



SW 510-009: Critical Intersectionality and Social Work Practice

Mini-course, SEED week, CILC, 2017

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In this mini-course, we will provide an overview of a critical intersectional framework developed by the UM-SSW Critical Intersectionality Learning Community and provide opportunities for students to apply 7 sets of capacities in different aspects of social work practice (with examples, critiques, and skill practice). Participants will explore positionalities in their own lives, engage in a variety of interactive activities, practice applying analytic frameworks in various settings, and work together to identify how they will continue to apply these capacities in their future SSW experiences.

Critical Intersectionality approaches draw from Critical theories which stress theorizing and acting to “liberate human beings from the circumstances that enslave them” (Horkheimer, 1982). (e.g., Frankfurt School, critical race, feminist and cultural analyses). Major emphases are on analyzing sources of power differences in society, taking action towards social, economic and cultural justice, and challenging and reshaping power inequities and the forces that sustain them.

In the learning community, we also emphasize explicit attention to goals for social and economic justice, and different ways of understanding and working for justice.

Intersectionality frameworks focus on multiple interacting systems of oppression associated with types of positionalities [e.g., race, ethnicity, economic class, age, disability, religion, gender, sexual orientation, gender expression and other TLGBQQI issues]. Positionalities include multiple components: social locations (structural), social categories (symbolic and cultural), social processes (day to day organization, community and group dynamics), and situated social identities (at self and relationship levels). How systems of privilege and oppression influence us, and how we experience our situated identities are influenced by positionality combinations and contexts.

Combining these approaches helps us to make sense of complex human conditions and especially how to address patterns of oppression and privilege that deeply affect human

opportunities and barriers, well-being, and health. If we are unable to recognize, analyze and address these forces at multiple system levels, we will not be able to resist or change them.

In the current climate, there are great distortions of what is meant both by critical social theories and intersectionality. These include assertions that the former is challenging the basic values that underlie the United States, including freedom, individual rights, and equality. And that the latter is underlying identity politics, political correctness and great divisiveness. We argue that these interpretations are distortions of these frameworks, which were intended to illuminate how the systems of power that underlie these dimensions work together and are influenced by contexts. Systematic application of these frameworks should allow us to identify common purposes, as well as those that may diverge, so that we can develop alliances, and work in coalitions on mutual and diverging goals.

Objectives

- Participants will learn definitions of concepts related to critical intersectionality and steps and processes for praxis and critical consciousness, demonstrated in a brief analysis of the impacts of privilege and oppression in their own lives.
- Participants will apply principles of critical intersectionality in analysis of group activities and in different components in their lives, examining sources of conflict and potentials for collaboration.
- Participants will practice application of critical contextual thinking and action planning in some practice examples.

Specifically we will

- identify seven sets of capacities for just practice, with examples,
- engage in processes for praxis and critical consciousness development,
- stress the importance of conflict and sources of conflict and potentials for collaboration,
- engage in systematic application of different frameworks,
- and articulate and practice principles for critical contextual thinking and action planning.

Significance

Justice is more than the absence or reduction of injustice, and the pathways and challenges to justice vary for those with different mixes of positionalities and in different contexts.

Intersectionality dimensions are associated with systems of power, as well as complex social structures, systems of meanings, interactive processes, and internalized identities. Practitioners must navigate their own backgrounds, understand how others view them, and work with people similar to and different from them, in a variety of contexts. They must also learn to use analytic frameworks that can illuminate interlocking systems of privilege and oppression, in order to identify social justice goals and barriers to these for different mixes of positionalities and contexts. Thus, working for justice, and practicing socially just processes requires the ability of members of different groups to understand and navigate their own lives and environments, separately and

together. We must also develop some common frameworks that allow us to recognize common and diverging agendas, and also how these can change from context to context. This mini-course will introduce participants to frameworks and skills and develop goals to continue learning about power, systems of meaning, relationships, and identities in their social work education.

Course Design

The instructors represent multiple positionalities among us, and will work as a team in implementing the course. The course will be very interactive, using multiple methods, including individual, small group, and entire class activities, a trip to the UM Museum of Art, and a series of generative, reflective assignments. A major emphasis will be on individual self-exploration, interacting with diverse classmates, introducing and developing 7 sets of knowledge and skill areas.

Course Philosophy and Responsibilities

We are endeavoring to enact the principles, knowledge, and skills encompassed within critical intersectionality frameworks. We draw on principles of adult learning, in which it is important to identify what you already know and bring to a new learning environment, so you can contribute your life experiences to the learning effort as a whole, and because old learning and approaches frequently have to be modified to incorporate new knowledge and approaches.

“Epistemological curiosity,” from Freire, refers to eager exploration of knowledge about our worlds, theorizing about justice issues and a vision for positive changes, causes and possible solutions to problems, and interacting with diverse others towards these goals. It especially requires reflecting on ourselves in interaction with others, and as we engage in change activities together.

Resource materials

- Kimberlé Crenshaw Discusses 'Intersectional Feminism'
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ROwquxC_Gxc
- Arao, B & Clemens, K. (2013) From safe spaces to brave spaces: A new way to frame dialogue around diversity and social justice. From *The Art of Effective Facilitation*, Stylas Publishing, 135-150.
- Grzanka, Patrick R., Ed (2014) *Intersectionality: A Foundations and Frontiers Reader*, Westside Press.
 - Introduction, Intersectional Objectivity, pp x1-xxv11.
 - Politics, rights, and justice. Political diffractions (with excerpts from other authors), pp 227-257.
- Collins, P. H. & Bilge, S. (2016) what is intersectionality? *Intersectionality: Key Concepts*. Polity Press. 1-30.

Optional:

<http://www.newstatesman.com/lifestyle/2014/04/kimberl-crenshaw-intersectionality-i-wanted-come-everyday-metaphor-anyone-could>

Assignments

Generative/Reflective Assignments for Mini-course

A. Participation. This includes

- being present and active on both days of the mini-course,
- completing the pre-class questionnaire, readings, and video, and
- engaging in some regular “journaling”, to capture your “take-aways,” reactions, questions, and application to yourself and social work after each session of the mini-course. We will give you a few minutes at the end of many sessions to capture your ideas. The instructors will not collect and review these, unless you ask for feedback. They are for your own use, and also to get you used to leaving some space for reflecting on and naming your learning and reactions. **Journaling** is a way to capture your immediate perceptions and reactions, in order to hone your observation and reflection skills. We will give you specific prompts for each journaling session, but you should also feel free to incorporate your own.

B. Second, after day one, and before day two, complete some analytic and reflective **worksheets** on your reactions to the first day’s activities, applying concepts from readings and class materials.

- Post this electronically by 9 AM on Thursday, August 31. We will send you an email with instructions about where to post it.
- Bring one copy to class with you on Thursday AM, so you can refer to it in class.

C. Third, after the course is over, produce **a short analytic reflective paper**, of 3 to 4 pages, with an Arial 11 point font, and margins no larger than 1 inch. about a) what you learned in the mini-course—including the topics and experiences covered, e.g., about yourself, definitions of justice, mechanisms of privilege and oppression, about critical intersectionality, social work, different modes of teaching and learning, implications for being a social work student, b) new questions and issues, any worries, This final paper is due Saturday, September 9 by 11:59pm on Canvas. It should reflect the components of praxis—theorizing, acting and reflecting and include the cross-cutting themes (working at multiple systems levels, engaging with power and different types of power, multiple types of boundaries, etc;), and as many of the other 6 sets of capacities as you can.

Additional thoughts about how to develop this analytic reflection.

- Revisit briefly key topics covered in the course and how we accomplished these activities, your journaling entries, your philosophy statement and letter to yourself, and how these have evolved. See course description for suggested topics for this paper.
 - Visions for social justice (goals and processes) and relevant knowledge and skills

- Critical intersectionality concepts, boundaries, types and manifestations of power, importance of contexts
- Assumptions, principles, skills, knowledge for your future learning and practice
- How this class has contributed (or not) to your goals for future development and progress towards these. Implications for how you will approach your work as a student.
- Describe briefly one or two accomplishments/learnings from this course and any regrets
- How will you continue learning in the future
- Anything else important for you to convey about your experience, development, etc in relation to the courses
- Typically, first drafts of the paper can easily generate far more than the 3-4 pages we required. But the material is likely to be pretty rough, and not very focused or analytic.
- Next, you must figure out how to organize the material into themes and condense your initial reactions. This can lead to thinking and conceptions quite different than you initially thought. It can also help you to identify patterns that are difficult to articulate while you are experiencing them. The themes can be cross-cutting or follow the sequence of the course.
- Then you need to go back over assignment goals, resource materials, activities, etc., and make sure key elements are incorporated, and that you are using the concepts. This is likely to deepen your analyses, help you to apply new language in your analysis, may uncover new insights and themes, and often leads to some reorganization. This is likely to require additional condensations to foreground the main points and themes.
- Then there is the challenge of writing those themes with examples in ways that will allow us to understand what you mean (in other words, think about an audience other than yourself).

Schedule

Tuesday, August 29:

10:30 to noon: Introduction to the course and each other, multiple choices activity and overview of praxis, 5 minutes of journaling and written reactions to key dimensions and your choices and interactions..

12 to 1—Working lunch. Engage in praxis: “Unpack” previous activity, what did you notice, differences and similarities, tensions and convergences. Implications for climate building for rest of the session, for yourself, for class as a whole.

1 to 2:30-- What is Critical Intersectionality—key components, elements, farmeworks. Journaling about your reactions, questions and applications of key concepts.

2:30: preparation for trip to UMMA.

2:45: Divide into three groups and walk over to UMMA.

3: PM Begin the experience at UMMA. Store your belongings, get oriented. Get your worksheets out.

3:15 to 3:45 : First station

3:45 to 3:50 move to second station

3:50 to 4:20: Second station

4:20 to 4:25: move to third station

4:25 to 4:55: Third Station

Pick up your belongings. Gather in Commons area, if you are able to stay, and we can have some discussion. Whether you can stay or not, you should fill in parts of the worksheets, and do some journaling about your experiences and reactions.

Thursday, August 31:

On day two, we will reflect and build on frameworks and experiences from day one, and begin applications—in practice examples, and in the classroom. Then we will assess the experience and learning, prepare for the final assignment, and consider how we will continue to learn going forward.

We will start at 9 AM and end at 5 PM. We will provide lunch.

Additional Resource materials follow in this document: These include

- an initial glossary, p 7
- diagram of PRAXIS, p 12
- diagram of components of Critical Intersectionality (p 13), and
- seven sets of capacities for social justice practice. pp 14-15

Partial Glossary, relevant for Critical Intersectionality

CRITICAL SOCIAL THEORY: Bodies of knowledge and sets of institutional practices that actively grapple with the central questions facing groups of people. These groups are differently placed in specific political, social, and historic contexts characterized by injustice. What makes critical social theory “critical” is its commitment to justice, for one’s own group and/or for that of other groups, and its engagement in examining what contributes to patterns of injustice and how these can be disrupted.

INTERSECTIONALITY: [involves a major critique of multiculturalism]

Analysis claiming that systems of race, social class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, and age form mutually constructing features of social organization, which shape peoples’ experiences and, in turn are shaped by them. (Collins). Vary from context to context. Includes:

- Social locations: Positions of structural power, within matrices of oppression
- Social categories: Shared systems of meanings associated with social locations
- Social processes: Day to day group and organizational mechanisms that continually constitute social locations, categories and identities
- (situated) Social Identities: How people experience and internalize their social locations and social categories, influenced by their positions within social structures.

Types of intersectionality: Intersectionality can focus on intersectionalities:

- within one category,
- on relationships between categories, or
- endeavor to eliminate categories.
- Some approaches also examine different steps in oppression and privilege and pathways to different consequences.
- **WEAK INTERSECTIONALITY** (Dill and Kohlman, 2011) – the incorporation of multiple forms of diversity and identity into research questions and practice, but has the effect of “reproducing hegemonic knowledge (and practices) rather than challenging assumptions about social worlds and systems”
- **STRONG INTERSECTIONALITY** works to produce counterhegemonic knowledge and approaches to marginalized and subjugated social groups and/or about the operations of power and privilege. They analyze systems of inequality in relation to one another.

CONSCIOUSNESS: Process of bringing into awareness the multiple aspects of one’s experiences including historical, environmental, cultural, interpersonal and intrapersonal. The quality or state of being aware especially of something within oneself. The state or fact of being conscious of an external object, state, or fact. Awareness; especially : concern for some social or political cause.

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING: Experiences that help individuals or groups become more aware of the workings of political, social, economic, and/or cultural issues in their everyday lives. (PH Collins) The activity of seeking to make people more aware of personal, social, or political forces.

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS: A process of continuous self-reflection and action to discover and uncover how we, our approaches to social work practice, and our environments have been and continue to be shaped by societal assumptions and power dynamics: an essential tool to help us to recognize, understand and work to change the social forces that shape our societies, ourselves, and the lives of our clients and work for social justice. Elements of critical consciousness include:

- Reflecting on oneself historically, in relation to others, including an awareness of *intersectionality*—how one’s race, gender, class, and other group identities simultaneously work together to create one’s perception & experiences (Freire, 1972 p.16; Collins 2000);
- Developing “*structural perception*” – the ability to see or “unveil” the social, political, and cultural forces that shape our everyday experiences (Freire, 1985);
- Developing “*critical epistemology*”: - a radical curiosity re: the nature of knowledge & how different truth claims support social inequalities (Freire, 1972 p.18; Agger, 1998).
- A commitment to *learning dialogically* in specific contexts with others (Freire, 1972);
- A commitment to *ethical actions to end injustice* (Freire, 1972).

CULTURE: Behavior patterns, arts, beliefs, language, institutions, and all other products of human work and thought.

- CATEGORICAL APPROACHES--examination of distinctive traits that categorize a culture, e.g., language, values, assumptions and expectations about appropriate behavior and relationships, beliefs about what is important, social institutions and structures.
- TRANSACTIONAL APPROACHES--recognizes that how people behave and perceive the world and organize their institutions, are changed by the context of a particular environment or situation, and by the key characteristics of others involved in relevant transactions. Would also incorporate analysis of...
- The "CULTURE" of the SETTING or CONTEXT (e.g., norms, roles, interaction and decision-making styles)

DECENTERING: The unseating of those who occupy centers of power, as well as the knowledge that defends their power. Typically applied to elite White male power, the concept of decentering can apply to any type of group-based power. (PH Collins)

- Also often refers to interrogating “taken-for-granted” meanings, from the perspectives of those closer to the margins in any social system, and creating new, more inclusive meanings, of those that reflect perspectives from those marginalized in particular systems.
- Displace from the center or from a central position. Remove or displace (the individual human subject, such as the author of a text) from a primary place or central role. (Google)

DECONSTRUCTION: In its most general sense, a constellation of methodologies used to dismantle truths or perceived norms. Deconstructive methodologies generally use three steps: identifying the binaries or oppositions that structure an argument; revealing how the dependent, negative term creates conditions for the existence of the positive term; and replacing binaries with more fluid concepts. The goal is to transcend binary logic by simultaneously being both and neither or the binary terms. (PH Collins) A method of critical analysis of philosophical and literary language that emphasizes the internal workings of language and conceptual systems, the relational quality of meaning, and assumptions implicit in forms of expression.

DOMAINS OF POWER (PH Collins, drawing on Foucault):

- Disciplinary domain of power—a way of ruling that relies on bureaucratic hierarchies and techniques of surveillance
- Hegemonic domain of power—a form or mode of social organization that uses ideas and ideology to absorb and thereby depoliticize oppressed groups' dissent. Alternatively, the diffusion of power throughout the social system where multiple groups policy one another and suppress one another's dissent.
- Interpersonal domain of power--discriminatory practices of everyday lived experiences that because they are so routine typically go unnoticed or remain unidentified. Strategies of everyday racism and everyday resistance occur in this domain.
- Structural domain of power--a constellation of organized practices in employment, government, education, law, business, and housing that work to maintain an unequal and unjust distribution of social resources. Unlike bias and prejudice, which are characteristics of individuals, the structural domain or power operates through the laws and policies of social institutions.

DOMINATION/DOMINANCE: The systematic attitudes and actions of prejudice, superiority, and self-righteousness of one group (a non-target group) in relation to another (a target group). Internalized dominance includes the inability of a group or individual to see privilege as a member of the non-target group. The exercise of control or influence over someone or something, or the state of being so controlled. (Google)

EXPLOITATION: Benefitting from the labor of others The action or fact of treating someone unfairly in order to benefit from their work. The action of making use of and benefiting from resources. (Google)

MATRIX of DOMINATION: The overall organization of hierarchical power relations for any society. Any specific matrix of domination has 1) a particular arrangement of intersecting systems of oppression, e.g., race, social class, gender, sexuality, citizenship status, ethnicity and age; and 2) a particular organization of its domains of power, e.g., structural, disciplinary, hegemonic, and interpersonal (Collins).

"NON-CONSCIOUS" IDEOLOGY: Widely shared beliefs within a society about why things happen as they do. Most of these are incorporated into routine expectations about events and relationships, and those who hold them may not be aware of them. Such beliefs help to sustain the social order (e.g., Blacks or women are weak and unable to care for themselves).

OPPRESSION: An unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. Race, gender, class, sexuality, gender expression, nation, age, and ethnicity constitute major forms of oppression. [also disability status, religion] (Collins) Arbitrary and cruel use of power; using severe or unjust force or authority. The ways that people face barriers to participation in society, exercising rights and taking advantage of opportunities. Mechanisms that create and sustain oppression are multiple, work together, and are often not recognized (e.g., powerlessness, marginalization, exploitation, cultural hegemony, violence [I. M. Young]). An unjust situation where, systematically and over a long period of time, one group denies another group access to the resources of society. The exercise of authority or power in a burdensome, cruel, or unjust manner. An

act or instance of oppressing. The state of being oppressed. The feeling of being heavily burdened, mentally or physically, by troubles, adverse conditions, anxiety, etc.

POSITIONALITY: One's locations along the various axes of social group identities (ethnicity, race, sexual orientation, religion, economic class, gender, disability status, age).

PRAXIS: Processes of action, reflection, action. Using one's own agency as situated knowers to identify and deepen knowledge of your own standpoint and to use knowledge gained from practice to inform theory and vice versa. [from Collins--simultaneously, ideas that inform practice and practice that shapes ideas. The struggles of Black feminist through for self-definition and self-determination constitutes a Black feminist praxis] Practice, as distinguished from theory. (Google) Exercise or practice of an art, science, or skill. Practical application of a theory. (Merriam-Webster)

PRIVILEGE: An unearned advantage, immunity, permission, right, or benefit granted to or enjoyed by an individual because they are members of a category of people that is accorded higher societal status, often non-conscious. A special advantage, immunity, permission, right, or benefit granted to or enjoyed by an individual or a class. A privilege is not a right and in some cases can be revoked. For example, in some countries driving on publicly maintained roads is a privilege; in others it is a right. If one violates certain rules, driving privileges can be revoked, and if one causes harm to another while exercising the right to travel just compensation may be sought and awarded. Most of us have privilege related to one or more of our social categories, and this is often invisible. Unexamined and unrecognized privilege makes it difficult to recognize oppression that others experience. It also makes it difficult for us to be allies across categories. A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group of people. (Google) A right or immunity granted as a peculiar benefit, advantage, or favor : prerogative; especially : such a right or immunity attached specifically to a position or an office (Merriam-Webster)

RESISTANCE: "An act or instance of opposition; An opposing or retarding force; An underground organization" (Merriam Webster, 1998). In psychology, "resistance" is used to describe personality factors that we use to both avoid and cope with change and stress (Wade & Tavis, 1998). In literature on privilege, "resistance" is used to describe an individual or group's difficulty to reflect upon and understand the inherent benefits of their position in the social matrix (Fine et al, 1997; McIntosh, 1989). In literature on oppression, "resistance" describes the subversive ways in which people who are oppressed exert dignity and agency in the presence of dehumanizing circumstances (Kesselman, et. al, 1997)

- In systems, ecological, and field theories, "resistance" is a force that helps organisms and social systems to remain stable, to retain homeostasis.
- The refusal to accept or comply with something; the attempt to prevent something by action or argument. The ability not to be affected by something, especially adversely. (Google)
- A psychological defense mechanism wherein a patient rejects, denies, or otherwise opposes the therapeutic efforts of a psychotherapist. (Merriam-Webster)

RIGHTS: The power or liberty to which one is justly entitled or a thing to which one has a just claim. Rights serve as rules of interaction between people, and, as such, they place constraints and obligations

upon the actions of individuals or groups (for example, if one has a right to life, this means that others do not have the liberty to murder him; if one has a right to a free public education, this may impose on someone else the requirement to pay taxes to pay the costs of that education). A moral or legal entitlement to have or obtain something or to act in a certain way. (Google)

SUBJUGATED KNOWLEDGE: The secret knowledges generated by oppressed groups. Such knowledge typically remains hidden because revealing it weakens its purpose of assisting them in dealing with oppression. Subjugated knowledges that aim to resist oppression constitute oppositional knowledges (Collins).

SURVEILLANCE: A strategy of control whereby people's words and actions are constantly watched and recorded (Collins). This term originally comes from Foucault as does disciplinary as Collins uses this.

Example of a positionality

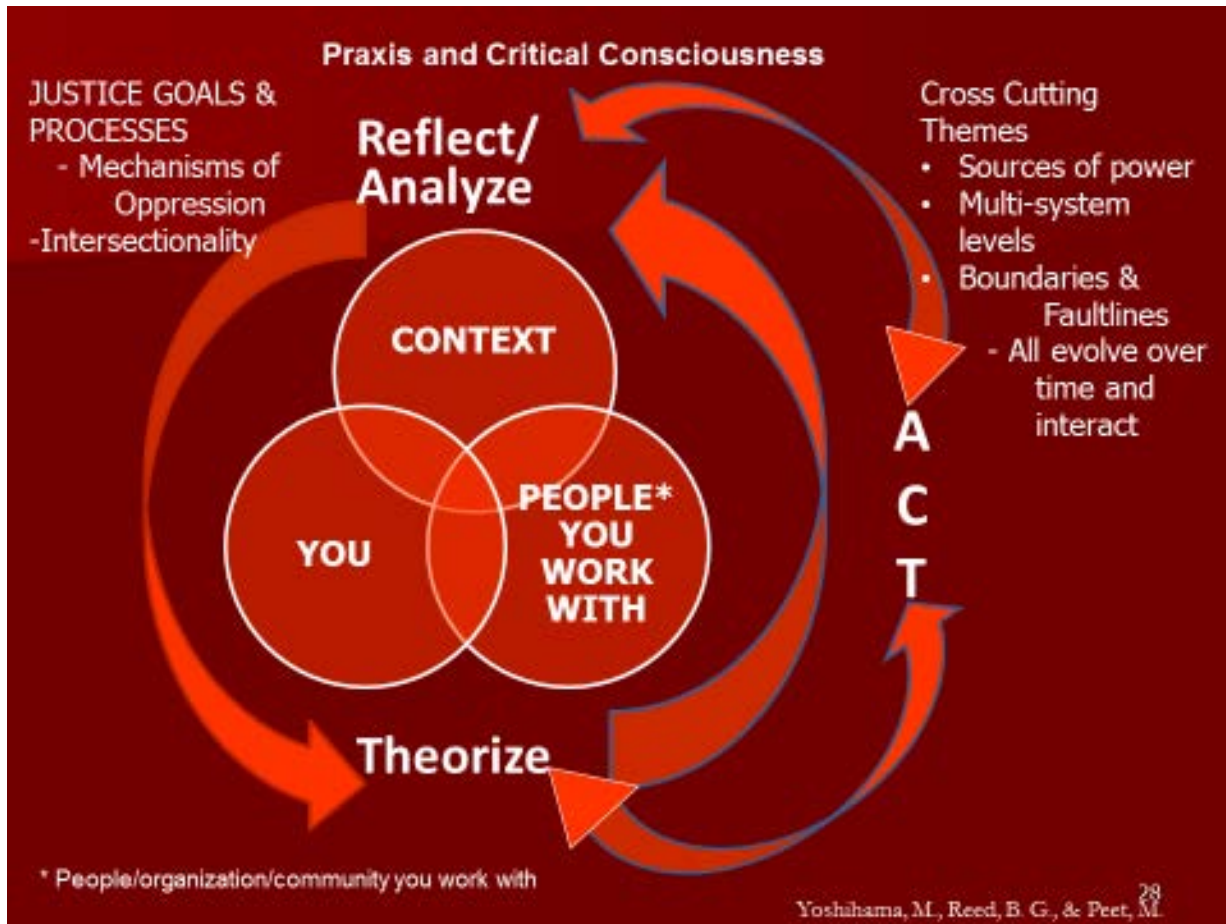
TRANSGENDER PERSON: An overarching term applied to a variety of individuals, behaviors, and groups involving tendencies that diverge from the normative gender role (woman or man) commonly, but not always, assigned at birth, as well as the role traditionally held by society. Characterized sometimes as a continua, mosaic, or fluid and shifting.

Many other terms and categories are relevant for particular positionalities.

Power

Many other terms are also relevant for different kinds of **power** (in addition to domains of power listed earlier).

- Position power is a type of structural power, deriving from one's formal roles, and positions within systems of hierarchies, within organizations, for instance.
- The power to control definitions and understandings.
- Expert power arises from earned knowledge and skills, recognized by others
- Reward and punishment power arises from control of resources and the ability to withhold or punish those with less status and resources
- Reference power arises from mutual respect, in which people aspire to acquire characteristics in an admired group or person.
- Collective power—arises from working with others
- Power over, vs power with, power to do (get things done), power within.

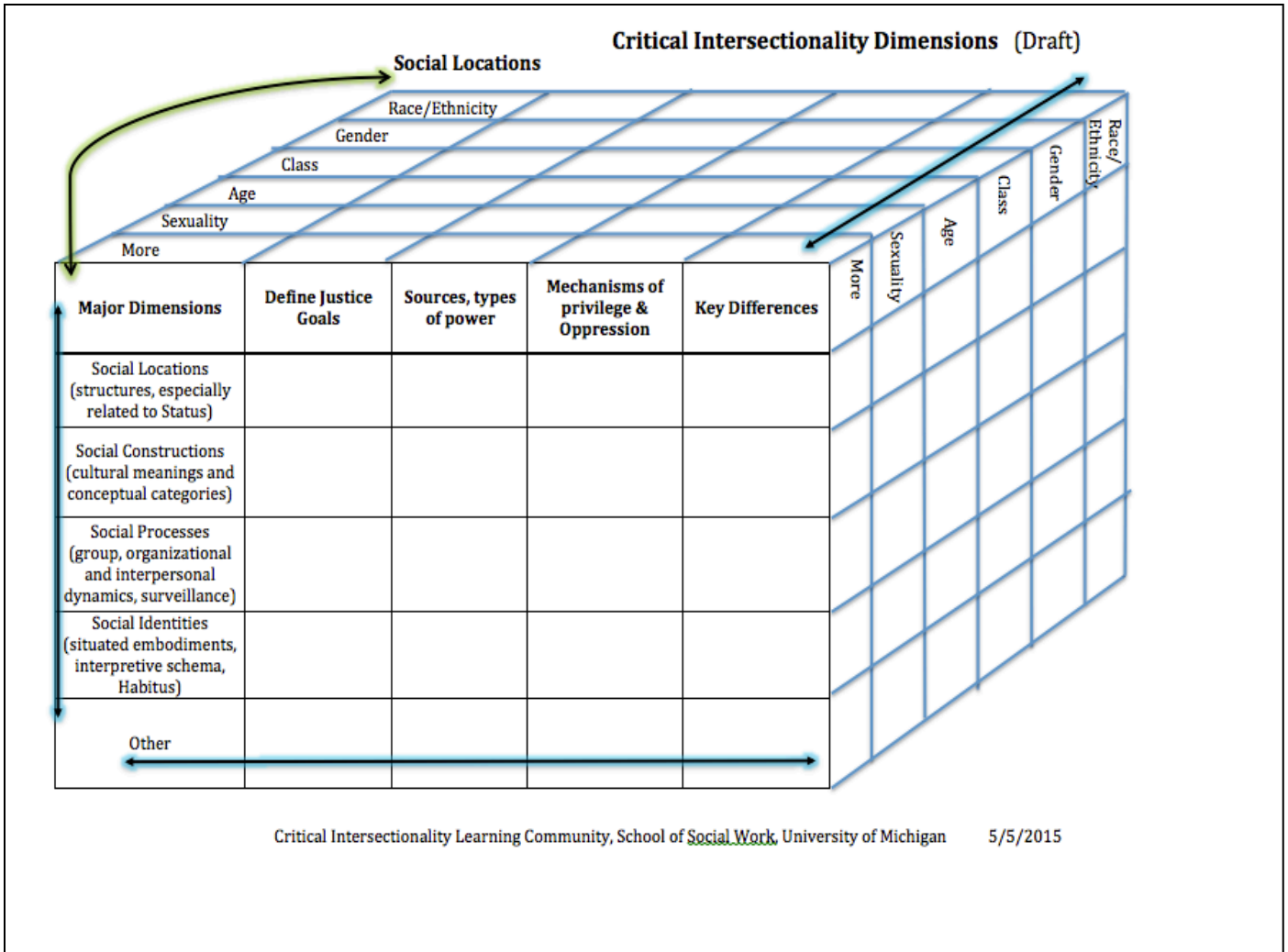


This is a diagram of the components of Praxis, with theorizing, and acting happening iteratively with regular reflection/analyses. The reflections and analyses needs to include the larger contexts, yourself, and all those with whom you work (these can include collaborators, co-workers, and also those who are clients, targets of organizing efforts, and people located within your organization and other locations relevant for your work.

All of this should occur within conscious and explicit consideration of what your social and economic goals are longer term, differences and similarities among the positionalities of those involved, and what mechanisms of privilege and oppression are likely to be most important in particular contexts.

Components of Critical Intersectionality and their relationships

Larger Contexts will influence the goals, which positionalities are most relevant, and what salience and meanings different elements have.



Social Justice Capacities and Skills

