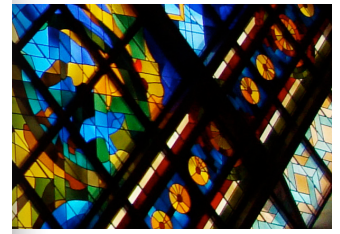




40 DAYS OF ENGAGEMENT on Anti-Racism



DAY 6

Celebrating Intersectionality

Amy Crawford



Learning

The term *intersectionality* was first used by Black feminist and critical race scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the late 1980s. At the time, Crenshaw was studying the struggles of women of colour, particularly immigrant women, and domestic violence. She noted “structural intersectionality” as well as “political intersectionality” as causes of increased domestic violence for immigrant women in Los Angeles, California.

“Structural intersectionality” referred to the provisions of the 1990 Immigration and Nationality Act (USA) that forced immigrant women seeking citizenship or permanent residency to stay married to and live with their US-citizen or permanent-resident spouses, regardless of any abuse they might have suffered. The oppression of the women based on race, gender, class, and national origin originated from both the state and their own spouses.

“Political intersectionality” was used by Crenshaw to describe the phenomena of mainstream feminism being dominated by

and catering to the experiences of White women, pushing the needs of women of color to the margins. Crenshaw’s research identified that the *intersection* of racism and sexism prolonged the domestic and sexual violence experienced by the women of colour in her research.

A very basic example of intersectionality would be to consider the experiences of a Black man, a White woman, and a Black woman. The Black man may be

oppressed by racism because he is Black, but he enjoys the privileges of being male. The White woman may be oppressed by patriarchy because she is a woman, but she enjoys the privileges of being White. In contrast, the Black woman exists at the “intersection” of racism and patriarchy, so she is likely to suffer from discrimination and oppression to a greater degree than both the Black man and the White woman.



In the decades since the publication of Crenshaw's study, the term "intersectionality" has been used in a variety of academic disciplines and the legal system, and has recently become something of a buzzword. In some circles, particularly more conservative political circles in the US, the implications of intersectionality are negative. Right-wing critics often believe that intersectionality will be used to bring down current racial and cultural hierarchies and create a new one, placing Indigenous or/and racialized women at the top of power structures. Crenshaw remains resolute in her belief that people experience

discrimination differently depending on their overlapping identities (intersections). Focusing on who would benefit or be harmed by an understanding of intersectionality is not helpful, nor true to her research.

It is likely that few people have a problem agreeing with the concept of intersectionality. The problem is that many may think that understanding and agreeing with the concept demands nothing of us. But efforts to address one form of oppression must take other forms into account. Efforts to fight racism require examining other forms of prejudice (like anti-Semitism or Islamophobia);

efforts to eliminate gender inequalities require examining how women of colour experience gender bias differently from White women. Acknowledging racism, sexism, ableism, heterosexism, transphobia, and other forms of systemic oppression means that we must address these biases both individually and collectively as a church. Acknowledging intersectionality does not mean that we pick and choose a particular bias to address. The United Church of Canada has committed to becoming an anti-racist church. This means we must all address racism in all its forms, both individually and collectively.



Faith Reflection

Read John 4, about Jesus' encounter with the Samaritan woman.

Jesus sees the Samaritan woman and considers her entire identity. He doesn't just see her as a woman to whom he shouldn't be speaking alone (note the disciples' reaction in verse 27). Jesus doesn't just see her as a Samaritan, whom he has been taught to avoid (verse 9). He doesn't just see her as someone with a complicated relationship history (verses 16-18). Jesus sees all of who she is—a woman, a Samaritan, one who has been marginalized because of her many marriages and relationships—and reveals his own identity to her.

Because we know all these details about her, the Samaritan woman's identity must be essential to the story. We are meant to see the intersecting realities of this woman's life and understand that she would have experienced oppression, prejudice, and shame for who she is—sometimes because she is a woman, sometimes because she is a

Samaritan, and sometimes because of her relationships with men. Yet the woman leaves her encounter with Jesus joyfully.

After her encounter with Jesus, this person is still a woman. She is still a Samaritan. She still has had five husbands and is living with a man who is not her husband. Jesus doesn't ignore or erase her identity. Instead Jesus meets her at those intersections. She is deeply known and accepted, and empowered to become a messenger of hope to her own people.

We too can be confident that our whole identities matter to the God who formed and chose us. An intersectional reading of this text indicates that even as we embrace a shared identity in Christ, it is important to note that the layers and intersections of identity increase the church's prophetic imagination, strengthen its witness, and enhance our advocacy.



Children's Activity

To help children understand the concept of intersectionality, draw a large flower with many petals around a centre circle. On the petals, write some words that describe different categories of identity: gender, race, language, country of birth, mental health, where you live, religion, age, ability/disability, education, and any other identifiers you choose. You may need to explain

what some of these identifiers mean. Next, invite the children to draw their own multi-petaled flower. In the centre circle, they can write their name. Have them fill in the details of their own petals using some of the identifiers you talked about. Adults can also create a flower and think about how their identifiers have changed over the years. Encourage children to see these various identifiers as

gifts of God that help to make each one of us unique and beautiful in God's eyes and to each other. Wouldn't it be a boring world if we were all the same!

Invite the children to share their flowers with one another, but don't force sharing. Say a prayer, thanking God for the gift and beauty of diversity.



Group Commitment

Give further thought to your own identifiers (explored in the flower activity). Often certain identifiers are thought of in negative terms and individuals are seen as less-than based on how they are identified. While it is true that bias, discrimination, and oppression can occur, how might you see your own or others' intersectionalities as

strengths or possibilities rather than weaknesses?

Ask yourself: What is important to you? How would you describe yourself? Write ten words that are central to your identity. These words can be anything, including ethnicity and gender, descriptions of your personality, issues or beliefs you care about,

and your favorite pastimes and activities.

Create: Make an abstract self-portrait or create a collage that represents the different aspects of your identity.

Commit yourself to a celebration of intersectionality in yourself and others. Consider hosting a party that celebrates intersectionality.



Advocacy

Begin paying attention to the demographics of different social or educational events that are meant to have a positive impact on the world or your community. Ask yourself what communities *aren't* represented in different circumstances, and why that is. Next begin paying attention to the demographics of situations or events that have a negative impact on the world or your community. Ask yourself what communities *are*

over-represented in these circumstances. Consider ways you could ensure that all voices are heard. Consider hosting a panel of political or organizational leaders and raising the issues of non-inclusion or over-inclusion that have negative impacts on various aspects of social life.

Look for organizations in your community or amongst the [Global Partners](#) of The United Church of Canada. Which organizations or

partners assume an intersectional approach (e.g. focus on Black youth employment, or Indigenous mental health, or improving employment situations for women of colour or immigrant women)? How could you support these organizations?

Resources

Blogs on the intersection of sexuality and race/ethno-culturality:

[God Gives Us Abundant Life](#)

[The Blessings of Community](#)

Blog on the intersection of race and mental health challenges:

[Addressing Racialized Trauma and Mental Health](#)

Explore the photography of Zanele Muholi, a South African whose [Faces and Phases](#) provides a visual record of Black lesbians in her home country.

Explore the [poetry](#) of jaye simpson, a Two-Spirit Oji-Cree person whose poetry reflects her experience of growing up Indigenous and queer in the child welfare system.

Watch [The Danger of a Single Story](#) TED Talk

Watch [The Urgency of Intersectionality](#) TED Talk



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