allyship and remember that one does not have to be the victim of a situation to advocate for it. We need to hold power structures and people who make us feel unsafe or pushed down accountable for their roles. Women deserve to be heard and understood and deserve equal rights. Feminism is going to be continually evolving and the journey towards victory seems long and difficult, but one that is hopeful and full of possibilities.