

## What is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality theory, developed by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), posits that the intersecting and overlapping aspects of identity modulate the way people experience the world, especially through how they are perceived and treated in society. First used to describe the experiences of Black women, intersectionality theory explains that since identities interact and do not operate independently, oppression or power can be compounded in certain individuals.

Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory and antiracist politics. University of Chicago Legal Forum, Vol. 1989: Issue 1, Article 8.

## Identity Table

There are many aspects of our individual intersectional identities. The following table arranges some aspects of identity into categories and provides multiple examples of identities that may fall into each category. This table is not meant to be comprehensive in either the categories or the examples. Rather it is our intention to invite you to examine many of the identities you hold, and think about how different aspects of your identity may interact. The examples given here were developed in the context of an American university, but it is important to note that different aspects of our identities may be more or less salient in different settings.

Identity category	Examples of identities
Race	Black, indigenous, multiracial, person of color, white, etc.
Ethnicity	"American," Middle Eastern, Navajo, Nigerian, Puerto Rican, Russian, South American, Western European, etc.
National Origin	"foreign born" (born in a country other than the U.S.), U.S. born, etc.
Immigration Status	Green Card holder, non-U.S. citizen, undocumented, U.S. citizen, etc.
Skin Color or Phenotype	Aboriginal, African, Asian, brown skin, Caucasian, dark skin, etc.
Size or Appearance	fitting or not fitting society's image of athletic, beautiful, short, tall, thick, thin, etc.
Ableness or Health	able-bodied, emotional, mental, physical, or learning disability, persistent or temporary health issue(s), etc.
Sex Assigned at Birth	female, male, intersex, etc.
Gender Identity	cisgender (perception of gender being congruent with sex assigned at birth), transgender (perception of gender being incongruent with sex assigned at birth), etc.
Gender Expression	appearance, behavior, and other characteristics that may or may not conform to social expectations of masculinity and femininity, etc.
Sexual Orientation	asexual, bisexual, gay, heterosexual, lesbian, queer, etc.
Religious or Spiritual Affiliation	Agnostic, Atheist, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jehovah Witness, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, Spiritual, etc.
Social or Economic Class	impoverished, upper class, working class, etc.
Geographic Location	rural, urban, suburban, poorer or wealthier region, etc.
Education or Credential Level	four-year degree, high school degree, PhD, private school, public school, etc.
English Language Proficiency	having an "accent," proficient in "standard" English, speaking in a non-standard dialect, etc.
Age	late 30s, early 50s, older, younger, etc.
Years of Work Experience	less or more years' experience, junior, senior, etc.
Work Style	analytical, creative, extroverted, introverted, process-oriented, task-oriented, etc.
Marital Status	civil union, divorced, married, single, unmarried partnership, widowed, etc.
Parent's Status	parents divorced, parent(s) imprisoned, parents married, raised by non-birth parent(s), non-traditional parent(s), etc.
Parental Status	married with kids, married without kids, unmarried parent, etc.

Adapted from NCORE Pre Conference "Intersectional Interventions: Supporting Queer and Trans Students of Color", Michael Riley, Nathan Nguyen, Romeo Jackson, and Vanessa Gonzalez-Siegel, and from a Worksheet by Abigail Francis, former Assistant Dean of Intercultural Engagement for LGBTQ Services, MIT

## Identity Wheel

Another way to visualize how your different identities come together is through compiling an identity wheel. Identity wheels are graphic representations of our intersectional identities, where we can fill in the identities we hold under different categories. In this version there are three layers of different identity categories, the innermost layer contains aspects of identity that are often central to how we think about ourselves and are less subject to change. The middle layer of identity categories contains aspects of our identity that may change with time and context. The outermost layer does not contain any categories. This layer is for you think about what aspects of your own identity have not been captured by the other two layers. Filling out this wheel can help you think through which identities you hold and how they may interact.



Materials adapted from "Inclusive Teaching" an online module developed by Dr. Darcy Gordon