

An Intersectional Analysis of the COVID-19 Pandemic and Call for Revolution

(Corrected Version)

Lisa Rosenthal

<https://twitter.com/DrLisaRosenthal> <https://www.intersectionalrevolution.org/>

March 24th 2020

*Acknowledgements: [Nicole Overstreet](#), Priscilla Aviles, and another anonymous person have made important contributions over many years to ideas I wrote about here, and they also provided feedback on earlier drafts. David, Nancy, Niki, and Wally Rosenthal also provided feedback on earlier drafts.

In the last 3 weeks, a lot has changed in NYC where I live and work, as in many places in the U.S. and world because of the COVID-19 pandemic. We have been jolted by what has already unfolded, and we are only just beginning to understand [how large an impact](#) this pandemic will have on our lives, in both the short- and long-term. So many of us have our attention held and life changed, connecting us transnationally as humans, while simultaneously impacting us each uniquely with our own personal concerns. We are all hearing different views on the issue, and here I offer my perspective, analysis, and call to action, which use an [intersectional](#) lens. Here is a summary of my main points, which outline what follows:

- Intersectionality can help us better understand this pandemic, its sources, and its consequences, through reflection on our unique combinations of both oppression and privilege.
- Because of interlocking systems of oppression and resistance to taking more collective public health approaches, government responses to this pandemic have been unacceptable, reflecting the normal status quo.
- We collectively have the resources to respond to this pandemic in ways that are much more effective at protecting and supporting all people, just like we always do.
- We do not use our collective resources effectively to support all people because we do not have democracy and instead have societal structures controlled by the .01% to exploit the 99% and the planet, ignoring the needs of the 99% in this crisis, as always.
- We are taught beliefs through our media and education to convince us to accept unjust societal structures as they are, and this pandemic underscores that these are part-truths and outright lies.

- There is no single objective truth except for our collective truth, and intersectionality is a critical lens to help us all understand our collective truth more clearly and inform how we want to respond to this pandemic and beyond.
- This pandemic offers opportunities for fostering intersectional revolution, which we can each contribute to collectively seizing, to build systems that support all people and the planet, thereby promoting each of our own individual well-being.

Intersectionality can help us better understand this pandemic, its sources, and its consequences, through reflection on our unique combinations of both oppression and privilege.

I present [intersectionality](#) as a framework to help my students think critically about and more clearly understand the incredibly complex world we live in all of the time. In the midst of this pandemic specifically, I believe this framework is absolutely essential to better understanding the current moment in context, and thereby informing how we want to respond both individually and collectively, both immediately and into the future. I encourage everyone to explore more in-depth accounts of the [history and insights of Intersectionality](#), especially because this term has become more popular but core components of this framework are often left out of the term's popular use. As a brief summary, intersectionality is a radical framework that grew out of activist struggles, particularly the work of [Black feminist](#), as well as Chicana, Indigenous, international, and LGBTQA+, scholar-activists. Intersectionality draws our attention to both oppression and [privilege](#), which is incredibly helpful to understanding our own and others' experiences of this pandemic. Oppression involves any form of unjust treatment and domination of a group of people, including all forms of discrimination, stigma, marginalization, exploitation, and inequality. Privilege involves any form of advantage a group has in society that other groups do not have. Intersectionality specifically highlights that:

- systems of oppression that dominate our societies are interlocking, working together in complex ways, including: ableism, ageism, cisgenderism, capitalism/classism, colonialism/imperialism, heterosexism, racism/white supremacy/anti-Blackness, and sexism/patriarchy;
- these interlocking systems of oppression greatly influence our individual experiences of the world through our identities/positionalities, including our: ability, age, class, gender/sex, immigration status/nationality, race/ethnicity, and sexual identity;
- all of our multiple intersecting identities/positionalities interact with each other in dynamic ways, together shaping our unique experiences as individuals.

I am a social and health psychologist also with interdisciplinary training in women's studies and public health. I have a now tenured academic job, and I advocate for the integration of intersectionality into the field of psychology. I am a 35-year-old, European American, heterosexual, cisgender woman, who was born in Brooklyn and grew up in Queens, NY in a middle income, working class family with radical politics. I also have an autoimmune disorder and therefore take medication that suppresses my immune system. All of that collectively influences my experience, perspective, and analysis of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Because of this situation, I and many others have experienced increases in distress and other challenges. There are ways in which this is a common, shared experience, and other ways in which it has affected us each uniquely. Because I am in a category of elevated risk for COVID-19 (i.e., my immune system is compromised), I have unique distress that more young, healthy, able-bodied people are less likely to experience or even be aware of. For example, even before this outbreak, I have very often felt a bit of distress about germs and my health during my commute to work (on bus and train) as well as other typical life activities that involve groups of people, which has been heightened recently. This is in part because many of us are generally pretty bad about behaving in ways that protect both our own and others' health (e.g., staying home to be away from groups and take care of ourselves when sick, covering mouths and noses when sneezing or coughing, getting vaccines). There are many reasons for these behaviors, including many important factors that are rooted in interlocking systems of oppression.

Privilege from being more young, healthy, and able-bodied makes people less aware of the dangers and distress that their health behaviors cause others who are more vulnerable physically. Our societal systems and dominant culture actively discourage and prevent us all from taking care of our own well-being sufficiently. People who experience relatively greater economic oppression (who are disproportionately also members of other oppressed groups) are directly blocked from access to the sufficient resources to adequately attend to their and others' health, such as affordable and high-quality health care, as well as paid sick/medical and family leave. We are taught by our dominant culture to admire hard work and individual responsibility over self-care, and we fear losing our jobs or not achieving the next promotion if we do not show up and work as hard as we can all the time, no matter how we are feeling. Many communities do not trust the medical system and therefore are hesitant to seek care or get vaccines. That mistrust is a result of long histories of [medical abuse](#) (e.g., [forced sterilizations](#)) and subpar care of stigmatized communities that still continue, as well as [increased vulnerability](#) to other oppressive systems (e.g., immigration, criminal justice) that accessing the medical system causes some groups. These dynamics are harmful for my own

individual health in unique ways as well as for our collective public health all of the time, and they pose unique dangers for me and all of us in the context of this pandemic.

At the same time that I experience some unique challenges given my health status, because of the many different forms of privilege I have based on my unique web of positionalities, I am much safer from the current and future impact of this pandemic than many people in many different ways. I am feeling so intensely grateful for so many things I have currently. This is certainly influenced by my recent increase in practicing mindfulness and studying [intersectional perspectives on Buddhist philosophy](#), including a focus on gratitude. But, I have also heard many people mentioning this current moment as a “[mindful](#)” one in that so many of us are pausing, re-thinking things, and reflecting on our own lives in ways that we do not typically do, including feeling increased gratitude for things we may typically not even think about consciously. Being grateful for what we have and mindful of our own privilege helps bring our attention more toward the circumstances of people who do not share our privilege and experience oppression in different ways than we do, which is critical to addressing this situation adequately.

Oppression is a [fundamental cause of disparities](#) that exist in the U.S. and around the world in rates and severity of many different adverse mental and physical health outcomes, including death due to many causes. Similarly, systems of oppression already are and will continue to result in certain communities being more harshly impacted by COVID-19 than others. As some examples, in addition to older people and people with other relevant health risks, the following groups are more vulnerable to COVID-19 and will have a harder time coping with its short- and long-term effects:

- people who are homeless or insecurely housed;
- people living in prisons, jails, detention centers, refugee camps, shelters, assisted living facilities, and other crowded living conditions;
- people who are or become unemployed or underemployed, those with no or insufficient benefits, those with insufficient income/wages, and those with insufficient wealth/savings;
- health care workers and others who continue to have to physically go to work;
- people who live alone and/or have weaker social support networks;
- people with all types of disabilities and conditions that need support services;
- people who are caregivers for others, including children;
- people who do not feel safe in their homes due to any forms of violence/abuse;
- people who do not have reliable access to internet and other technology, such as computers, tablets, and cell phones;

- people who have more trouble navigating the internet and other technology.

Further, systems of oppression that have existed for centuries in different forms in the U.S. and around the world lead certain groups of people to be more likely to be in all of these above-listed challenging circumstances than others, including:

- poor and working class people;
- Black, Indigenous, and other people of color;
- immigrants and refugees;
- people from the majority world (referring to “non-Western” countries outside of the U.S., Canada, Europe, Australia, and New Zealand);
- women;
- LGBTQA+ individuals.

Also, groups like Asian people (and immigrants more broadly), who following a consistent pattern throughout history are experiencing [heightened stigma](#) because of leaders and media [stereotyping and scapegoating](#) them in relation to the pandemic, will also will be hit harder by this situation.

Because of interlocking systems of oppression and resistance to taking more collective public health approaches, government responses to this pandemic have been unacceptable, reflecting the normal status quo.

Federal as well as state and local government responses to COVID-19 in the U.S. (and other places) have thus far been [late, insufficient, and incredibly dangerous](#). The warnings of how this novel coronavirus could impact us were ignored and hidden for too long, symbolic of cavalier, arrogant, anti-science attitudes and actions that pervade our governments and come from the great privilege of and efforts to prevent change by those with the most power: assuming that this would not impact the U.S. the way it had and would other places, underplaying its significance and keeping information from the general public, refusing resources such as test kits from the World Health Organization, and avoiding sufficient preparation of various systems/institutions to be able to handle this. This is true specifically within the last few months since COVID-19 was discovered, but the general [lack of preparation](#) for potential (and responses to actual) crises like this, which consistently disproportionately negatively impact oppressed communities, goes back much further in time.

Our governments' responses also demonstrate the resistance [many of those in positions of power](#) have to [public health perspectives](#), which focus on understanding and supporting well-being among the entire population. These public health perspectives compel us to significantly change our behaviors in coordinated ways (e.g., social distancing) and require our societal systems to be re-organized (e.g., putting resources where they are most needed, including supporting the most vulnerable communities) in order to protect the collective well-being, which simultaneously and in turn helps us to better protect each individual's well-being. This epidemic highlights our need for these perspectives to be incorporated into our systems, encouraging more collective approaches to responding.

Governments in the U.S. at all levels have now started to implement some approaches and policies that are more collective, as well as what they frame to the general public as wise and generous policies and practices to help and support everyone, including the most vulnerable. Politicians tell us that halting our lives as usual and making these societal changes are warranted right now because this moment is unprecedented and war-like. Yet, [these measures are not sufficient](#) to actually support those who will be most greatly impacted, despite pressure and advocacy from diverse communities, activists, and scientists. The measures are all short-term, exclude protecting many vulnerable individuals and communities, and do not come close to providing the amount of support that many individuals and communities need. There is not enough attention to the ways that some measures we are taking that have merit and value (e.g., social distancing measures, such as closing schools and restaurants) have a myriad of adverse consequences for many oppressed people that need to be sufficiently addressed. The dysfunction of our societal systems encourages people, [led by those in power](#), to use this pandemic as an [opportunity to exploit and profit](#) from people's needs and distress. Some [U.S. senators](#) even cashed in on their stocks to protect their wealth after being debriefed on COVID-19 over a month ago, while the senate as a whole subsequently did not act to protect their constituents from this pandemic. Further, the pandemic is being used as an excuse to advance oppressive agendas that exacerbate harm, such as [further restricting immigration](#). And, while this situation is incredibly unique and rare in many ways, the surrounding dynamics actually reflect the absolute norm and status quo, in all times, not just this moment.

Our normal status quo perpetually involves our societal resources being overwhelmingly used to literally and metaphorically [wage war](#) – not nearly sufficiently against viruses, climate change, or other challenges that threaten humans around the world, but rather – against oppressed communities outside of and within the U.S. Our normal status quo involves leaving oppressed people to fend for themselves in times and situations of need, such as [natural](#)

[disasters](#) and [critical life outcomes](#). And, our normal status quo involves the general public being actively misled by the [media](#), which the .01% (or the very few most wealthy and powerful people who are billionaires and own large corporations) [disproportionately control](#). The changes that we collectively need to our societal structures and systems are much larger, more fundamental, and more long-term than those in positions of power (including the .01%, politicians, and other policy-makers) are currently offering, or ever have.

We collectively have the resources to respond to this pandemic in ways that are much more effective at protecting and supporting all people, just like we always do.

Although the novel coronavirus is quite unique and would be a great challenge to us no matter what, it is absolutely something that our societal structures and systems could and should be better prepared to respond to in order to better protect us all. Collectively transnationally, and disproportionately in the U.S., we have access to so many forms of technology, expertise, and other resources that could and should be leveraged much more effectively and efficiently to lessen the negative impact of this pandemic now, as well as to address many different challenges that we face all the time. Here are my suggestions for what responses to this pandemic should have already been and should be moving forward:

- bringing together activists, leaders, and experts who represent perspectives of all communities and disciplines (in any particular location as well as the entire human population) to investigate, advocate, debate, and democratically make decisions about what to do for the collective good
- fostering full participatory democracy among all people by asking them to be active participants in the above investigation (e.g., census-like survey that asks us what we each most want and need from our governments in this crisis and after), delivering clear and honest information from the above investigation to all people (including to students/young people, as developmentally appropriate), and actively facilitating everyone to vote, not just for who the representatives above should be but also more directly on policies;
- pooling all available resources to produce the most essential equipment and other products (e.g., respirators, testing kits, protective gear) and distribute them fairly based on need;
- pooling all available resources to support everyone and those most vulnerable, including guaranteeing all people secure housing, free health care, access to sufficient food, free internet and technology, and needed support services;
- stopping all evictions, rent/mortgage payments, and utility payments, as well as eliminating and preventing the accumulation of debt (including student debt through loan forgiveness and free education at all levels);

- removing people from dangerous contexts, like unsafe homes and forced overcrowded living conditions (e.g., releasing people from detention centers and prisons/jails, instead using restorative justice practices), and guaranteeing them secure housing;
- encouraging and supporting all people to find creative ways that they can contribute to the greater good, based on their strengths and challenges.

Although there will never be perfect responses or systems, they absolutely can be much more functional and effective than what we are getting. The above suggestions can be our principles that we collectively agree to strive for, knowing that we will still encounter many challenges and weaknesses, which we can work together to address. This is exemplified by [some places](#) with significantly less resources than the U.S. implementing some better measures than the U.S. to support their populations. Imagine what we could do with the income and accumulated wealth of the [.01%](#), even still leaving them very wealthy, but just not so outrageously disproportionately to the rest of us; along with all the resources that typically go into industries and parts of governments that are not priorities in and even exacerbate crisis situations, such as military/war, and various industries that are more profit-driven than need-providing. Charitable donations from the .01% are simply not enough and are problematic in multiple ways, including that the wealth being donated to solve problems is gained through actually [creating those same problems](#) as well as the oppression of the 99%, and donations give the [.01% control](#) over how the resources will be used instead of the people in need. The 99% should have their own resources to work with and real input in how collective resources are used.

I would strongly hypothesize that the majority of people in the U.S. and the entire world right now would support the above listed suggestions about what should be happening and would be willing to participate in contributing to them, if truly all their opinions were actively pursued and they were offered clear and honest information to inform those opinions. And, what attending to centuries-long interlocking systems of oppression while analyzing this situation clarifies is that the above suggestions should also apply always. Take all of the above suggestions and add:

- when there are less crises to attend to, we collectively share in using freed resources (including our own time) to support us each individually flourishing and enjoying life more in whatever ways we would like, while still being mindful of protecting the planet, striving to reduce harm to others we cause, and other contributions to the collective good.

This pandemic highlights that the excuses that “change takes time” and “that’s not possible” are not accurate. There is already evidence of environmental benefit from responses to the

pandemic, such as [cleaner air and water](#). People with disabilities have pointed out the [hypocrisy](#) of employers denying them employment and/or accommodations when now suddenly so many people are working remotely from home. Some (although not nearly enough) people are being [released from jail](#), which activists always advocate for, with limited success. This pandemic begs us to pause and really deeply consider what type of world we believe should exist and what is possible. The above suggestions are not just delusional fantasies, they are real possibilities. Of course, there will always be challenges and weaknesses to all our efforts, but there is absolutely no justifiable reason why humans cannot do better than what we are and have been doing for far too long. So then, why aren't we? What is the purpose of societal systems and governments, if not to protect the collective well-being in times of crisis, and always?

We do not use our collective resources effectively to support all people because we do not have democracy and instead have societal structures controlled by the .01% to exploit the 99% and the planet, ignoring the needs of the 99% in this crisis, as always.

Our societal systems and governments in the U.S. (and most places in the world) do not work for so many of us because they are intentionally designed to keep the .01% incredibly powerful and wealthy. The vastly disproportionate power and wealth of the .01% have been violently stolen from (e.g., through colonialism and slavery) and gained based on the exploitation of the 99%. Interlocking systems of oppression constantly result in incredible trauma and destruction to the 99% and the planet, while the .01% selfishly hoard the resources they have gained through those same systems of oppression. This is only possible because we do not actually live in a democracy in the U.S. Certainly not all, but the majority of U.S. politicians (including both Democrats and Republicans) work directly for the .01%, not for the 99% that they are supposedly representing. Because of interlocking systems of oppression, U.S. politicians are disproportionately white, Christian, cisgender and heterosexual, able-bodied, men, and wealthy. And, their wealth is in large part because they are paid, and their campaigns are generously supported, [by some of the .01% in exchange](#) for protecting the interests of the .01% and their corporations. While politicians may pander to communities' concerns to make sure they continue to win elections, those interests generally are not their priorities, leaving the 99% and the planet incredibly vulnerable to so many different harms, while the .01% live with absolutely unnecessary and perverse amounts of [wealth](#). There is also evidence that infectious diseases including viruses, in addition to many natural disasters, are [directly impacted](#) by global warming and other environmental destruction, which are disproportionately caused by the [fossil fuel industry](#) as well as other large and powerful industries' practices. The .01% that own these industries have known the impact they have on

the planet for many years, have directly lied to us about it, and continue to spend large sums of money and other resources to prevent governments and activists from forcing them to change their [destructive practices](#).

U.S. election systems themselves, such as the [electoral college](#) and the [delegate system](#) for primaries, are also so obviously un-democratic, directly serving to stifle the will of the 99%. Further, large numbers of people are excluded from even being able to cast votes in these rigged systems. This has been true since our country's founding, which involved [explicit exclusion](#) of poor people, people of color, and women from voting. And, it has followed subsequently with the constant eroding of the hard-won legal right to vote through the exclusion of people [in prison](#), on parole, and with criminal records (this varies somewhat by state); [mass incarceration](#) that increases numbers of people in those excluded categories (who are disproportionately Black and members of other oppressed groups); and other [voter suppression](#) efforts. People in prison/on parole/with criminal records, who are often excluded from voting, include many of the same people who are paid literally pennies per hour while in prison to perform all kinds of labor that benefit corporations and governments, including working to help save us collectively in crises. As examples, people in prisons are currently [producing the hand sanitizer](#) that New York state is so proud to offer for free, while they may lack access to hand sanitizer and soap themselves, and people in prison have [fought fires](#) in California during wildfire crises. As [Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor](#) recently said, the COVID-19 pandemic is "pointing to the complete absurdity and dysfunctionality of entire aspects of our society that we have to begin to deal with in a serious way." So, why do so many of us collectively accept, cooperate with, participate in, and contribute to societal structures if they actively harm us all of the time, and so miserably fail to support us when we are especially in need?

We are taught beliefs through our media and education to convince us to accept unjust societal structures as they are, and this pandemic underscores that these are part-truths and outright lies.

[Hierarchy-enhancing ideologies](#) are beliefs about how people and societies work that are taught by our dominant culture through education and media to justify and promote the unequal, unjust status quo. These hierarchy-enhancing ideologies play very important roles in explaining why we collectively accept (even if only passively) such vast injustice and inequity that exist in the U.S. and entire world. We are prevented and discouraged from, as well as punished for, fully understanding and helping others understand the injustices of our systems. Instead, through media and education that are disproportionately controlled by the .01%, we

are actively taught at best only biased, part-truths, reflecting purposeful and motivated lies about how things work.

For example, although we do not live in an actual democracy in the U.S., we are consistently taught that we are the world leaders in democracy. We are taught that U.S. foreign policies, including the wars its wages and funds around the world, are in order to promote democracy, while they actually very often [stifle democracy](#), both directly and indirectly through the pursuit of the U.S. sustaining its world dominance and corporate interests, [especially oil](#). We are taught that more collectivist-oriented economic systems like socialism necessarily stifle democracy and individual freedom, and that more individualist-oriented systems like capitalism necessarily promote democracy and individual freedom, while our own U.S. systems along with many others around the world directly [contradict](#) these claims.

We are also taught individualism is the opposite of collectivism, that we can only have one or the other, and that individualism is healthier for us than collectivism. We are taught that human beings are inherently selfish and unmotivated to make valuable contributions to societies without the promise of individual material gain. Human beings certainly each care about our own individual well-being, and there are many ways we are [biased](#) toward our own perspectives because of this individualism in us. At the same time, this current situation highlights that we also have strong collectivism in us (even despite many of us being taught so strongly our entire lives to reject it), and that caring for oneself and caring for the broader collective good are not always or simply in conflict with each other, but rather can often actually support each other. This is exemplified by the small and big ways that in this crisis so many people are doing what they can to help each other, including cooperating with social distancing measures, [sharing resources](#) they have with others in need, and contributing any expertise they have to [solving problems](#). These are all behaviors that are motivated by wanting to protect both ourselves individually and others/the broader collective – not just one or the other. Further, some people are putting themselves in direct danger in order to use the expertise that they have to help others, particularly health care system workers, many of whom are [low-wage and immigrant workers](#) that are incredibly exploited and under-rewarded for their critical and valuable work. Many non-dominant/non-Western philosophies from around the world support the intricate connections between the [individual and the collective](#), highlighting that self-compassion and self-love are symbiotic with compassion and love for others. Of course, there are and always will be tensions between interests of the individual and the collective. But, this situation makes clear that individual and collective interests are not opposites but actually often support each other, and we can thoughtfully work through the tensions that arise to benefit everyone.

Another example of a hugely influential hierarchy-enhancing ideology is white supremacy, which includes stereotypes about various groups of people of color that scapegoat them for systemic problems (e.g., unemployment, crime) and justify incredible racial injustice and animosity. The privilege that people of European descent experience in the U.S. and throughout the world often prevents them from acknowledging white supremacy and understanding the ways in which it can lead them to support politicians, policies, and systems that not only harm people of color, but even harm many of their [own self-interests](#) and well-being, including contributing to their [own deaths](#). White supremacy, along with anti-Blackness and other ideologies that justify all forms of racism, poses a significant challenge to coordinated collective action among people from different racial/ethnic backgrounds, thereby helping to sustain all systems of oppression. People's internalization of these racist ideologies is exemplified by the spike in attacks on Asian people happening in the U.S. and other places, while the real culprits of this pandemic are those in power.

These attacks also relate to another influential hierarchy-enhancing ideology: nationalism. At the same time that interlocking systems of oppression harm so many people within the U.S., we on average in the U.S. are more sheltered than people in other places, especially in the majority world, from crises like this one, other natural disasters, and wars that disrupt "normal" life. Many of those differences between our experiences in the U.S. and those of people in the majority world are direct consequences of the U.S.'s (and other Western countries') long legacies of colonialism and imperialism. Many people in the U.S., including even many progressive people, have internalized nationalism, believing for example that international borders and the U.S. military keep us safe. Although strongly limiting all travel in the context of this pandemic makes sense to reduce transmission, the greater restriction on international borders that has happened so quickly creates distress and increases vulnerability for many people, particularly [immigrants and refugees](#). Those immigrants and refugees are very often driven from their homes as a direct consequence of the international [policies of the U.S.](#) (and other Western countries) and interlocking systems of oppression all around the world. Further tightening restriction of international borders is exactly what [white supremacists](#) have been advocating for since the beginning of this year. And, white supremacists (not people from other countries) actually commit the [majority of terrorism](#) in the U.S., while protecting us from terrorism and other danger is the excuse we are told for our incredibly harmful immigration and military practices. Many of us have not even questioned the news about borders being closed because of the heavy influence of nationalism and our national/immigration privilege.

These are just a few examples of many hierarchy-enhancing ideologies promoted by the .01% to get us to believe that our societal systems and structures are fair, logical, and work as they should, justifying and promoting the status quo. As the current situation raises fundamental questions about our values and how we believe societies should function, we must look beyond the hierarchy-enhancing ideologies we have been taught to make our own informed decisions, taking into account as much evidence as possible. Based on my 35 years of avid learning and investigation, I strongly believe my analysis and description of what is happening and has been for centuries are accurate. But, no one needs to take my word for it – I encourage everyone (as I always do my students) to actively explore all the different evidence and perspectives we have on all of these dynamic, multi-level, and intertwined issues, think critically about that information, and come to your own conclusions.

There is no single objective truth except for our collective truth, and intersectionality is a critical lens to help us all understand our collective truth more clearly and inform how we want to respond to this pandemic and beyond.

There is not one absolute truth that we can ever find through some mythical un-biased science. We all have a side to the story of this planet and species, which is our own individual truth, and which combined all together with everyone else's individual truths make up our full collective truth. How we perceive and understand this collective truth is strongly influenced by where our unique web of positionalities' metaphorically places us in a very complex, multi-dimensional space heavily determined by interlocking systems of oppression. Using an intersectional lens greatly clarifies our perceptions of the collective truth, much like how since I was young I have used glasses¹ to turn my vision from blurry to clear.

The more we internalize (and less we reject) the hierarchy-enhancing ideologies that we have been taught, the more difficult it is to accurately perceive and understand our collective truth of interlocking systems of oppression, like those ideologies are glasses with the wrong prescription that the .01% have given us to purposefully blur and block our vision. Every one of us is susceptible to internalizing those ideologies because we are exposed to them constantly. Even if or when we do not consciously realize it or actively seek to internalize these ideologies, we still do. And, even if we also experience other forms of oppression and/or are committed to progressive change in at least some ways, we still can internalize these ideologies. This is why we are all (even those who identify as radical/revolutionary) capable of contributing to the oppression of others, including our loved ones and comrades, whether or not we are aware of it. At the same time, having more privilege tends to make us more comfortable with the unjust status quo, more disproportionately (or even exclusively) exposed to the perspectives of

others who share our privilege, and more likely to internalize hierarchy-enhancing ideologies, thereby making our understanding of the collective truth more unclear and incomplete. Because of their lived experiences, individuals with multiple oppressed positionalities have tended to be less susceptible to internalizing hierarchy-enhancing ideologies, and to have the insights and arguments to develop the framework of intersectionality. The many radical activists and thinkers who have contributed to and employed intersectionality have advocated for their unique needs as members of multiple oppressed groups to be addressed, and simultaneously have given us all a lens to more clearly and completely understand our collective truth.

Intersectionality also offers critical strategies to [strengthen collective organizing](#) across all identity/positionality lines for radical changes that benefit us all, which many activists have long been doing, and [increasingly so](#). Intersectional coalition-building holds great promise for consolidating power against our common oppressors, who have incredibly disproportionate power. This incredibly disproportionate power is one important reason that many people give as to why they do not believe radical changes are possible and therefore do not work toward them, even if they believe they would be ideal. Intersectional coalition-building is a critical key to this very real challenge, as it can help connect the 99% nationally and transnationally to more effectively use the power we have in our numbers. Intersectionality promotes and supports activists focusing on the specific issues that they care most about and using the specific strategies that they feel most committed to, while also working collaboratively with activists focused on other issues and using [different strategies](#), to learn from and support each other. Intersectionality also helps us to minimize the intersectional harms and tensions that come up in organizing, as well as to develop innovative ways to address those inevitable harms and tensions that are [restorative and community-building](#). Intersectionality helps to guide us collectively in the multi-dimensionally most direct route toward justice that can benefit the 99% in the U.S. and entire world, as well as our planet. Another important reason people sometimes give for not joining radical movements even when they agree philosophically, is that they believe it is not possible to achieve an ideal world free of injustice. Although we will never actually reach an ideal of no injustice, it is also true that we can work to continually move in the direction of justice, and intersectionality helps us get closer, faster.

The incredible potential intersectionality holds as a tool for consolidating power and fostering revolution is further supported by the long-standing heavy repression (e.g., through F.B.I. and police department surveillance, infiltration, criminalizing, threats of and actual violence, and outright murder) of radical activists that have analyzed and organized transnationally and intersectionally, whether that term specifically was ever in their vocabulary or not. Some U.S.

examples include experiences of [Malcolm X](#), [Fred Hampton](#), [Angela Davis](#), and [Assata Shakur](#) in the 1960s and 1970s, as well as more current experiences of [Patrisse Khan-Cullors](#) (and the #BlackLivesMatter movement more broadly). There are many more examples of this in the U.S. and around the world, of which there is clear evidence. This repression contributes substantially to why we have collectively been under-exposed to radical revolutionary perspectives like intersectionality and over-exposed to hierarchy-enhancing ideologies. We have to be aware of and prepared to respond to increasing repression in building more intersectional social movements, including coping with all the distress that is a consequence of repression and can sometimes make us hesitant to engage in activism we truly believe is needed. Despite these realities, I really hope that this pandemic compels us all to share our own individual truths, seek out the individual truths of people who experience oppression differently than we do, and act on the resulting understanding of the collective truth and the radical changes it calls for. The more of us committed to speaking and acting on our collective truth, the less effective repression will be.

This pandemic offers opportunities for fostering intersectional revolution, which we can each contribute to collectively seizing, to build systems that support all people and the planet, thereby promoting each of our own individual well-being.

The COVID-19 pandemic shines a light on the interlocking systems of oppression that must be dismantled to create societies and systems that support all people and the planet. I believe this light is a particularly bright one and is strengthened with the brave, innovative, and relentless organizing of some of our most radical, revolutionary, and amazing activists of this and all times. The current situation can be a catalyst for people that experience different forms of oppression but tend to accept hierarchy-enhancing ideologies and the status quo to [liberate themselves](#) from that false consciousness. Working both individually and collectively toward developing a more intersectional critical consciousness, or clearer understanding of the collective truth of interlocking systems of oppression, can help us seize the opportunities this pandemic offers to foster intersectional revolution: radical reorganization of our societal structures in ways that strive to dismantle all systems of oppression in order to support all people and the planet.

The current situation aligns with many other events and processes that are happening everyday all around the world (and have been for centuries), involving oppressed peoples rising up and demanding change. These movements are often organized heavily by people who experience multiple forms of oppression (e.g., [women of color](#), [poor/working class women](#), [LGBTQA+ people of color](#)), who we rarely celebrate or even know about. On March 8th when

coronavirus concerns were spreading globally but not nearly to the extent as would come soon after, many people around the world demonstrated/marched for [International Women's Day](#), which has [intersectional socialist origins](#) dating back to the early 1900s. In Mexico, the following day there was a [women's strike](#) with particular focus on demanding that more be done to address the high rates of murder of and other violence against women in the country, connecting to [feminist movements](#) in the U.S. and transnationally focused on various forms of violence against women. Oppressed people everywhere have long been fed up with unjust societal structures and those in power, and while this pandemic will disproportionately negatively impact oppressed people, it will also serve as an excuse for those in power to ignore activists' demands for change. So, I am calling for us each do what we can to promote intersectional revolution. Here are a few suggestions to consider:

- Give intersectionality a real try, setting aside excuses we have heard or even ourselves argued for dismissing it, and deeply engaging with it as a radical framework that can greatly benefit us all. If we are at all dissatisfied with the way our governments have handled this pandemic; if we have our own experiences with any form of oppression; and/or if we believe that we need any change in our societal structures to support people in the context of the current pandemic; then let us be open to engaging with intersectionality and all the evidence we have about the collective truth to radically re-envision what could and should be now and into the future. Even those of us who already identify as progressive, radical, or revolutionary can always benefit ourselves and our movements with an intersectional lens.
- Seek out perspectives and leadership of people who are different from us, particularly those who do not have the same privilege and experience oppression in different ways than we do in various forms, both about the pandemic and other societal issues. This will take extra effort currently, while many of us are self-isolating and spending much of our days online, limiting diversity of perspectives that we are exposed to even more than normal if we do not actively seek out that diversity. I want to emphasize here that while I am deeply committed to transnational solidarity, I write from a U.S.-centered perspective. Interlocking systems of oppression work in interconnected but unique ways in different places in the world. We in the U.S., especially those of us who were born here, need to more actively seek out perspectives of people from the majority world.
- Channel our own current experiences of anxiety due to the pandemic and challenges we face into acting in ways that can promote the collective good, being mindful of the unique challenges faced by people who do not share our privilege and experience oppression differently than we do. This can include communicating with others about these dynamics to help support each other in fostering more intersectional critical consciousness. Writing this has been quite therapeutic for me in the past week and a half, and I felt it was an

important way I could offer my unique perspective, expertise, and abilities to others. Now I am working on other actions I can take moving forward.

I feel incredibly intense hope and yearning for intersectional revolution in this moment. Whether it is possible to achieve or not, we ourselves, our communities all around the world, and the planet, desperately need us to try.

¹Glasses metaphor from [Nicole Overstreet](#)