



# WHAT IS... INTERSECTIONALITY



## DEFINITION:

**THE TERM WAS COINED** by American critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. She says that "Intersectionality is a metaphor for understanding the ways that multiple forms of inequality or disadvantage sometimes compound themselves and create obstacles that often are not understood among conventional ways of thinking." These forms of injustice can also be seen in and through intersecting, complex, embodied identities. Intersectionality gives us a way to discuss how all forms of oppression (i.e. racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, ableism, classism, ageism, heterosexism, colonialism, etc.) work together and cannot be examined separately from one another. This perspective is also known as intersectional justice.<sup>1</sup>



## BIBLICAL/SPIRITUAL/THEOLOGICAL FRAMING OR REFERENCES:

**INTERSECTIONALITY IS EVIDENT IN** how Christians collectively identify as the Church, the Body of Christ. We all have sacred worth and are marked with the image of God. We are one Body, yet we have many parts – many identities in each member of our faith community. In Romans 12:5, we are reminded that we belong to each other regardless of our differences. I Corinthians 12 emphasizes that each part of this one Body of Christ is important and when one part suffers, we all suffer. Our first two general rules as Methodists – do no harm and do good – are an intersectional response to the needs of all and not just a few. Our baptismal covenant admonishes us to "resist evil, injustice, and oppression in whatever forms they present themselves."



## EXAMPLE(S):

### EXAMPLES OF INTERSECTIONALITY:

Applying an intersectional lens focuses on precise points of convergence between a specific form of oppression and other forms of oppression, and how responding to one form needs to take into consideration other intersecting forms. As a black woman, Crenshaw could not dissect her experiences of racism and sexism into separate categories, and certainly not into separate movements. Intersectionality, in her seminal discourse, is a criticism of social justice work that treated gender and race as separate issues.

Intersectionality sees systemic racism as an injustice that is directly linked with oppression suffered by persons of color who are also of diverse genders, classes, immigration statuses, etc. Understanding colonialism cannot be unlinked from racism because it is racism that gives permission to plunder other nations. Many do not realize that colonialism is also evident in policies that control and take over people's autonomy and rights to their own bodies, sexuality, and gender expression. Intersectionality applied to ministries supporting the hungry and unhoused goes hand in hand with advocating for policies that alleviate poverty, care for creation and sustainable food production, and enact living wages.

<sup>1</sup> Crenshaw, Kimberlé Williams (1989) "Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics." University of Chicago Legal Forum 1989: 139–67.



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## REFLECTION:

### QUESTION #1

Name the various ways you identify yourself (i.e., gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, location, class, language, abilities, etc.). How do these identities inform how you think and respond to specific instances or social issues?

1

### QUESTION #2

Are you able to separate responses and ideas if you try using the lens of specific identities that intersect your life? How does this separation of identities/responses affect your whole being?

2

### QUESTION #3

Which identities give you privilege and which ones mark you as a target for discrimination?

3

### QUESTION #4

How does this consciousness of intersectionality inform your sense of justice and solidarity?

4

### QUESTION #5

How can the church's social justice advocacy benefit from understanding intersectionality?

5



## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES:

**KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW ON INTERSECTIONALITY (FROM TIME.COM)**  
<https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>

**KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW ON INTERSECTIONALITY (FROM COLUMBIA LAW SCHOOL)**  
<https://www.law.columbia.edu/news/archive/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality-more-two-decades-later>

**KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW ON INTERSECTIONALITY - VIDEO (FROM NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ViDtnfQgFHc>

**KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW ON THE URGENCY OF INTERSECTIONALITY - VIDEO (FROM TED TALKS)**  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=akOe5-UsQ2o>