

Understanding Difference, Power & Discrimination (Intersectionality)



As a basis for trauma
informed care

Dawn Schiller

Overview



☞ Difference, Power & Discrimination

☞ Systems of Oppression “the isms”

☞ Intersectionality and Diversity

☞ Inherent Trauma of Subordinated Groups

☞ What We Can Do

Difference & Power



- ❧ **Difference:** Socially constructed binaries determining dominance or subordination on a group (gender, social class, ability, sexual identity, age, religion, country of origin).
- ❧ **Power:** Defined as “power-over,” the ability to coerce another’s behavior. Includes access to social, political, and economic resources.
 - ❧ Power accrues to those who most closely approximate the **mythical norm** – (in the US) male, white, heterosexual, financially stable, young-middle adult, able-bodied, Christian.

Privileges



- ❧ An invisible knapsack of unearned assets - Peggy McIntosh
- ❧ Are special advantages people have by virtue of their birth, status or position in society
- ❧ Aligns with “Mythical Norm”
- ❧ Based on socially constructed identities

Oppression



- ❧ An imbalance of power.
- ❧ Unearned systematic disadvantage
- ❧ Members of privileged groups participate in oppression even if they are not overtly prejudiced

Systems of Oppression that Facilitate Privilege and Inequality



- ❧ Racism
- ❧ Sexism
- ❧ Classism
- ❧ Heterosexism
- ❧ Ageism
- ❧ Looksism/Sizeism/Weightism
- ❧ Ableism



Systems of Oppression



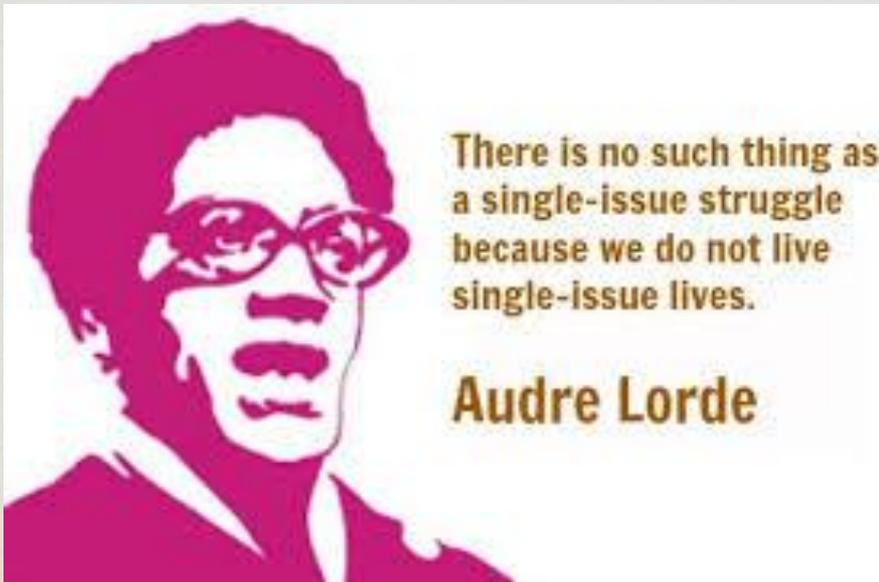
- ❧ Systems that discriminate and privilege based on perceived *or* real differences among people
- ❧ People who are born into “subordinate” groups such as **women, disabled people, people of color, LGBTQ+, etc.** have an **unequal access** to power, resources, opportunities, and equality because they are born into this system where they are oppressed.
- ❧ They are **suppressed, exploited, and dehumanized**

Diversity ~ Marginalized Communities



- ✧ Ethnic/Culture
- ✧ Racial
- ✧ Refugee
- ✧ Immigrant

- ✧ Religious/Spiritual groups
- ✧ Gender (WOMEN) and sexual orientation
- ✧ Able-bodiness
- ✧ Socio-economic status
- ✧ Geographic status /Nationality
- ✧ Linguistic groups



Elements of Oppressions



- ❧ A Defined Norm
- ❧ Institutional (government, churches, corporations)
- ❧ Economic Power (to create wealth)
- ❧ Threat of Violence & Victim blaming
- ❧ Lack of Prior Claim
- ❧ Invisibility, Othering & Isolation
- ❧ Stereotyping
- ❧ Horizontal Hostility – targeted group believe, act on, or enforce systems of oppression
- ❧ Assimilation and Tokenism

Marginalized Communities & Mental Health (Well Being)

❧ **Mental health**

difficulties experienced are related to a social context of discrimination/oppression.

❧ Can lead to:

- ❧ social alienation
- ❧ low self-esteem

❧ Psychological distress

❧ Experiences of insecurity & hopelessness

❧ Risks of violence (trafficking)

❧ Poor physical health

❧ **All increase vulnerability to mental disorders.**

Stress of Discrimination



❧ **Racism** and stressful life events are significant predictors of **PTSD symptoms**, suggesting the importance of **life context**.

❧ There is empirical support for **racism as a separate and unique source of stress** for minorities.

Stigma of Being Poor



- ❧ Insufficient resources for necessities
- ❧ Urban areas characterized by high density poverty
- ❧ Diminished resources
- ❧ Poor education
- ❧ Lack role models for college, occupational striving
- ❧ Shame
- ❧ Negative attributions (worthless, unintelligent, poor work ethic).

Historical Trauma

Native American

- ❧ Native American loss of population;
- ❧ 1883 federal law prohibited Native Americans from practicing traditional ceremonies (Brave Heart, Chase, Elkins, & Altschul, 2011).
- ❧ American Indian Religious Freedom Act, 1978
- ❧ Indian Removal Act of 1830, forced relocation of 100,000 Native Americans.
- ❧ Loss of land never restored.
- ❧ Feelings of shame, powerlessness and subordination. (Brave Heart & DeBruyn, 1998).

Historical Trauma

African American



- ❧ **Slavery, segregation, & racism are important factors in the history of African American.**
- ❧ 1st - 1619 as indentured servants.
- ❧ 17th century - Slavery became a way of life
- ❧ 1863 Emancipation of slaves
- ❧ 1883 the US Supreme Court Sumner Act 1875, declared that giving African Americans equal rights to public accommodations & transportation, unconstitutional.
- ❧ Late 1800's Jim Crow Laws - segregation

What Can We Do?



- ❧ **Discuss trauma** in the context in which it occurs.
- ❧ **Acknowledge micro-aggressions** that are a part of living with marginalized identities.
- ❧ **Be able to acknowledge and fully address racism, discrimination** in its full historic context for the person and/or group if needed and desired.
- ❧ **Be able and willing** to address the social situations and contexts that place people at risk of trauma – poverty, crime, etc.

What We Can Do?



- ❧ **Must avoid pathologizing and further stigmatizing marginalized groups of people.**
- ❧ **Take advantage of people's strengths** that can assist in building the resilience necessary to overcome trauma
- ❧ **Be aware of your own bias –**
<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.htm>

Why is Understanding DPD Important

- ❧ The most effective trauma work includes understanding difference, power & discrimination
- ❧ Survivor behavior can be puzzling & frustrating. Consideration of intersectionality helps makes sense of a survivor's struggles.
- ❧ Allows for **empathy** when **balancing bearing witness** to trauma with **empowering survivors**
- ❧ Provides a **better understanding of the complexities of a diversity**