Dominant and Marginalized Social Identities in the United States

Across systems, U.S. society has constructed an American culture and socialized us into the frame in which it operates. These systems include, but are not limited to media, education, healthcare, banking, transportation, employment, laws/legislation, legal system, housing, food systems, politics, etc. Everyday these systems help to support the idea of what is 'normal' by rewarding conformity and penalizing non-compliance.

Directions: Complete the following chart by trying to identify the agent/target pairing. Focus structurally rather than situationally, and don't worry about getting it "right". The conversation you will have while making your decisions is the most important part of this activity. Afterward, use the "Types of Systemic Oppression" listed on the back to identify the -ism (one will repeat).

AGENT	SOCIAL IDENTITY	TARGET	SYSTEMIC OPPRESSION (-ISM)
	INDEGENEITY		
	RACE		
	GENDER		
	AGE		
	CLASS		
	ABILITY		
	SEXUAL ORIENTATION		
	RELIGION		
	EDUCATION		
	LANGUAGE		
	NATIONAL ORIGIN		

Social Identity and Positionality

Social position groups are based on the relationships that people who share particular social identities (race, gender, class, sexual orientation, ability, etc.) have to systems of power (aka institutions and other types of structures). These relationships to systems of power either oppress members of these groups or provide them with agency. Group identities may include group members' physical, cultural, and social characteristics. These identities are sometimes obvious and clear, sometimes not obvious and unclear, often self-claimed and frequently ascribed by others. For example, racial groupings are often ascribed as well as self-claimed. All of this can impact one's social position. How identities are positioned in relation to institutions may change from country to country to reflect the socio-political climate of that country.

Social Identities are the portions of an individual's self-concept derived from the perceived membership of a social group. Social identity influences behavior by providing a framework for socializing. Social identities are based on the relationships that people who share particular social identities have with systems of power (aka institutions and social systems). These relationships to systems of power either provide access to opportunities for privilege and dominance, or act to oppress, disregard, and subjugate a group. Group identities may include group members' physical, cultural, and social characteristics.

Target Identities are those social identity groups that are *positioned* as targeted by oppression, to be disenfranchised, subordinated, exploited and/or otherwise harmed.

Agent Identities are those social identity groups that are *positioned* to be afforded agency, advantaged, dominant and hold unearned privilege in society.

Systemic Oppression is the systematic mistreatment and exploitation of target groups that creates inequity and disparity for the target groups. There are different types of oppression attached to different target/agent groups. How an individual experiences oppression is a reflection of the overlaps between their agent/target positioning. This may change from moment to moment and over time based on our immediate institutional or cultural context. At any given moment in time, it is possible to experience multiple forms of oppression/privilege or simultaneously experience oppression and privilege.

Types of Systemic Oppression (-ism): Nationalism, Racism, Christian Hegemony/Dominance, Ageism/Adultism, Colonialism, Heterosexism, Sexism, Classism, Elitism, Ableism.

Social Positionality is the social and political context that creates your social identity in terms of race, class, gender, sexual orientation, and ability status. Positionality also describes how your identity influences, and potentially biases, your understanding and outlook on the world.

Intersectionality is a critical framework that recognizes the ways in which institutional oppressions exist in relationship to each other. Intersectionality acknowledges all categories of social stratification, including non-target identities that might be considered dominant when viewed independently.

Note: Many people have both agent and target group identities and positions. How these identities and positions overlap impacts our experience of the world and our life outcomes. Some social identities and positions may impact our experiences and life outcomes more than others.