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Intersectionality and cultural inclusion in family violence work

Hala Abdelnour

SPEAQ Forum 2025

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Acknowledgement of Country

We are meeting on unceded lands, and we honour the Traditional Custodians and thank them for their care of the land, the species, the waterways and all second nations who live here.

We pay our respect to their Elders past and present and extend that respect to any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people here today.

We note that the privilege many of us enjoy came at a great cost to others, that sovereignty was never ceded, and that injustice continues to this day. We also note that First Nations Peoples are disproportionately impacted by the issues we're here to discuss.

We collectively commit to walking with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people in a spirit of harmony towards a future where all people have equal opportunity to belong, contribute and thrive in this society.





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Honouring Lives and Teachers

We remember and honour those whose work informs us today, those whose guidance we follow and those who have lived experiences of gender inequity/ racism and other forms of discrimination, including those who have lost their lives to various forms of violence.

We value their impact as we work together to build social structures and systems that are collaborative, equitable, just and non-violent.



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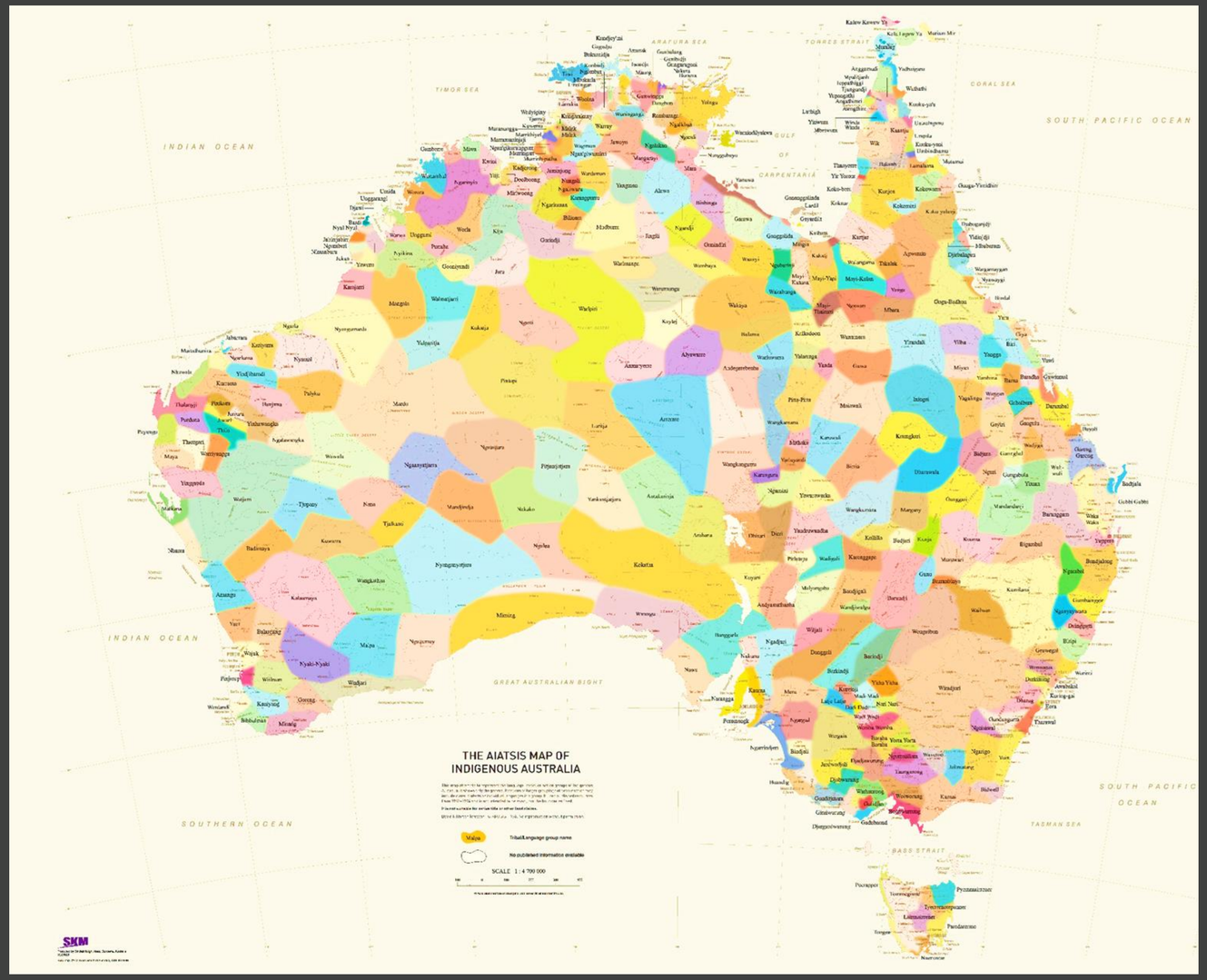
What I hope to explore with you

History and emergence of Intersectionality Theory

Link between intersectionality and justice

Consider how our DFV interventions might better incorporate systemic equity

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Diversity is a fact

Justice, Equity and Inclusion are a choice

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Reflection on Justice

In pairs, discuss:

– what does justice mean to you in the context of your work?

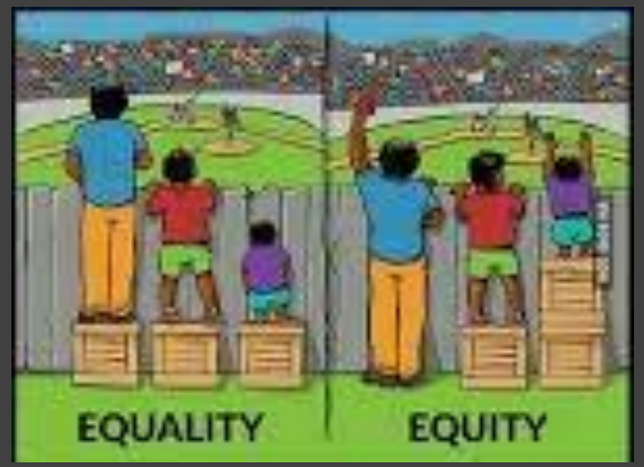
– what is important for our sector to consider in relation to justice?

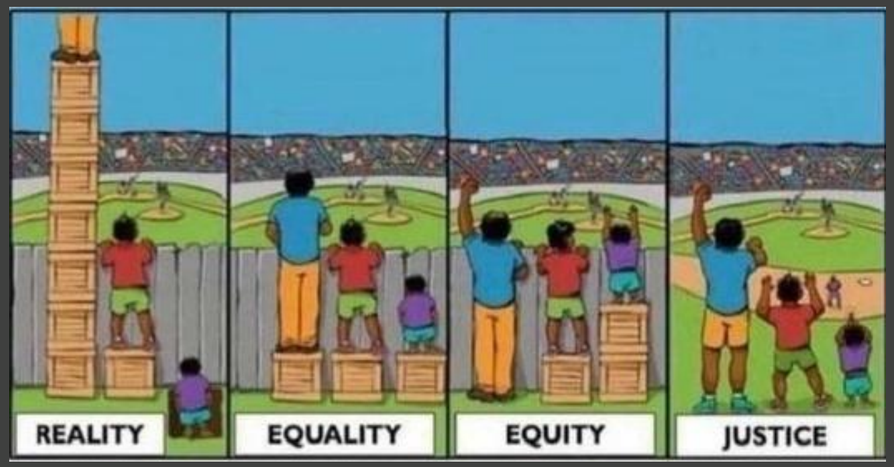
– what systems of injustice can you identify that impact your clients?

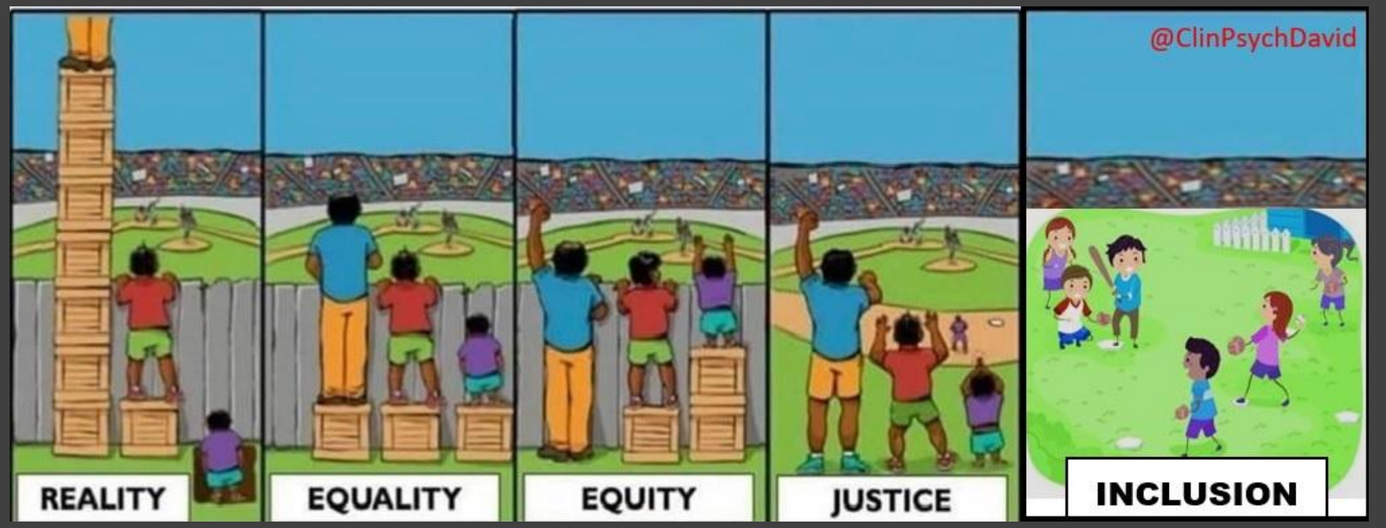


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Intersectionality Theory

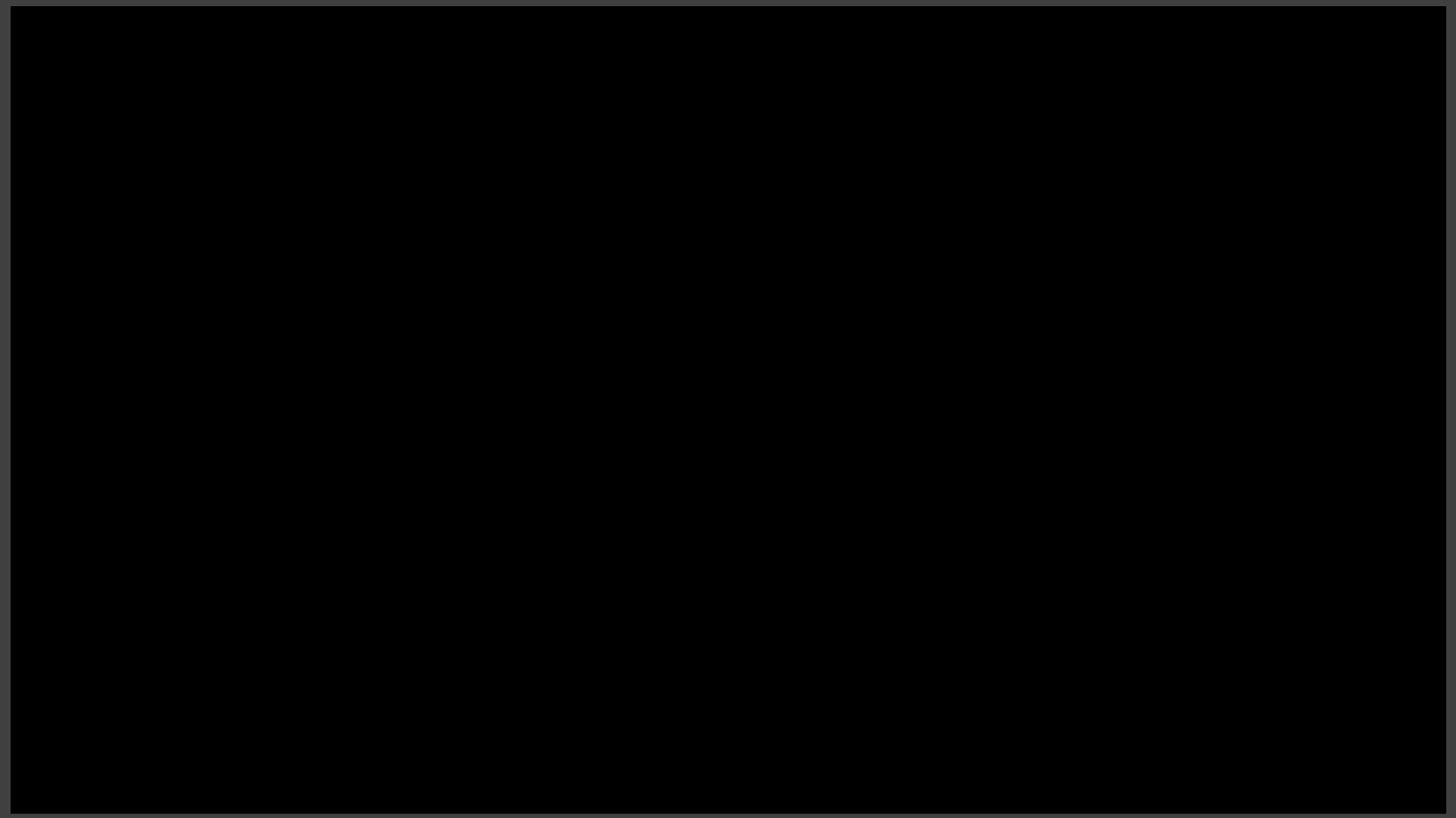
At the core of Intersectionality theory was a focus on black women – recently termed ‘misogynoir’.



“What happens to Black women in public space isn’t about them being any woman of color. It is particular and has to do with the ways that anti-Blackness and misogyny combine to malign Black women in our world.”

~ Moya Bailey

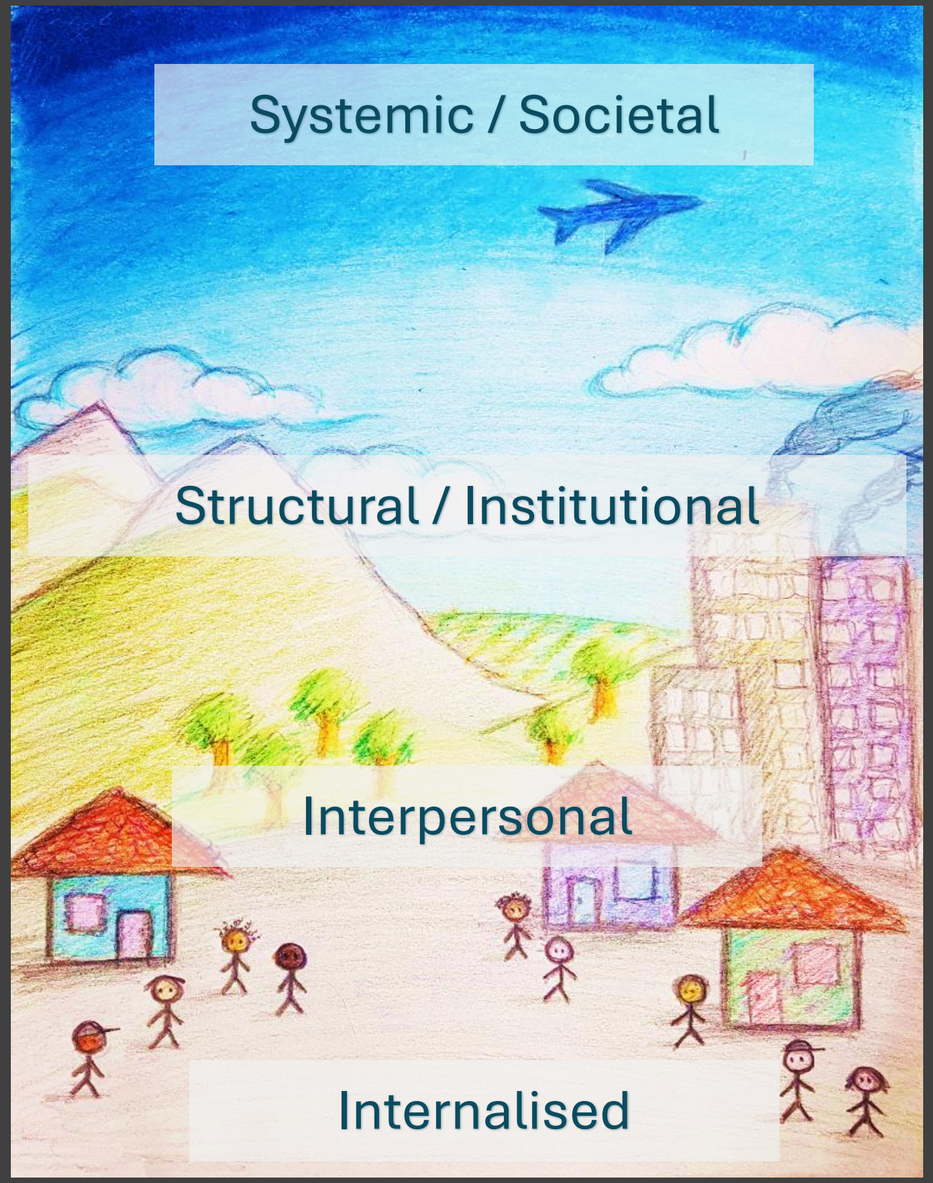
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Kimberle Williams Crenshaw | Structural & Political Intersectionality | Omega Women's Leadership Center, 2007

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Four Layers of Prejudice



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Intersectionality - Relevance

Assumes colonial power and oppression will be reproduced through our theories, practices, trainings and institutions



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The Confronting Past of the Australian Parliament | *Ms Represented* with Annabel Crabb
ABC TV & iView, 19 July 2021

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Prejudice in Justice Processes

- All strip searching of children between 2018-2020
- Almost 3,000 instances
- Poor governance – safeguards and protections
- Little consideration for traumatic impact
- ‘forgetting children were children’
- 95% boys
- Black children 11 times more likely to be strip-searched than were white children

Source: Children’s Commissioner Report of Strip-Searching Children in England and Wales(2023), via the work of Dr Anne Aiyegbusi

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Examples of Systemic Reform

Respect Victoria, working with the Victorian Gender Equality Commissioner, recently acknowledged

The Australian Justice system:

- Was established more than 120yrs ago
- Protected the rights of white male property owners
- Extinguished the rights of First Nations people
- Women cast as property
- Entrenched in tradition and is slow to evolve
- Reflect prevailing ideas of ‘justice’
- Is a product of the community we live in
- Change means taking an intersectional feminist approach to applying systems thinking

Achieving justice in family violence prevention requires:

- workplaces to:
  - ✓ Prevent sexual harassment
  - ✓ Address inequalities
  - ✓ Be safe places to work

And for

- Institutions:
  - ✓ Diverse representation is critical
  - ✓ Conscious and unconscious bias is addressed

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An Australian Case Study

Ms Dhu

- Aboriginal woman – aged 22
- Police called to home in 2014 – domestic violence
- Although victim - Ms Dhu also arrested for unpaid fines
- Repeatedly asked for medical care due to searing pain in ribs
- Police assumed she was feigning and medical staff downplayed her reports of pain and difficulty breathing
- Collapsed and died alone in cell 2 days later
- Found to have had fractured rib inflicted by partner
- Cause of death sepsis due to injuries inflicted and re-inflicted

Source: Death of Ms Dhu, Wikipedia

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What is Intersectional Feminism

Firstly, what do we understand about feminism in FDV?

A feminist approach acknowledges that:

- FDV is gendered in nature
- FDV is perpetrated predominantly by men against women
- most women who commit acts of violence against men are often victims of violence themselves

Intersectional feminism, acknowledges that other **systemic inequalities**, **social conditions**, and **personal factors** interact with, and reinforce gender (and other) inequalities.

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Inclusive Practice

Our work must challenge violence-condoning narratives whilst:

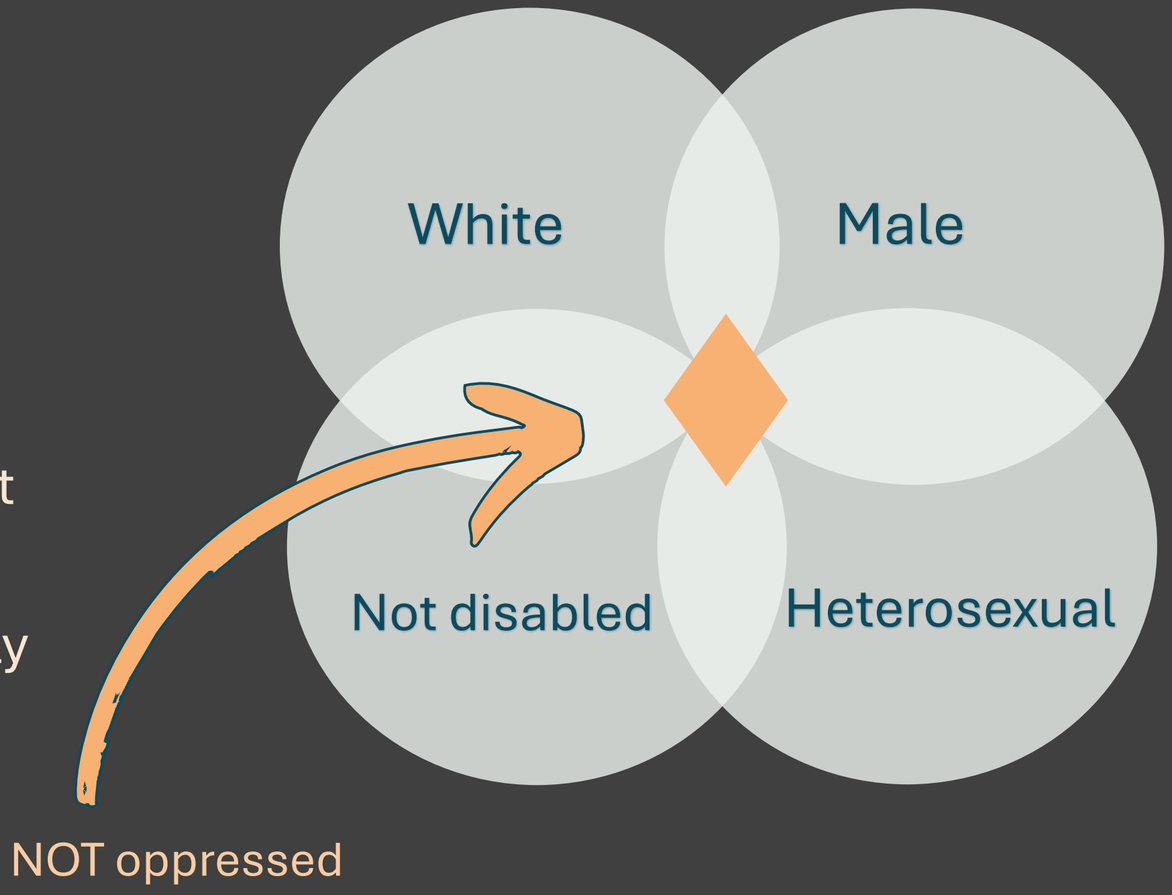
- being respectful of differences in lived experiences based on personal traits and characteristics
- being aware of existing oppressive structures
- being aware of our own implicit biases and how these impact our work
- being aware of our position of power and how we can use this to create inclusion, equity, justice and safety

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Where are you placed as a worker?

Structural intersectionality acknowledges that:

- Many people who are oppressed also have access to some forms of privilege and vice versa.
- Not all men benefit equally from patriarchy and white people don't benefit equally from racism.
- Most people cannot be categorised solely as privileged or oppressed.



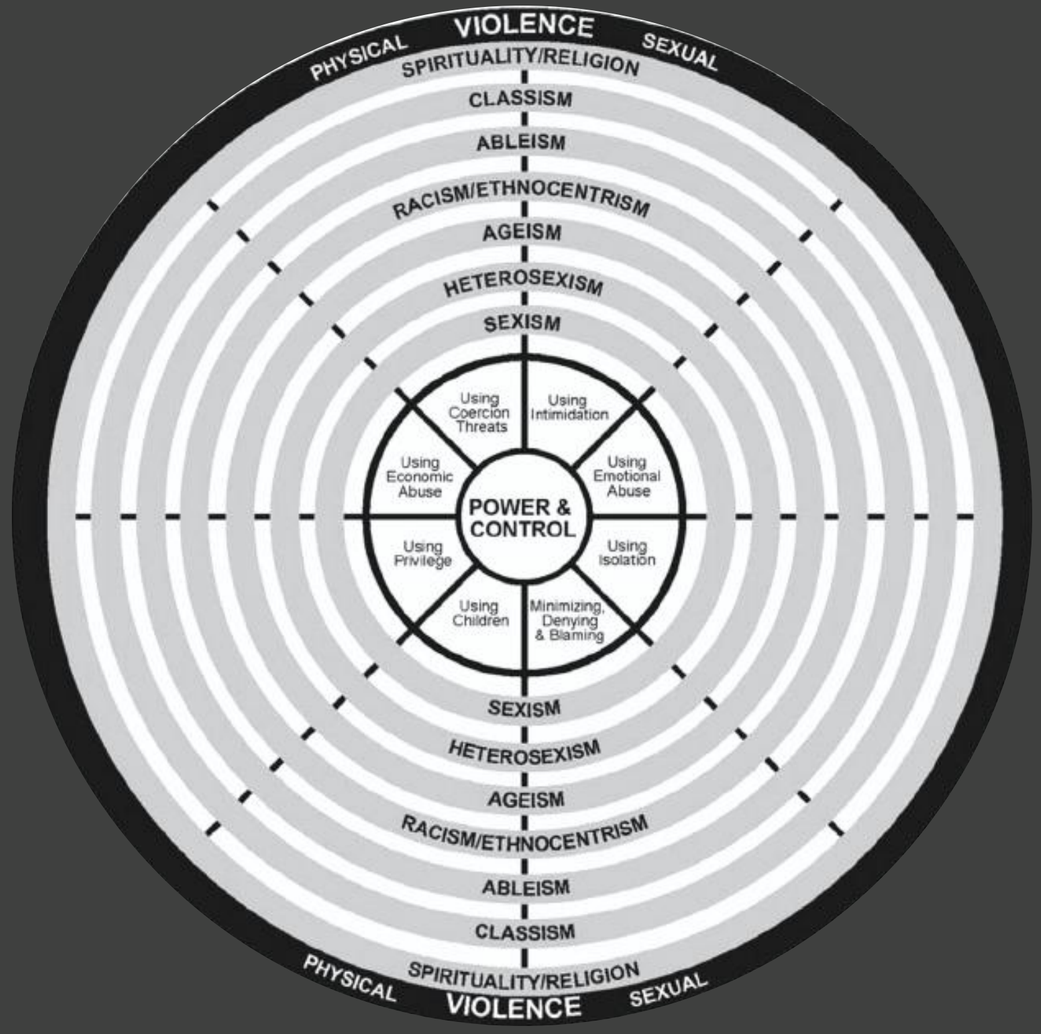
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Where is your client placed?

Structural intersectionality:

Looks at how systems are structured in ways that create significant (dis)advantages to individuals and groups.

Asks us to place ourselves within the system at any point in time, as our positioning can change significantly within our specific context.



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Principles of engagement: JEDI

To achieve equity, justice and inclusion for all individuals:

- We must become more aware of the systems and structures of discrimination, how they impact each of us, and respectfully bring this into our work.
- Why? Because, then we would be truly demonstrating something other than a power and control dynamic.
- We must be prepared to challenge and change systems of oppression.

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Resources

ANROWS Notepad (collection of research)

bell hooks

Kimberle Crenshaw

Dr Anne Aiyegbusi

Wabano Centre for Aboriginal Health

The Women's Centre, U.S.

College of Social Sciences and Humanities, U.S.

Kelly, Ursula (2011), Theories of Intimate Partner Violence: From Blaming the Victim to Acting Against Injustice Intersectionality as an Analytic Framework, Vol 34

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Thank you.

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