SARA SHAHVISI: Hi there. I'm Sara Shahvisi, and I'm chief programs officer of Fearless Features. For those of you that don't already know about us, at Fearless Futures we engage people in critical thought to uncover the root causes of inequities and grow powerful new leadership and design of transformative change. We do this through our London and New York offices around the world, from technology companies, to investment banks, to government departments and consumer goods companies.

We work with leaders and managers, and our training is all about leaning into the depths and challenge of engaging with the lived realities of inequities, and the ways that these inequities intersect. And that's the topic we're going to be talking about with you today in this session, which is thinking outside the boxes, a close up look into incremental intersectionality. I'm going to pass you now over to my colleague, Sable.

SABLE LOMAX: Hello, everyone. I am Sable Lomax, and I work across the pond from Sara in New York City as director of programs. So Sara handles all of our programs globally. I focus on our programs here in the States. So with that, we're now going to segue into what does this all mean when we say incremental intersectionality. Because I'm sure if you're listening, you're like, OK, Sara and Sable, big words, I need more context. Don't you worry. That's why we are here.

I want to talk us through a few examples of celebrities just to highlight the intersections that we've been speaking of. But Sara is going to talk about intersectionality more concretely in a few. I'm just going to kind of highlight, using some pictures, what we mean when we say, are we truly looking at all facets of someone's identity, or are we still thinking inside the box? We want us to be thinking outside the box.

So right before you on our screen here we have Stevie Wonder and Kanye West. So oftentimes, not all times, but oftentimes in spaces, when we're talking about disablism or ableism, the conversation is rooted in those with very physical disabilities-- individuals like Stevie Wonder, where you can look at them and see that they have a disability.

A lot of the times those conversations miss individuals like Kanye West, who have an invisible disability. Kanye West, if you're not familiar, has shared with the public on various mediums in the past-- recently in the past, I should say-- that he has been diagnosed with bipolar disorder.

So when we're having these conversations about those with disabilities, who is in this box that

we are checking, and who is being missed in that conversation? But just to push our thinking even further, when we are having these conversations, are we only talking about that particular struggle? Or are we highlighting that, even within the disabled community, there are various experiences that someone might have, various lived realities based on their identity?

So we have with Stevie Wonder, he has a disability. He's also a black man. Like Kanye West, he has an invisible disability. He too is a black man. So even though both of these individuals are black men, and both of these individuals have disabilities, just the very nature of one being very visible and one not being visible, they have different experiences. Although there is some similarities within the same community.

So now we have two women in front of us. We have Nadiya, and we have Hillary. Oftentimes when we're having a conversation that is connected or related to gender, we're talking about women. We're saying we need to have equality for women. Yes, that might be true. But in that, it does not take into account the different parts of someone's identity that cannot be stripped out and isolated like this were a chemical experiment, if you will.

So both of these women identify as women. However, the experience of Nadiya Hussain is going to be very different than an experience of Hillary Clinton, especially depending on geographical context. And even within that, the experience is still going to be the same-- is going to be different. What does that mean? That means that when we go to solution-ize for Nadiya, when we go to solution-ize for Hillary, we have to take into account that their experiences are going to be different, even though they both identify as women.

We have Malala, and we have Hasan Minhaj. So yes, we might look at their last names and say, OK, I feel safe to assume that they're from Muslim majority countries. So if we just take that piece of information, or we just look at their phenotype, their physical characteristics, attributes, we might say, OK, they're going to have this experience being from a Muslim majority country. You might not even know if they're Muslim or not, but from a Muslim majority country.

That might be true, however, the mere fact that Malala is a woman and Hasan is a man, they're going to have different experiences. Because they're dealing with different struggles. Hasan might have this struggle of Islamophobia, whereas Malala might potentially be dealing with-- well, not might-- is going to deal with Islamophobia and sexism. And depending upon the financial status of their family growing up, they might be dealing with classism as well.

And considering the accident and the physical experience that Malala went through, it is plausible that she might be dealing with some disabilities as a result of that experience that we might not see. Just because someone physically looks like everything is neurologically OK, et cetera, does not mean that that is the case.

So here we have Ellen DeGeneres and Laverne Cox. So there has been, particularly in the United States, there has been wide conversations for years. But they've been amplified very greatly in the last few years, I would say, or re-amplified greatly the issues and struggles for those within the LGBTQIA+ community. Yes. OK. However, within that there are different experiences. Ellen has identified as a gay woman. Ellen is still a white woman. Laverne is a trans black woman. That is going to be two very different experiences, even within that community.

What does that mean? Although someone's struggles might be similar, if they are dealing with additional struggles, we have to rectify this reality that they will be dealing with a different experience. So we have three women on our screen-- Beyonce, Sandra, and Barbara. So do these three women deal with sexism? Yes. But what Beyonce is dealing with is sexism and racism. Sandra is dealing with sexism and racism. Barbara is dealing with sexism and anti-Semitism. That means that although they're all dealing with sexism, because they're dealing with other issues, other struggles, it creates a different experience.

Here we have Eminem, Jay-Z, and Serena Williams. You might be saying, OK, Sable, I've been flowing with you. But you threw up Serena on the screen with Eminem and Jay-Z, and now I'm confused. I will un-confuse you, I promise. Well, I will do my best, I should say. So if you don't know a lot about their upbringings-- this will not turn into a historical biography, but just to let you know, Eminem grew up in a working class background in Detroit, Jay-Z grew up in a low income working class background in Brooklyn, New York, and Serena, very similar, just in California. Los Angeles, California.

So we have three folks here who have, or who come from, I should say, working class families-- so very similar backgrounds growing up, as far as socioeconomic status. However, what are the differences here? Though Eminem may have come from a working class background, Eminem's a white man. He is going to experience life very differently than Jay-Z, who is a black man.

And Serena's going to experience life even different as well than these two. Because although

she was working class, and she is black, she's also a woman. So that's just the highlight. When someone has a similar struggle, when you layer another struggle on top of that, it lends itself to a different reality, a different lived experience.

SARA SHAHVISI: Intersectionality is a term coined by the legal scholar in the United States, Kimberle Crenshaw, in the late 1980s. And I urge you, if you haven't already, please, please, please at this moment, pause this video, go to Google, type in Kimberle Crenshaw and read everything she has written, videos she's recorded. Because I couldn't possibly articulate her thoughts as well as she does, and the examples she uses in terms of legal cases are really compelling and really easy to understand the concept.

The concept of intersectionality, if we condense it and really simplify it, at its core is the notion that people can live at the intersections of multiple oppressions, multiple inequities, multiple struggles, if we want to call them that, that a single person can live at the intersection of racism and sexism, for example. As Sable spoke about earlier. And therefore, because they live at the intersection where their struggles come together, the experience of inequity for them is therefore compounded. There's that additional level, that additional layer. There is more to it. There is a complexity to it.

But also, that it has specific particularities to it. Because it is these two specific struggles coming together, or three, or four struggles coming together. For example, if we go back to one of the examples that Sable's shared-- so we look at the example of, for instance, Beyonce. As a black woman, her experience of the world and her experience of oppression and inequity will have commonalities with that of, for instance, a white woman.

It will have commonalities with that of, for instance, a black man. But will be different to both of those struggles because it will be particularistic to her living at the intersection of being a woman and being a black person. There will be particularities to it-- expectations, norms, tropes around that specific identity.

That, at its core, is what intersectionality is. Intersectionality is an enhancer. It's an elevator of our solutions. Because it allows us to lean into the nuance and complexity of people's lived realities of inequality. It allows us to lean into the entirety of some people's experiences, rather than siloing, as Sable says, into those boxes.

SABLE LOMAX: So I'm just highlighting a slide here that shows a visual of what Sara just mentioned. Some of us are very visual. I love a picture. Ta-da! We thought of you ahead of time. So this is just a

visual representation of what Sara just described. And we could even go to that top axis and put disablism. We can go to the left and put classism We could add Islamophobia, or-- what am I missing here-- colonialism. Like, we can add other things here, like she said, and it would create a very unique experience.

So what does this look like? So we have a graph here. We take no credit for this, just for the record. But as you can see if you look at this image, it discusses median pay for women by disability status over time. So when we think in traditional conversations surrounding gender pay disparities, it is widely known that men tend to make more than women. And then that varies with various-- what's the word I'm looking for-- within various industries, the disparity varies.

But the reality is for just about every industry, there is a disparity between the amount that women make and the amount that men make. And even within the amounts that women make, there are still differences there, which speaks very directly to what Sara was saying, the amount of money that a white woman makes per dollar or per pound is different than the amount of money that a Muslim woman makes, the amount of money that a Hispanic or Latinx woman makes, the amount of money that an Asian woman makes, the amount of money that a black woman makes.

So even with the gender disparity conversation, there is disparity amongst the women. So that's something we want to highlight. So knowing this, we're like, OK, well, what about our disabled members of society. How does that play out? So it would be kind of-- what am I-- word I'm looking for-- it would be a blanket solution to say, well, we want disabled members to make an equal amount of money as those who are non-disabled. If you just say that very quickly, it sounds great. But what that doesn't pay attention to is that a disabled man makes more than a disabled woman.

And it speaks to what Sara has already said. Even within those who are experiencing the same struggle, the same system of oppression, when there is an intersection in their identity, it creates a very unique experience. So here we have this graph that shows us the median pay for women by disability over time. Just want to pause for a second so you can kind of look through.

Starting off in your x-axis from 1997, if you read all the way across, the data stops at 2014. And then you have those who are non-disabled. Activity-limiting only is that yellowy line. The

lighter yellow line, work-limiting only. And then the kind of orange, burnt orange line-- activity and work-limiting.

So even within disabled women, there are pay differences based on their ability. So here we have the graph for pay for disabled men. If you just look at it very quickly without analyzing it, we can see that OK, they are making more. But even within that, there are still pay differences based on their physical ability, whether it's activity-limiting, work-limiting, or both. We can also see that their brown line is further below on the graph.

They're making less. So if you are both activity and work-limiting, you're making less. And we can see how much those who are non-disabled are making. But if you look at this graph--

[BEEP]

Why won't it click? Versus this graph, you might notice some differences. This pops out about here. That's higher. When we go to solutionize, we have to step back and take a look at what is all happening for someone. What are all the struggles that they are dealing with? Because when we focus on one thing, we create a simple solution that's not complex enough to deal with their actual lived reality.

So now I'm going to pass you back over to Sara to say OK, you've given us some graphs. Well, how does this actually work in real time?

SARA SHAHVISI: Now, the tricky thing with intersectionality and applying this in our organizations, and applying this to our solutions is that there aren't a huge amount of good examples of how this is done, which makes it difficult there. Because I can't throw up for you all these amazing ways that other companies, and society in general, have solved in an intersectional way. But there is hope. There are some things we can start to think about, and these are small things I thought about sharing with you here that are quite easy to do. You could do tomorrow.

When you're trying to tackle the inequity that is faced by disabled people in an intersectional way, one, something real easy, is to stratify your data. If you're looking at data within your organization, you're looking at data across society, at outcomes, specific outcomes for disabled people, exactly as Sable just spoke about, in comparison to non-disabled people, the really, really great thing you can do with intersectionality is stratify that data along other axes. Are you bringing in a race lens? Are you bringing in a gender lens, as well?

So you're looking at the experience of disabled people, for instance, in reference to the health

care system, for instance, in reference to promotion in your organization that you're further stratifying, obviously, always in line with data privacy guidelines. Something so easy to do as long as you've got the right software, and you've got the right minds working on it.

The second thing you can do, which I think is really exciting-- and there are some really great examples of these within companies-- is when you're running events-- there's so many great events run-- to amplify the voices and stories of disabled people, to bring them into the mainstream. And that's fantastic and really important.

We need to hear more from disabled members of our organizations and community. And not just hear those stories, but have those stories be integrated into where power happens, essentially where decisions are made. Those voices need to be there, as well. They need to be sat at that table. But you can bring intersectionality into this really beautifully.

For example, if you're running an event on disability and disability awareness, who is being showcased? Whose story is being told? Whose voice is being amplified? Are there specific disability activists that you could speak to-- and obviously, pay always to come into your organization, for instance, and share their stories, share their recommendations with you, but also speak to the lived experience of disabled people who perhaps are people of color also, or women also, belong to the LGBTQIA+ community, also.

So bringing in a story that is nuanced and speaks to a wider lived reality, as well. So you don't get a singular story, a singular voice. Intersectionality is exactly about that. It's not about saying, we're only going to talk to these people or these people. But what about if we bring these stories together, et cetera? It's an en-richer. It's an enhancer as a tool.

SABLE LOMAX: To help you think through all of what Sara just shared with you, when you're at your desk, your sofa, or what have you, on another day, we have some questions for you to ask yourself. So if you want to, if you're working on making things more acceptable, or if you're saying to yourself, I've actually not thought about this in particular as it relates to disabled members in society, we have a few questions that you can ask yourself to begin to apply an intersectional lens to the work that you do with disabled communities, no matter what that work is.

So I'm going to share this slide. And it's which voices and stories are you amplifying, and how does that inform our narratives about certain groups? So when we think back to that first slide that I showed with Stevie Wonder and Kanye, are we amplifying the voices of those who have

physical disabilities only? Or are we amplifying the voices of the disabled community as a whole?

So there could be individuals on that stage who have an invisible disability. So unless someone said to us, I have XYZ, the audience would never know. So whose stories and voices are we amplifying? And even within that, do we have a wide variety of voices? Do we have both men and women? Do we have members from the trans community? Do we have members from the LGB+ community? Do we have a wide range of voices being amplified and heard, or are we only signifying a few?

What defaults and norms do you cognitively go to when thinking about people's lived experiences of inequity? So this is more of a reflective question. When you say, I want to work with disabled people, who's that default person that comes to your mind? Oftentimes it's someone in a wheelchair because of media and images that are shared. OK, who are you missing if you only picture those in a wheelchair?

I was thinking to myself recently on an elevator-- I hit a button because I had to go up, and I was like, I can't recall the last time I felt Braille on an elevator. I can remember growing up, feeling it. I don't feel it anymore. So what defaults and norms do we think about when thinking about our disabled members of society? Folks with blindness have not disappeared, but Braille has decreased, at least here in the United States-- something to think about.

What complexity of experience and attached unique expectations are you missing? We very much highlighted for you that identity is complex. Humans are complex. People are complex. Systems of oppression and struggles manifest themselves in very complex ways, whether it's at the interpersonal level, or structurally and systemically. So knowing that, when we're going to solutionize, are we going the easy route because it's faster and it's quicker?

Or are we taking the time to say, wait-- I might be missing out on parts of someone's identity and I might be operating in silos here, when I should be leaning into thinking outside the box? Sara, is there anything else that you want to share for questions that someone might want to ask themselves?

SARA SHAHVISI: No, I love what defaults and norms you do cognitively go to because it allows us to ask ourselves that question, who is my default notion woman, who is my default notion disabled person, as you said. And what might that mean for which stories and which experiences might consistently be missing out? Because I don't go to that cognitively. Because unfortunately,

because we all are in a world where siloed thinking is very prevalent, it pushes us into having those hierarchies, having those defaults.

SABLE LOMAX: So we want to thank you for tuning in, for watching myself, Sable, Sara-- I'm like this, like she's next to me. She is next to me, but not next to me. Sara is actually in London right now. So I think that's the joy in virtual work because you can truly be anywhere when the time zones align. That doesn't always work out for certain time zones. But for New York and London, it works perfectly.

Once again, we are Fearless Futures. You can connect with us at www.fearlessfutures.org. You can find us on Facebook-- I have to do it with my fingers to make sure I get everything-- Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram at Fearless Futures. And if you have a question or a concern, or maybe you're like OK, I want to do more, then feel free to send us an email organisations@fearlessfutures.org. British spelling-- so an S, not a Z. organisations@fearlessfutures.org. Thanks, everyone.

SARA SHAHVISI: Bye.