Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging is a difficult subject, and many organisations have broken down the topic into specific gender, LGBT+ and race and ethnicity initiatives to make the task more manageable. This makes sense when first starting out, but over time, this approach can become extremely siloed and start disengaging people, especially those with multiple minority identities who can’t relate through a single minority lens. I identify as a gay man of British Chinese origin and those two aspects of my identity interact to make me who I am.

With Pride celebrations gaining prominence each year and the recent impact of the Black Lives Matter movement, it is more important than ever that LGBT+ black people and LGBT+ people of colour have their voices heard and are fully represented in business and mainstream media.

For LGBT+ people, this means that it is our responsibility to speak out against the racism and systemic injustice that LGBT+ people of colour face, and to amplify their stories and experiences, because Pride would not exist without these people.

Many might argue that Black Lives Matter and LGBT+ rights are separate issues. It is true that there are important distinctions between the communities, histories and needs, but marginalisation cannot be broken down into silos, just like the different aspects of our identities cannot be considered in their individual parts. Being queer or a person of colour presents challenges, but having an intersectional identity compounds those challenges. People of intersectional identities need different support.

Imagine you’re a black lesbian working for a business that touts “We’re focusing on women.” You’re being implicitly told, “Sure, we care about you, but only about a part of your identity, one that we are familiar and comfortable with.” Despite the good intentions, there’s a subtle implication behind the message — “Wait your turn. We’re helping the white straight women first.” To really better support LGBT+ people of colour and other intersectional colleagues, organisations must consider diversity and inclusion more holistically.

One way organisations can achieve this is by fundamentally moving away from the traditionally adopted siloed approach of separate diversity networks and moving closer to a collaborative cross-network approach. This requires buy-in right through the organisation that diversity networks and employee groups should be working together on all of their initiatives. A great example of this being put into practice was a recent celebration of Black History Month which I organised. As soon as our Black Professionals network began to organise for the month of celebration, we invited members from all of our networks to take part and challenge each other to broaden the discussion. What resulted was a truly intersectional celebration of black individuals in the firm, including black women, black single parents and black lesbians. Most importantly, we also dedicated a part of the month of celebrations to educate people about the pivotal role that black trans women, like Marsha P. Johnson, played in the LGBT+ movement for equality.

At the end of the day, advocating for workplace equity requires compassion, continual introspection and an openness to learn more about others’ experiences of discrimination. So continue to advocate for LGBT+ issues, women’s causes, racial equity, disability rights, and more – but do it through the lens of intersectionality. Because without equality for all, especially those struggling at the intersections, there is no equality at all.

Bio

Martin has made strides as one of the few LGBT+ East Asian advocates in the UK. He has been recognised in the Financial Times and Yahoo Finance for his work in improving ethnic minority representation in the LGBT+ community, with the rollout of an intersectional global reverse mentoring program, and numerous efforts to improve the representation of LGBT+ East and Southeast Asian identities.

Having noticed a lack of LGBT+ East Asian role models in his own life, Martin regularly speaks about his struggles living openly as an LGBT+ East Asian, exploring the intricacies of navigating collectivist Asian culture with an LGBT+ identity and understanding the complex biases and stereotypes arising from an intersectional identity. To tackle the representation problem in the UK, Martin has founded the first UK organisation that focuses on achieving equal representation for East and South East Asian identities in media, business and politics. Having already worked with numerous charities, local youth groups, schools and universities, Martin hopes to continue improving the representation of LGBT+ Asian identities and supporting the future generation in becoming role models.

