

*"What difference does difference make?
Intersectionality, diversity and global justice"*

Nikita Dhawan

What difference does difference make?

- The epistemological framework and theoretical categories of mainstream feminist scholarship did not adequately reflect the experiences of different subject positions.
- Global sisterhood and universal patriarchy: Presumption that sexism is a universal and transhistorical phenomenon.
- Against “add and stir approach” to racism, class bias, imperialism, intersectionality functions as a corrective methodology.

Diversity, Intersectionality and Gender Justice

- Diversity Studies: Focus on **multiplicity** and **plurality** of social categorizations. They also outline how power has multiple origins and operates dynamically in social and political arenas.
- Diversity politics involves agenda of action for promulgating political and social policies promoting **anti-discrimination** as well as **equal opportunities** for people of different backgrounds.
- It is seen to be a crucial cornerstone in advocating justice and democracy in institutions as well as society at large.

Multi-issue feminism



**There is no such thing as
a single-issue struggle
because we do not live
single-issue lives.**

Audre Lorde

POETRY BY AUDRE LORDE

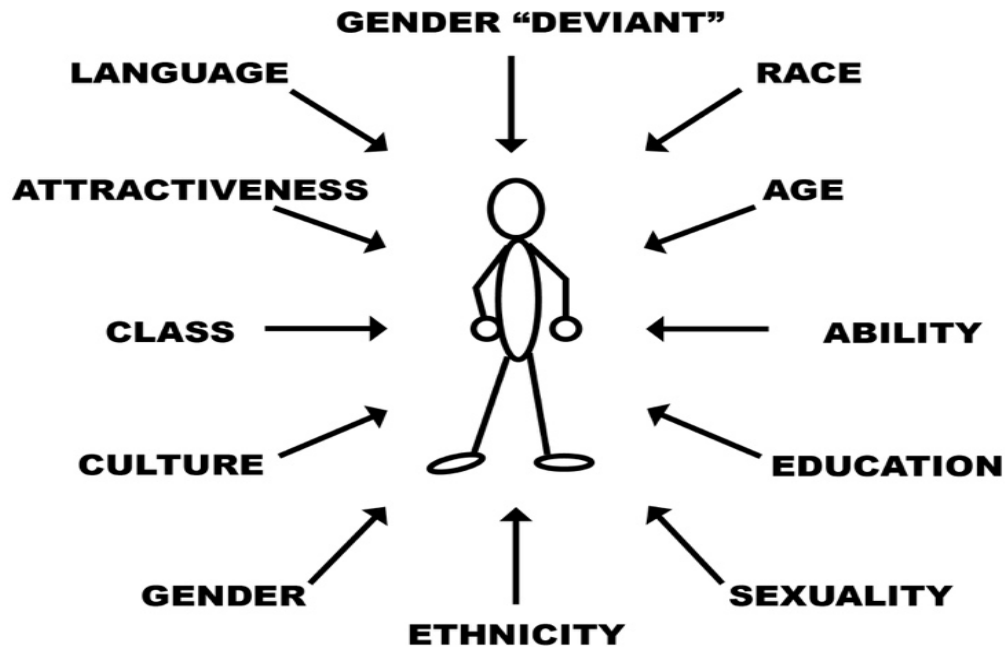
- Historically intersectional feminism is rooted in the experiences of oppression of black women.
- Sojourner Truth's 1851 "**Ain't I a Woman?**" speech, for example, exemplifies intersectionality, in which she spoke from her racialized position as a former slave to critique essentialist notions of femininity.
- The term "intersectionality" was coined by black feminist scholar Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw to understand the links between racial and gender injustice.

- Crenshaw uses “intersectionality” as a metaphor to explain how **race, class and gender oppression** interact in Black women’s lives.
- Court case: Black women claimed discrimination yet their claim was dismissed since legal concepts of discrimination saw it in terms of “gender” only or “race” only – rendering the particular experience of Black women invisible.
- Along similar lines, Patricia Hill Collins describes the various intersections of social inequality as the “**matrix of domination**” and as “**vectors of oppression and privilege.**”

- Intersectionality: **Co-constitutiveness** of class, race, gender, sexuality, religion, able-bodiedness, age, nationality.
- How different forms of discriminations, like racism, sexism, homophobia, ageism **overlap and intersect** and thereby produce particular forms of inequality in the family, community, organizations, and enterprises.
- Works towards repealing all discriminatory provisions in policy and law as well as enacting new provisions to **enshrine gender, racial, sexual equality**.

- Our experiences of race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality intersect to produce a social location that is equal to **more than just the sum of its parts.**
- Any individual within the social order experiences **different forms of privilege and subordination**, depending on their race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality.
- Because each of these constructs is hierarchical, intersecting forms of domination produce both **vulnerability and agency.**

Co-constitution of categories



Kimberley Crenshaw: traffic intersection

- Intersectionality is explained in terms of an image of multi-car collisions
- Black women being hit by two cars: “injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination or both.”

The crossroads of intersectionality

1

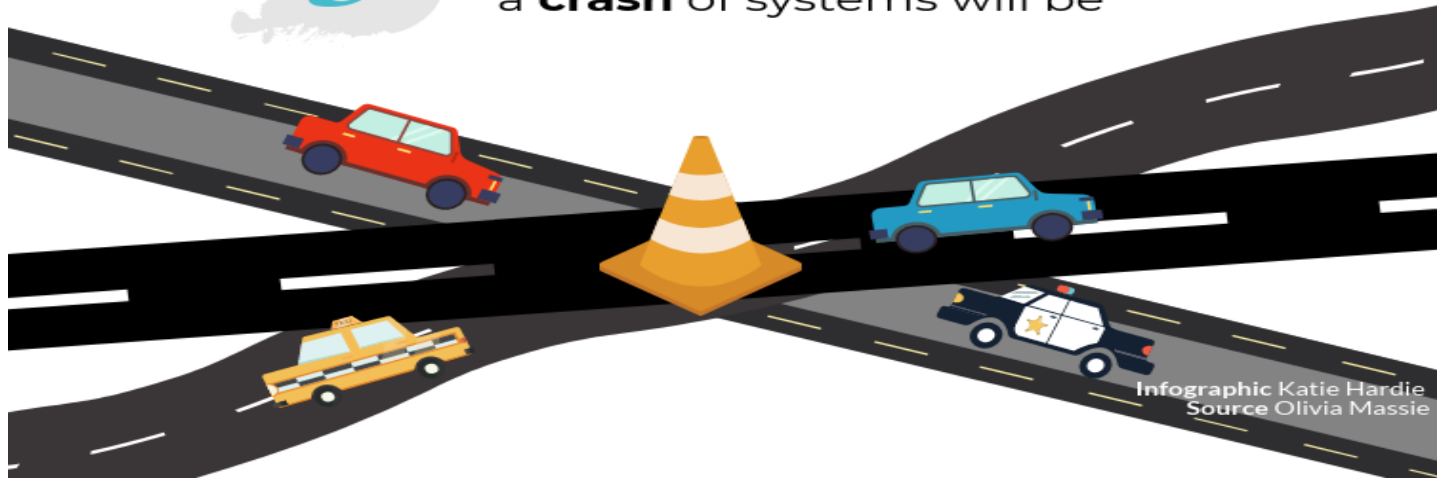
If each road is a different **race, gender or ethnicity**

2

If each car is a different **tool of oppression**

3

Then the more cars that meet at an **intersection**, the bigger a **crash** of systems will be



Infographic Katie Hardie
Source Olivia Massie

Differences make a difference



Non-Performativity of Diversity and Intersectionality

- Despite the hype surrounding diversity as an emancipatory concept, postcolonial feminist scholar Sara Ahmed suggests that, regrettably, diversity politics mostly serves as mere lip service.
- Examining institutional commitments to social change through implementation of diversity and equality programs, she identifies an effect she calls non-performativity of diversity speech.

- As Ahmed points out, the non-performativity of an utterance does not indicate its failure; rather, its very success lies in not doing what it claims, even if it is read as performative, namely, as doing what it pledges.
- Although the discourses and guidelines surrounding diversity are not completely ineffective, nonetheless they do not necessarily lead to the effects they name and promise.
- The claim made by an institution that it is anti-racist or anti-sexist has the paradox effect in that sexism or racism can no longer be criticized within such institutions.

- Immunised through the self-representation of being diversity-friendly, institutional racism and sexism become impossible to name, thereby rendering discriminatory and racist practices invisible and making them all the more difficult to contest.
- The effect is that the non-performative rhetoric prevents combating that which it pretends to abolish.
- Ironically, anti-racist and diversity-friendly discourses can, at the same time, function as a resource for these struggles, because they enable the exposure of the gap between claim and practice.

- The negative relation between rhetoric and reality indicates the institutional farce performed in the name of diversity politics.
- There is systematic resistance against the institutionalisation of diversity, which would structurally entrench principles of gender and racial equality.
- It is thus imperative to situate the ‘mainstreaming’ of intersectionality politics and diversity management within the historical and economic landscape of neoliberal pluralism and global capitalism that consumes difference as an alibi so that it does not make a difference.

Kimberley Crenshaw: videos

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=C-qFYal-ePY>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mnmyIDWKMt8>