

INTERSECTIONALITY:

From a Speech Delivered by Kimberle Crenshaw on V-Day
10th Anniversary Celebration The Superdome New Orleans, LA,
April 11, 2008

(Found on <http://whiteprivilegeconference.com/>)

Imagine, just for a moment, what would happen if an accident occurs on that patch of road where [the victim is a gay, woman of color,] converge and intersect. Imagine no one actually SAW the accident, but everybody heard it. Terrible sounds, screeching breaks, a big crash and then a body, lying in the intersection, unconscious. All of the Disaster Relief specialists jump in their ambulances and rush to the scene, and are flummoxed. What do we do? She's lying there, in the intersection. She's on everybody's road—the race road, the gender road, the LGBT road, but no one can tell which traffic hit her. So, they start to discuss it.

Now nobody's doing anything yet, they just, well... are thinking about it. So, Mr. Race man says, “hmm, well, can't really tell what happened here, but my guess, since she is a woman, is that she probably got barreled over by the gender traffic. I'm going to leave her to you.”

But Ms Feminist says, “well hold it a minute, if it was really gender, I think she'd probably be over here, closer to this spot here. I don't think I can handle this one but you know, she looks a little, well, BUTCH. Maybe she got hit by the homophobia traffic.”

“Well,” Mr. LGBT says “to be honest, my guess would be...not. We’ve covered a lot of accidents but not around these parts. My guess would be that it was probably poverty, or you know, maybe she was coming from the Global South, so it could be, you know, globalization or something like that. Let’s ask the anti-imperialism folks if they recognize her.”

“Well,” Ms. Human Rights chimes in with a bright idea---“let’s just try to revive her and ask.”

So they all move in a little closer, bend down, and one lifts her head up just a little, and yells, “WHO HIT YOU? WE NEED TO KNOW? WAS IT RACISM? WAS IT PATRIARCHY? TELL ME, WAS IT HOMOPHOBIA? WE NEED TO KNOW WHO INSURED YOU AGAINST THIS INJURY? SE HABLA ESPANOL?”

And the woman struggles to come to, but can only say, “I don’t know, but can someone just help me? Just help!” And she passes out...again.

Unable now to figure out who is responsible, all of the Disaster Relief Specialists just pile back into their ambulances and speed away to the next accident, hopefully one fully within their purview, and definitely on their exclusive patch of road.

Just an apocryphal story? Sure. Exaggerated? Well looking around this place, looking at our movements, and looking

directly into the mirror, you tell me. What about this: In upstate New York, I was working with Latina domestic violence activists who were struggling to persuade their white colleagues to adopt more language sensitive interventions in their shelters. One particular case is haunting. A woman called the crisis hotline. She was desperate, the fear and anxiety in her voice betrayed the adrenaline coursing through her body. She'd run for her life, she told the hotline worker in Spanish. Her husband had tried to kill her before, and this time he vowed to finish the job. She had fled with her young son, and they needed a place to stay. The hotline worker called the local shelter.

"Good news," she told the woman, holding the phone, "there's room." But, the intake coordinator wanted to know -- "does she speak English?"

The hotline coordinator: "well I think, but I'll check." Back to the phone. She asks, but the woman is in so much fear, the coordinator can barely make out her Spanish, much less her English. She goes back to the intake coordinator. "I don't know, but she's desperate. Her husband is looking for her, it is after midnight, and she is out on the street alone with her son. She needs a place to stay now."

"Well we can't take her unless she can speak English. We have an empowerment program that all of our women must take. If she can't speak English, she can't participate in the program."

The hotline counselor was stunned, but kept trying. "Well, can't

we have her son translate for her? This woman is in trouble. I don't know if she will survive the night." Intake Coordinator: "Well, that's just our policy. If the son translates, he would further disempower the woman. She needs to be able to speak for herself."