How Social Identity Influences Our Experiences: Intersectionality

Pattie Nishimoto, ACSW, LCSW, PhD
Associate Professor
Concord University MSW Program

Terri Philpott, ACSW, LCSW, PhD Candidate
Field Practicum Director
Concord University MSW Program
Learning Objectives

- Learn about the concepts of intersectionality and mattering;
- Examine your social identity and how those identities shape your lived experiences;
- Explore the social constructs of privilege and oppression in personal & professional experiences;
- Discuss experiences of mattering (a sense of belonging & being treated with respect and dignity) and marginalization (being social excluded or experiences inequities; and,
- Applying intersectionality to social work practice.
Intersectionality

"overlapping or intersecting social identities and related systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination."
Intersectionality

• Intersectionality is a feminist sociological theory first highlight by Kimberle’ Crenshaw in 1989.

• It is a methodology of studying “the relationships among multiple dimensions and modalities of social relationships and subject formations.”

• Social identities are the key aspect of mapping one’s intersectionality perspective.

• A visual way of conceptualizing intersectionality is by imagining a multi-dimensional graph with axes of gender, race, class, citizenship, ableness (ability), age, sexuality, etc.
The premise of Intersectionality Theory:

Although initially articulated by feminists of color, it is that social differentiation is achieved through complex interactions between markers of difference such as gender, race, and socioeconomic class. In order to comprehend how an individual’s access to social, political, and economic institutions is differentially experienced, it is necessary to analyze how markers of difference intersect and interact.
Intersectionality

Privilege
- Able-bodied
- European heritage
- Male
- White
- Male and masculine
- English as a second language
- Working class, poor
- Unattractive
- Old
- Non-binary
- LGBTQ
- Persons with disabilities

Oppression
- Intermale
- Jews
- Dark
- English as a second language
- Working class, poor
- Unattractive
- Old
- Non-binary
- LGBTQ
- Persons with disabilities

Domination

AWIS
The roots of intersectionality can be traced back to a speech delivered by Sojourner Truth, a black woman who had been a slave, at the 1851’s Women’s Rights Conference in Akron, Ohio.

In her speech, she articulated how her identity was shaped not only by her gender but also by her race and class. Referencing “that man over there says that women need to be helped into carriages and lifted over ditches...nobody helps me into carriages or over mud puddles...And ain’t I a woman?”
Elizabeth Spelman argued that treating interlocking systems of oppression as additive implies that processes of gender, race, and class are separate entities, and it ignores how these factor’s interact to shape lived experience.

Intersectionality approaches the concepts of gender, race, and class as social constructions that vary across geography and time; markers of difference are not viewed as static traits, but as processes that are (re)produced in the daily actions of people.
Intersectionality

• Or intersectionalism is the study of intersections between forms or systems of oppression, domination, or discrimination.

• A standard textbook definition of intersectionality theory involves the interplay of race, class, and gender, often resulting in multiple dimensions of disadvantaged.
In other words, Intersectionality is about...

- How an individual can face multiple threats of discrimination when their identities overlap a number of minority classes, such as race, gender, age, ethnicity, health, and other characteristics (Steven Williams in Barber, 2017)
- The simultaneous experiences of categorical and hierarchical classifications including but not limited to race, class, gender, sexuality, and nationality (Cole, 2019).
- A perspective the examines how two or more social constructions of oppression and/or privilege intersect to shape people’s social locations and cumulative lived experiences (Battle-Walter, 2004), which then lead to the discrimination and oppression of marginalized groups.
Now What do we do as social workers?
Intersectionality

Emphasizes a holistic view that provide context to social work practice.

Social work emphasizes the need for capturing the complexity that exists among the interrelatedness of social systems.
Social workers need to recognize the power imbalance that exist among individuals and between institutions and the individuals and the resulting social inequalities and injustices.
“Be comfortable talking about the uncomfortable” (Tristan Renae, personal communication, September 17, 2019)
Aligning with NASW Values and Ethical Principles

Social Welfare: Promote the general welfare of society... The development of people, their communities, and their environments. Advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs.

Integrity of the Profession: Maintaining and promoting high standards of practice.

Social Justice: Social workers challenge social injustice with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups of people.

Dignity and Worth of the Person: Social workers respect the inherent dignity and worth of the person by being mindful of individual differences and cultural and ethnic diversity.

Importance of Human Relationships: Social workers recognize the central importance of human relationships.
Be conscience of the context of our social identity, which reflects various ways of how society labels us.
Implications of Intersectionality based on our Social Identity

• People are members of more than one community at the same time. **What communities are you a member of?**

• Inequality are always present, depending on the context. **Social workers, for example, must be aware of our power differential.**

• Social inequality whereby people have unequal access to valued resources, services, and positions in society.
The internal dimensions of our identify may also influence our social location in life -- community dimensions, social life experiences dimensions, and institutional dimensions.
Social Identity

Social identity is socially constructed and reflect various ways of how society has labeled you.

Social identity is constructed through a process of stereotyping.
Marginalization: Social exclusion or experiences of inequalities in the distribution of resources and power

- Race
- Class
- Gender
- Age
- Sexual Orientation
- Physical & Mental Ability
- Religion
- Nationality/Citizenship

People experience marginalization in each of the following categories.
Privilege and Oppression

• Have you experienced unearned privileges (advantages) based on your social identity?

• Or, have you experience oppression, based on your social identity?

• When we reflect on our social identities, is it based on our comparison with others?
Social Workers cannot ....

• Be color-blind: Denying a person the right to have context (history) in American culture
• Expect people from black, brown, indigence, LGBTQ+ communities to teach people about racism
• Reinforce the boundaries of “us” and “them.”
• Think that diversity is other than white.
• Only focus on intention verse impact.
Mattering

Describes the feeling that people have when they sense that others are interested in them and value their contribution.

A sense of belong and feeling appreciated by others.

Four Dimensions of Mattering

- **Attention**: The feeling that someone notices or is interested in you.
- **Importance**: The sense that people are interested in what you are thinking, feeling, and doing.
- **Dependence**: The feeling that your contribution is valued and needed.
- **Ego-extension**: The feeling, whether right or wrong, that others are interested in how you are doing.
Ho’oponopono

Terri and I will have a live discussion with participants after the video presentation.
RESOURCES


