

The Question Up For Debate: Is Feminism Really For Everyone?

By Nico Mayer

The public needs a broader representation of feminism than what mainstream media has provided. Women like Patricia Arquette and Emma Watson have been spotlighted for speaking out on women's issues however, rarely do women who don't share their white, upper-class experience receive the attention that is needed to manifest the true goal of feminism.

Intersectionality acknowledges that feminism is not one-size-fits-all, that each aspect of a woman's identity (what "sections" she fits into) contribute to her experience. For example, race, ethnicity, religion, economic status, ability, and sexual orientation are all contributors to the privilege a person might or might not have. According to the ideas of Kimberlé Crenshaw, a black woman who introduced the intersectional theory, "...the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism, any analysis that does not take intersectionality into account cannot sufficiently address the particular manner in which Black women are subordinated."

One example of typical "one-size-fits-all" feminism or "white feminism" is the way the wage gap is discussed. The most common number heard in this discussion is that women make 78 cents to every white man's dollar. However, this number is only true for white women. In reality, the wage gap for women and all people of color is even greater. For African-American women that number lowers to 64 cents, and for Latina women 54 cents.

According to Jarune Uwujaren and Jamie Utt for the website Everyday Feminism, "between 25% and 50% of women experience gender-based violence (sexual violence, intimate partner violence, street harassment, or stalking) in their lifetime." However, as further explained by Uwujaren and Utt, using an intersectional lens reveals the whole story.

Similar to using 78 cents to represent the wage gap, limiting statistics about gender-based violence without considering other factors besides gender disguises important trends in the data to which we as a society need to pay attention. For instance, although *all* women are at risk, bisexual women are far more likely to experience sexual violence. Understanding the difference in frequency and risk will help us better protect and find more justice for women.

Some may object to an intersectional approach because it preserves differences. Some feel that intersectionality divides women-- comments like "why do you have to bring up race?" and "doesn't this pit women against each other?" are examples of this position. However, acknowledging real differences doesn't create them. Instead, the recent popularization of intersectional feminism has offered a way for all women to be there for each other and to find strength through their own differences.