
DIMENSION I: Personal Inclusion-centered Leadership Practices Module



THEME 2

INTERSECTIONALITY:

Ways You Are Interconnected With Your Community

Intersectionality is described as:

“Every individual possesses multiple identities and these identities comprise a whole and multi-faceted person. Each identity is representative of how each person experiences life in society. Each person has different and valid experiences, but the rights certain groups experience may not be equivalent to the rights experienced (or not experienced) by other groups.” – Cooke, 2019

Understanding intersectionality is crucial to the foundation of inclusion-centered leadership. Intersectionality is not simply the presence of our personal identities. It refers to the reality that our multiple identities compound on each other creating overlapping and interdependent systems of power and privilege and/ or discrimination and disadvantage. These personal identities also become the basis of our inherent biases that frames how we: make operational decisions; place values and allocate limited library resources; ultimately, how we lead, whether or not we are conscious of it. Here is why leading with intentionality and purpose is important as our decisions may lead to intentional/unintentional decisions that may be harmful to the constituents we serve. For example:

- A library director or staff member says inclusion and equitable access to programs and services is important but does not collaborate or co-develop them specifically for and by underserved constituents. Library staff may presume they know what cultural and ethnic groups of their community want or need.
- Library board members question the need for all-gender bathrooms.
- Circulation or reference staff, in geographies with high percentages of Spanish speakers, don't speak Spanish.

Discover

Intersectionality is a great tool to become aware of and understand:

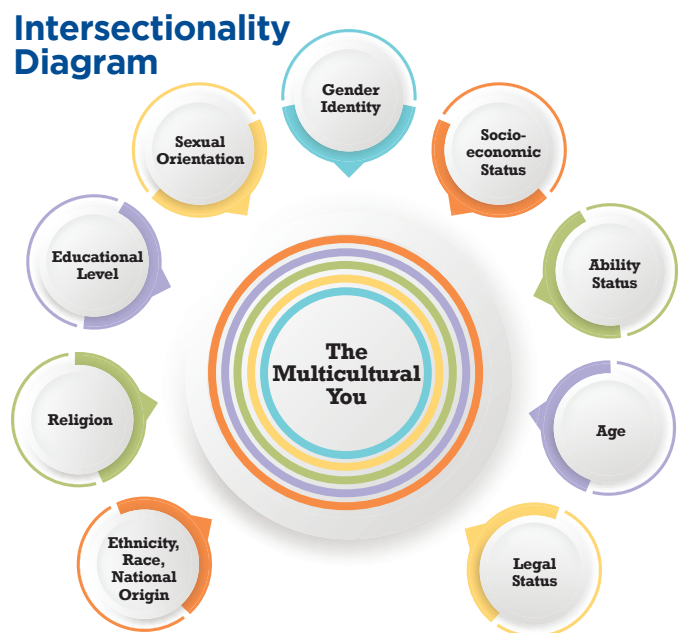
1. how you use your power and privilege;
2. the complexities and hidden motivations of your leadership practices and operational decision-making; and,
3. your shared experiences and connections by which you can build broad-based partnerships.

Key tenets of intersectionality include:

1. Human lives cannot be explained by taking into account single categories.
2. Relationships and power dynamics between social locations and processes (e.g., racism, classism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, sexism) are linked.
3. People can experience privilege and oppression simultaneously. This depends on what situation or specific context they are in within your life or the lives of others.
4. Multi-level analyses that link individual experiences to broader structures and systems are crucial for revealing how power relations are shaped and experienced.
5. When taking an intersectional approach, we must consider our social position, role, and power.

6. Intersectionality is explicitly oriented towards transformation, building coalitions among different groups, and working towards social justice (Rollfs 2022).

Looking at this diagram, you can see that each individual possesses multiple identities.



From Nicole Cooke (2019). Information Service To Diverse Populations: Developing Culturally Competent Library Professionals.

Each of these circles represent the multiple identities that every library leader possesses and is rooted in how we were socialized. They determine the dynamics of power and privilege. By becoming aware and reflecting on how you promote or push down certain identities, you will become sensitive to the attitudes and practices for how and why you lead in the current manner. This reflection will also allow you to consider your own beliefs while beginning to understand the actions of others.

Reflect

Self-reflection of one's own intersectionality is an opportunity for you to reflect on your individual identities and consider how your own cultures and beliefs are similar to and different from that of the people you serve and work with. When completing the worksheet on the next page, dig deep beyond cursory labels such as wife, son, librarian, and the like. Instead, challenge the thinking about the core of who you are.

WORKSHEET 2

CIRCLES ACTIVITY: Identifying Your Power, Privilege, and Personal Interconnectedness to Your Community

Worksheet adapted from *Circles of My Multicultural Self* (Gorski 2020)

Objectives

- Understand the multiple dimensions of your identity and where your experiences of marginalization, power, and privilege occur or occurred in your life and how you use this information in your leadership attitudes, practices, and behaviors.
- Address the relationships between your desires to self-define your identity and the social constructions that label us regardless of how we define ourselves.
- Integrate reflective practice in operational decision-making.

What You Need

- A copy of the *Intersectionality “Circles” Activity Worksheet (page 17)*
- Review the *Instructions of the Circles Activity*
- Your favorite pen
- Find a place where you do your best thinking with no interruptions

Time

120 minutes



Instructions

STEP 1

Place your name in the center circle of the structure on the next page.

STEP 2

Write an important aspect of your identity in each of the satellite circles — an identifier or descriptor that you feel is important in defining you. This can include anything: Asian American, female, mother, athlete, educator, Taoist, scientist, or any descriptor with which you identify.

STEP 3

Add more circles, other shapes and connectors to the original graphic and change their sizes to reflect importance and so forth as you critically reflect on the various components of your individual identity. Such as:



Represents library director identity



Size of circle represents how you prioritize your identities in terms of more or less within your position as library director



Experiences that affect an identity(ies)



Environment (out of your control) that affect an identity(ies)



Stereotypes that affect an identity(ies)

STEP 4

Above each circle, place the letter abbreviations to describe your personal experiences within that identity:

D — I Have Been Discriminated

M — I Have Been Marginalized

Po — I Have Power

Pr — I Have Privilege

S — I Have Been Stereotyped

Act

Action 1: Based on the identity map you drew and your answers to the questions above, complete the following stereotype statement:

“I am (a/an) _____, but I am NOT (a/an) _____.”

Action 2: Based on the sentence in Action 1, identify community member groups that you could broaden library relationships with that share similar experiences and/or connections as yourself.

INTERSECTIONALITY “CIRCLES” ACTIVITY WORKSHEET

Worksheet adapted from *Circles of My Multicultural Self* (Gorski 2020)

