

**Social Justice, Cultural Humility and Social Work
Supervision
Norah Hosken**

**BSW, PhD Candidate, Lecturer and Field Education
Coordinator in Social Work at Deakin University,
Geelong, Victoria**

An emergent supplemental approach for social work supervision

- within Australia informed by locally accountable intersectionality, critical anti-racism, Whiteness and post-colonial perspectives using critical relational-reflexivity, and cultural humility that embeds in a social justice framework.
- that invites the views of all those involved and affected by social work supervision, and privileges the views of those with the least power in those situations.

Using experience, stories and theories to improve supervision

I have found that many clients, students, and workers, particularly those from working-class, Aboriginal, and minority culture backgrounds in Australia have talked and written with/to me in ways that combine experience, life stories, practice and theory. Over the years I have reciprocated and use this way of sharing information to commence this presentation.

The story of seeing a white woman

‘Norah, you need to do something about your people, it is just not right that you leave each other all alone’.

I had come out of a social work degree managing to not realise I was a member of a racial/ethnic group in Australia that was dominant, had particular family and other cultural values and practices, and whose ideology was embedded in every institution and practice that, as refugee workers, we encountered and advocated against.

The story of seeing racialised practices

‘The Aboriginal and minority culture background women waited, despaired and watched as the white women and their children moved in and out of the refuge, and they were left behind.’

Racialised, classed and gendered practices

‘...practices can be racialised, classed and gendered and therefore racist, classist and sexist with, or without, intent being present on behalf of those designing them to be so. The measure is if these practices have ‘an unequal effect on the rights and freedoms of the individual or group involved’ (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 2000)’.

Intent may not be actively present because institutions and work processes were, and are, often constructed reflecting the needs and worldviews of those people of specific genders, racial/ethnicities and classes who dominate.

The story of experience and naming theories

At the time I did not name the experiences and the resultant learning described above as me having engaged and struggled with the complexities and nuances of Whiteness, critical post-colonial, anti-racist and intersectional theories. Nor did I name having used the skills of cultural humility, critical relational-reflexivity and mutual-inquiry.

Listening and being accountable to students, supervisees and clients

Accountability to students across personal/ professional, organisational/cultural and structural/ political levels.

In a similar way to when I am in direct client and community practice, though, I find the 'easy road' with feedback is to hear and try to change those aspects that require the least risk or change for me at the personal/ professional level.

Thompson's (2006) 'PCS analysis'
(pp. 26-30):

Hegemony
Dominant Ideology
Ideology

In trying to understand and hold the competing views and realities of myself, students and others across these intersecting levels:

I am motivated and haunted by feelings of accountability, summed up in the following quote:

‘It is not who we are that defines us, but what we do’.

(As I have teenage children, this quote is not from an academic publication, but from the flawed main character in the latest Batman movie).

**Accountability to clients across personal/
professional, organisational/cultural and
structural/political levels.**

Accountability by 'imagine and hold in the room'

**Privilege-oppression critical relational
-reflexivity, critical whiteness and
doing/modelling to improve supervision**

Critical relational- reflexivity

...questions how knowledge is generated and, further, how relations of power influence the processes of knowledge generation.... The reflexive practitioner is aware of the assumptions that underlie how they make sense of practice situations (Sheppard,1998) and the cognitive processes by which knowledge is created (Sheppard *et al.*, 2000). What we know and how we know become the foci of scrutiny, along with an awareness of how relations of power are complicit in knowledge creation in social work practice... reflexivity can be relational when knowledge constructed by practitioners about clients is shared with clients and discussed openly between practitioners and clients (D'Cruz, et al., 2007, pp. 77-79).

Intersectionality

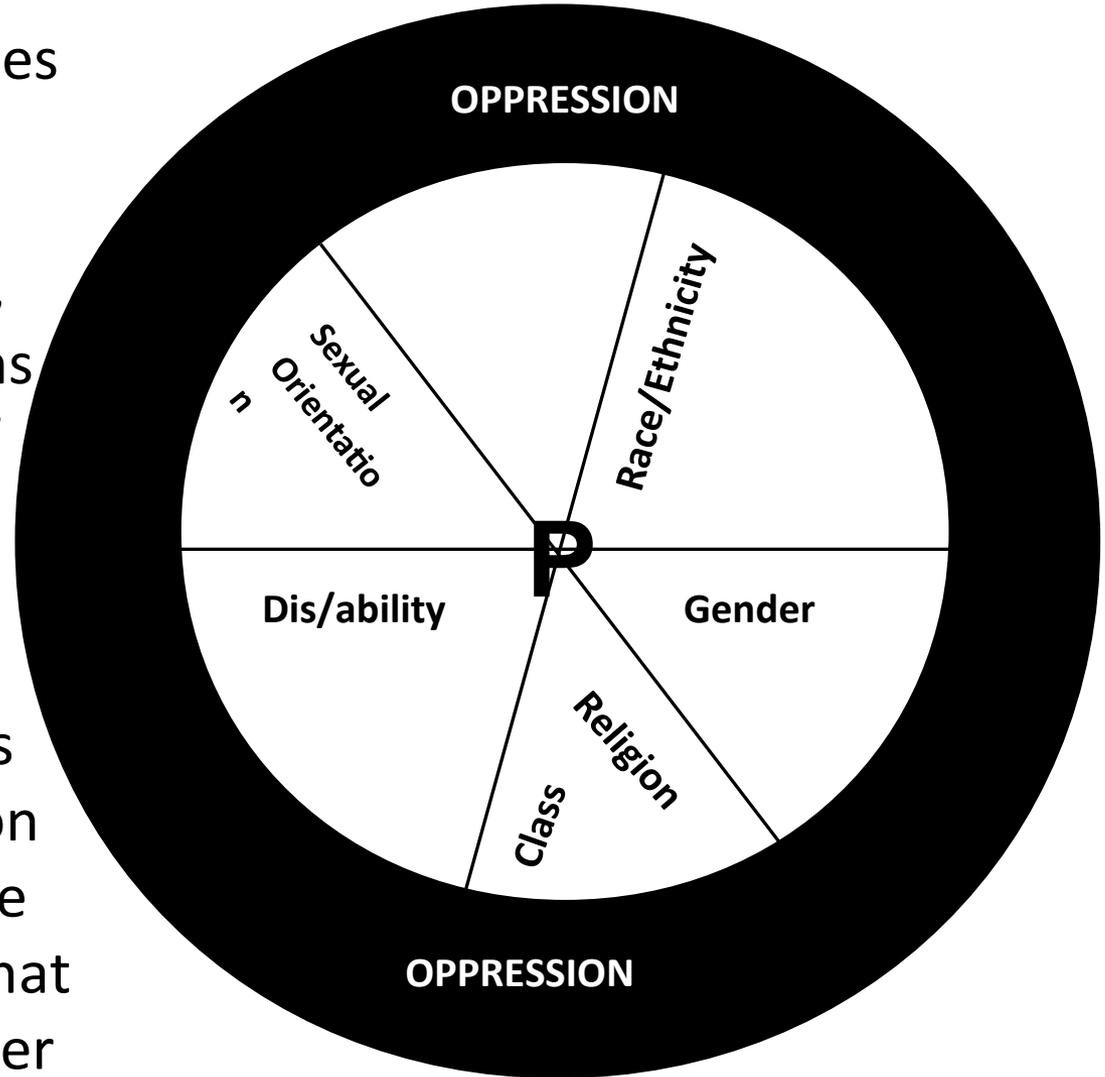
Sociologist Patricia Hill

Collins (2000, p.18) defines intersectionality as 'particular forms of intersecting oppressions, for example, intersections of race and gender, or of sexuality and nation.'

She goes on to say:

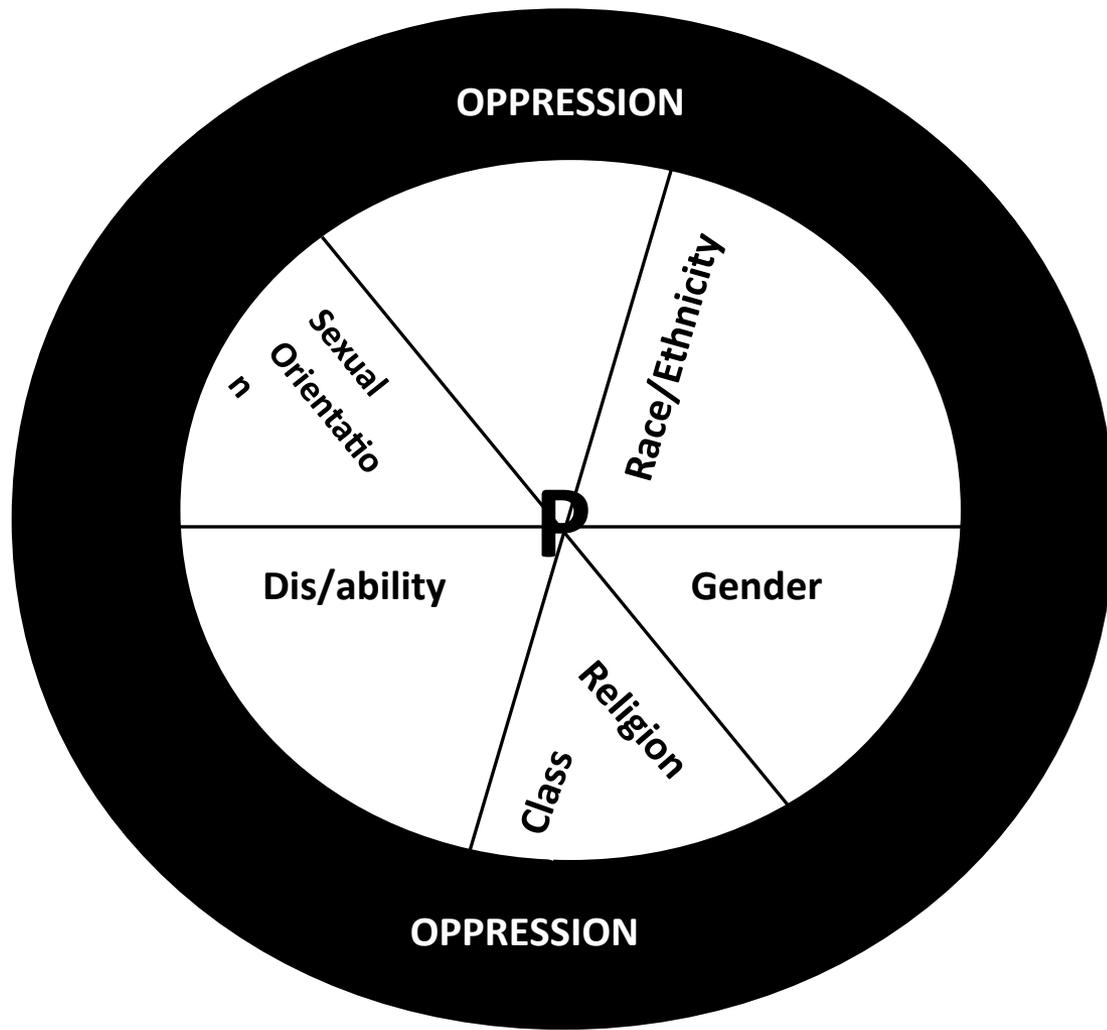
'intersectional paradigms remind us that oppression cannot be reduced to one fundamental type, and that oppressions work together in producing injustice.'

Discuss 'mythical norm'

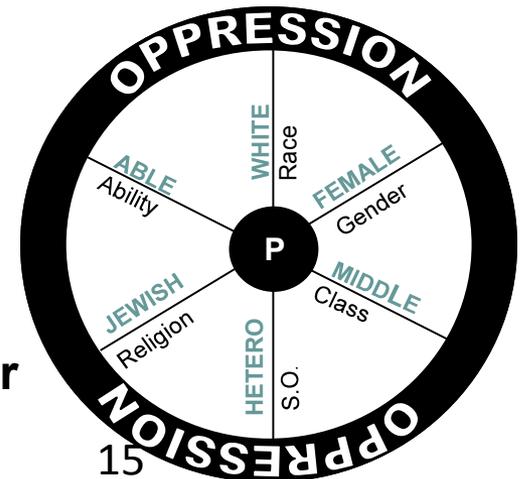


Samuels (2007) Wheel of Oppression revised from McIntosh 1989 and 2003.

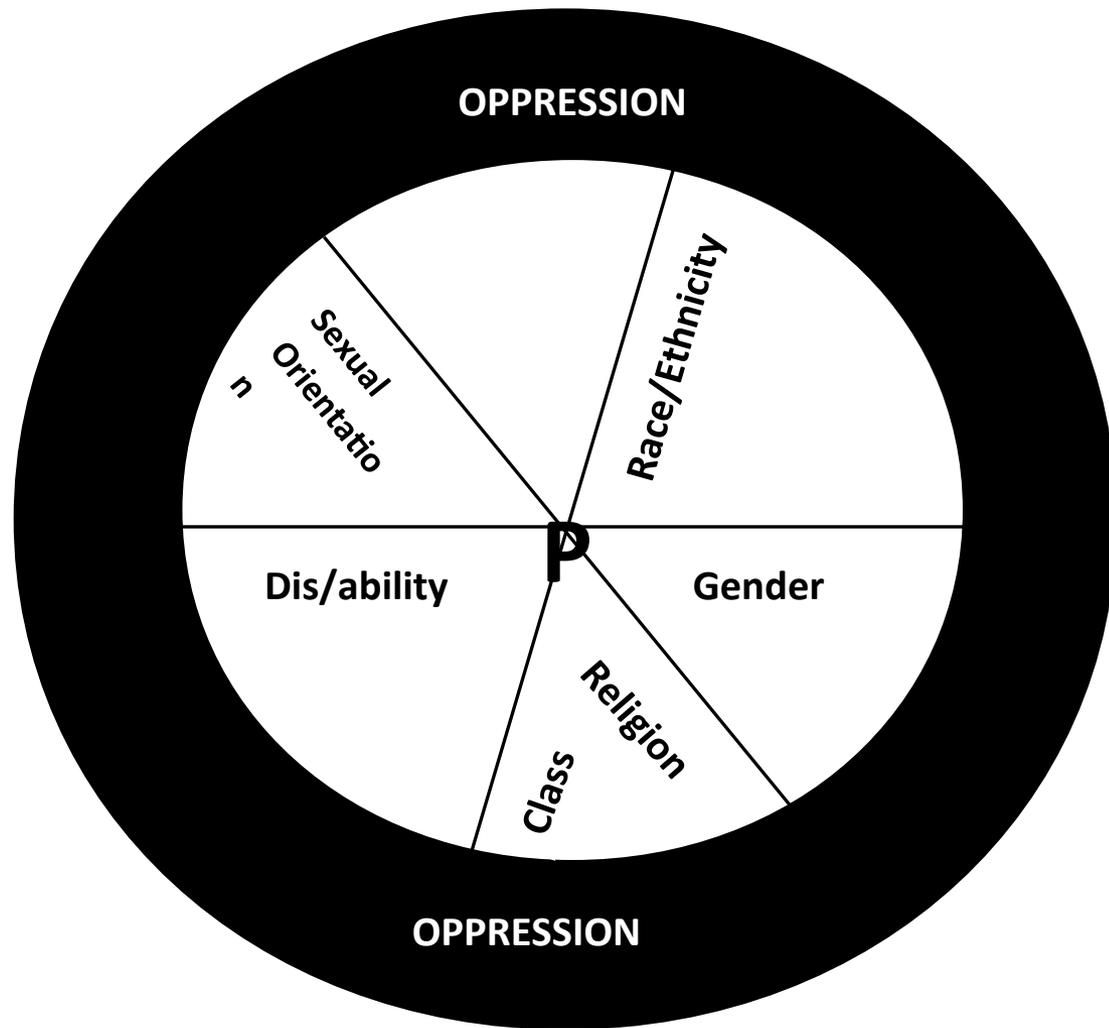
Exercise to develop self and supervisee awareness of social and cultural location and privilege. Each spoke represents a social location. Please fill in your status above the spoke.
P-Privilege



Example

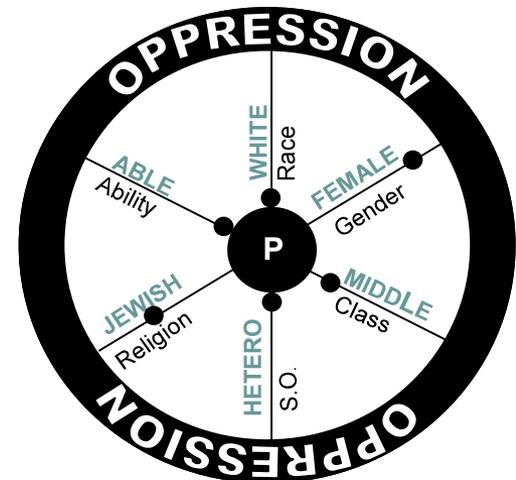


Samuels (2007) Wheel of Oppression and Pedagogy for social justice exercises.

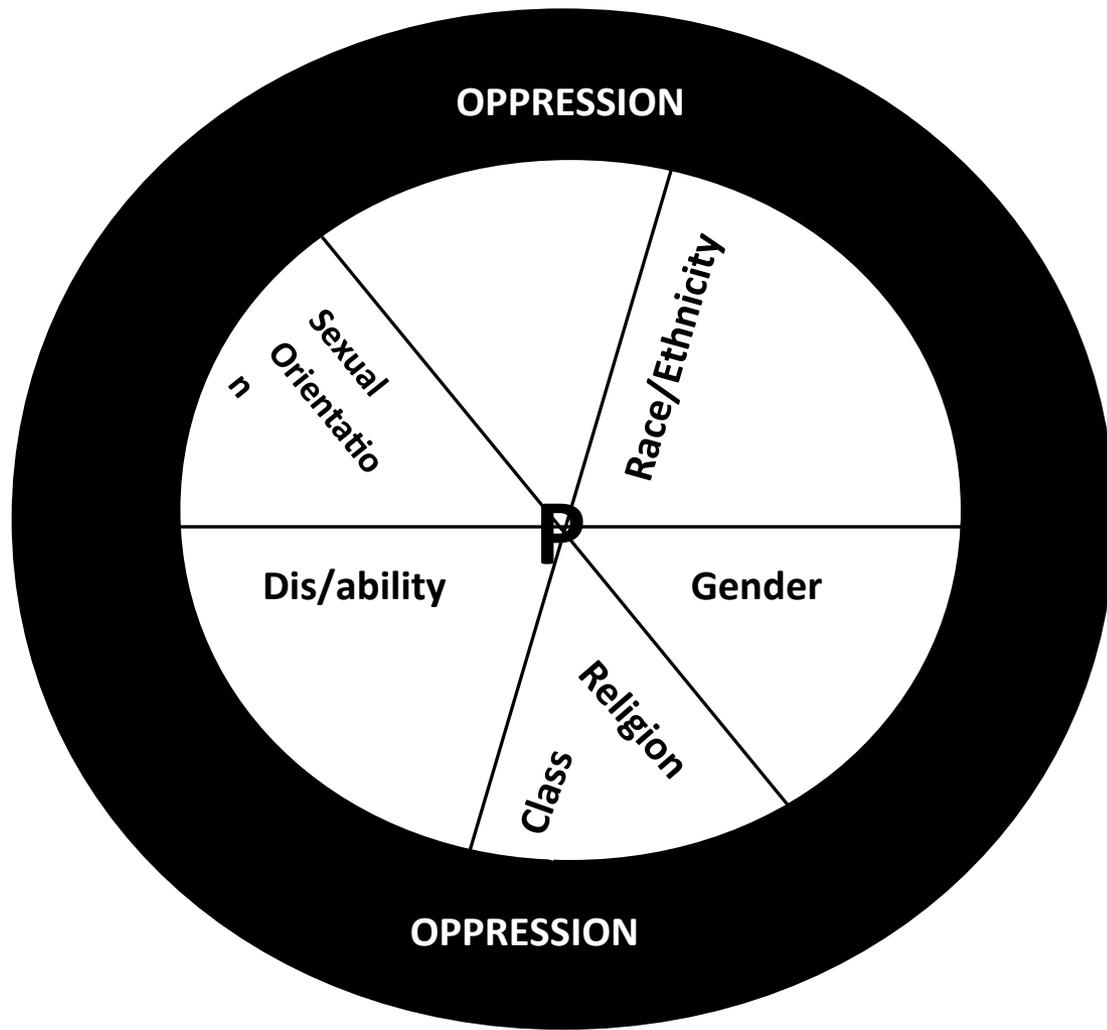


Please make a mark on each spoke of the wheel to indicate whether you are closer to or further away from the 'mythical norm'.

Example

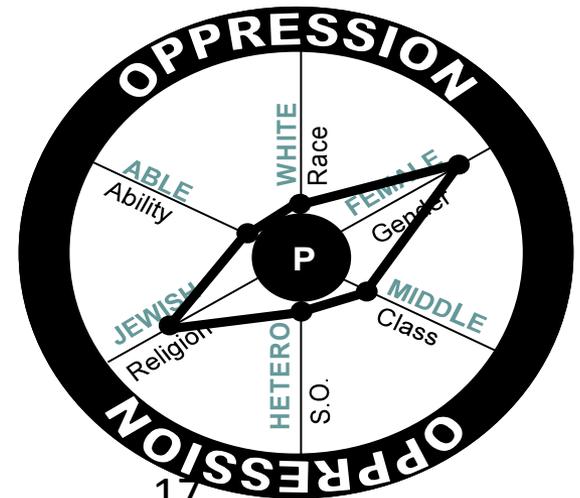


Samuels (2007) Wheel of Oppression and Pedagogy for social justice exercises revised from McIntosh (1989 and 2006) .

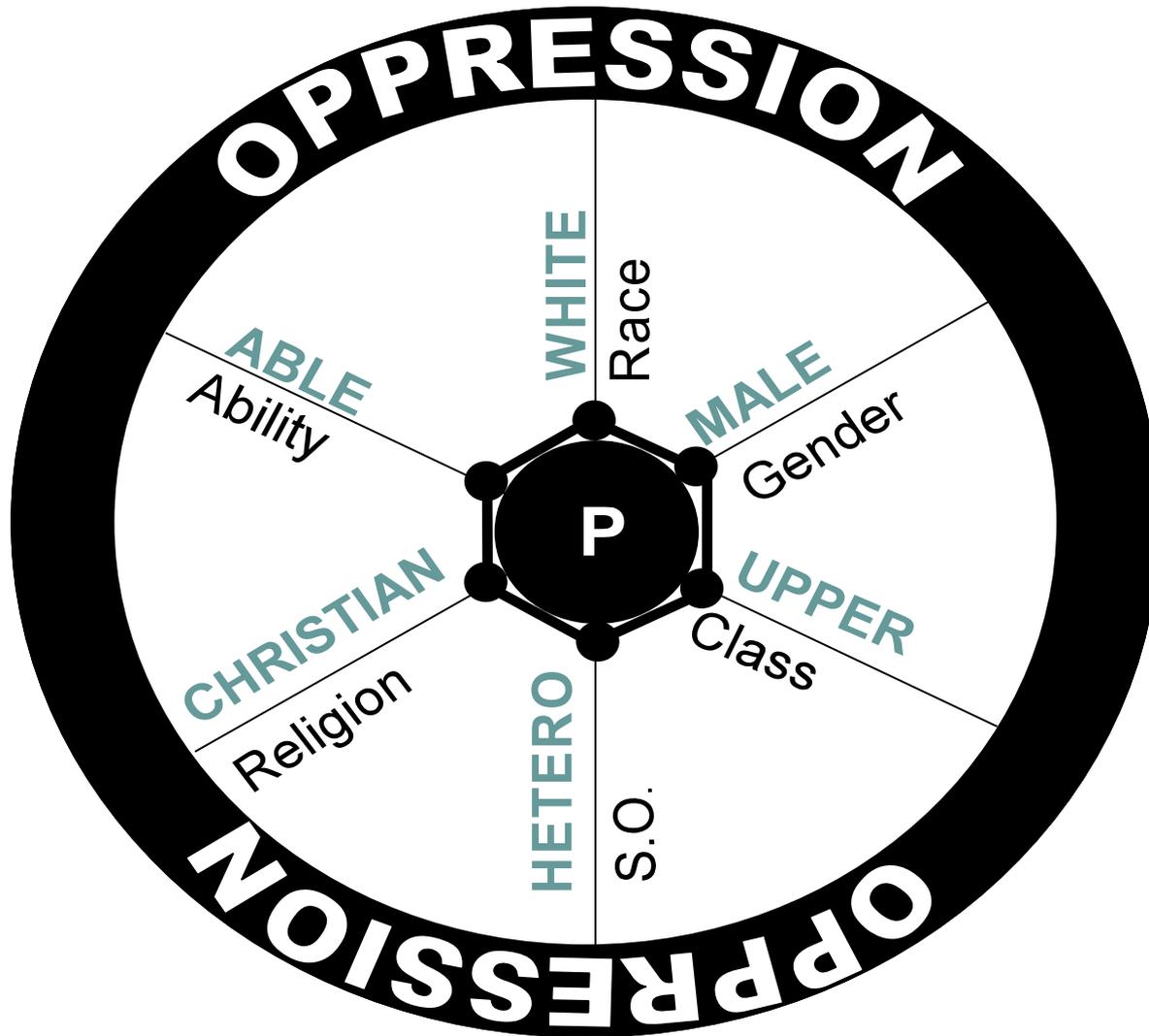


Please connect the dots on your wheel. This is a two-dimensional model of how your statuses intersect and work together to privilege or oppress.

Example



Samuels (2007) Wheel of Oppression exercises.



**Samuels (2007) visual representation of
Collin's (1990) Matrix of domination**

University discourse of excellence, merit and competition based on student and staff member mythical norms
Equity and diversity discourse

Political and bureaucratic organisation of the university

Student

Staff

Fig.1.1 – Student and staff standpoints: Gender, class and race and the University

(adapted from Smith's, 2006, p.3 Figure 1.1 titled "A woman's standpoint: Single parenthood and education institutions and Taber's, 2007, p.58 Fig. 1.1 titled "A woman's standpoint: Mothering and the military institution").

The problem with self

Young (2004, p.116) identifies the concept and process of critical self-reflexivity as a 'White and Western preoccupation' built on the assumption that there is indeed a self that is identifiable, knowable and separate from others.

Reflexive supervision involves:

- Reciprocity
- Mutual respect and mutual inquiry
- Self awareness- reflectivity - reflexivity

Critical relational- reflexivity

is the capacity to appreciate and moderate how our own experiences affect our views of clients, families, groups and communities and requires consideration of how what we understand about a situation is jointly produced through the interactions between the self and others, as those interactions are occurring. It involves ongoing critical evaluation of how positions in the larger social structure may influence interactions and power dynamics between social workers and clients (Heron, 2005; Rossiter, 2005)

The problems of Whiteness

Dwyer and Jones (2000 pp.210-219) argue that although there are many forms of whiteness differently located historically and geographically, 'they share a common, non-relational, approach to knowing the world', where whiteness works as an epistemology, as a particular way of knowing and valuing social life. The 'social construction of whiteness relies upon an essentialist and non-relational understanding of identity'; a removed and rationally achieved superior objectivity predicated on detachment rather than connected relationality.

Australia colonisation, invasion, genocide, neglect, ignorance, disregard.



White
privilege

‘**Monica Morgan**, from the **Aboriginal Yorta Yorta** people of south-eastern Australia, said there were 20,000 Yorta Yorta people in that region before the British - what Monica Morgan calls the "**first boat people**" - came in 1788. By the end of the 19th century, fewer than 100 were left’.

(Blunt, 2001)

Anti-racist

...theories and practices ...privilege understandings of the complex and particular operations of race power together with relevant cultural knowledge. (Quinn 2009, p. 98).

Post-colonial/transnational feminisms

From these perspectives, race, gender, class, sexuality and nation are seen as complex social processes and discursive constructions that need to be challenged at the same time that they are strategically deployed to question dominant western paradigms (Mohanty, 2003a; Spivak, 1988, 1990).

AASW Code of Ethics (the Code)

now acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Australians; commits social workers to 'acknowledge and understand historical and contemporary Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage and the implication of this for social work practice'; and places responsibility on social workers for ensuring their practice is 'culturally competent, safe and sensitive' (AASW 2010 p.5).

The Code has not dealt with the critiques of anti-oppressive practice or with its focus on multiple forms of oppressions dissipating the significance of race (Young 2004 pp.114-115; Walter, Taylor, & Habibis, 2011 p.12).

Cultural humility

My own thinking, at this stage, is that cultural competence may not be the best short form descriptor or 'goal', particularly for students and workers like me, from the dominant Anglo racial/ethnic group in Australia. My concern is the goal of cultural competence may inadvertently encourage arrogance in dominant culture/ethnicity students and workers to presume we have the right and ability to 'know' and become competent in minority cultures.

Does education, supervision and assessment for cultural competence (humility) occur at the interpersonal level, the level of the agency, the community, social policy?

Many authors define culturally competent practice largely in terms of interpersonal or direct practice with individuals, families, and groups.

The AASW revised Code however is clear in its choice of a definition of culturally competent practice that it is to occur across all domains.

Can a version of intersectionality that uses localising and standpoints help Australian social work supervision respond to its contexts?

There are tensions between and within Whiteness theory, intersectionality, anti-racist and anti-oppressive theory. One significant tension for social work (educators, practitioners, and supervisors) in aiming for equality in enacting awareness of the range of oppressions and privileges this disrespects the reality that for many Indigenous academics and people in Australia 'the category of race subsumes all other sources of social divisions including gender' (Walter, et al., 2011 p.8).

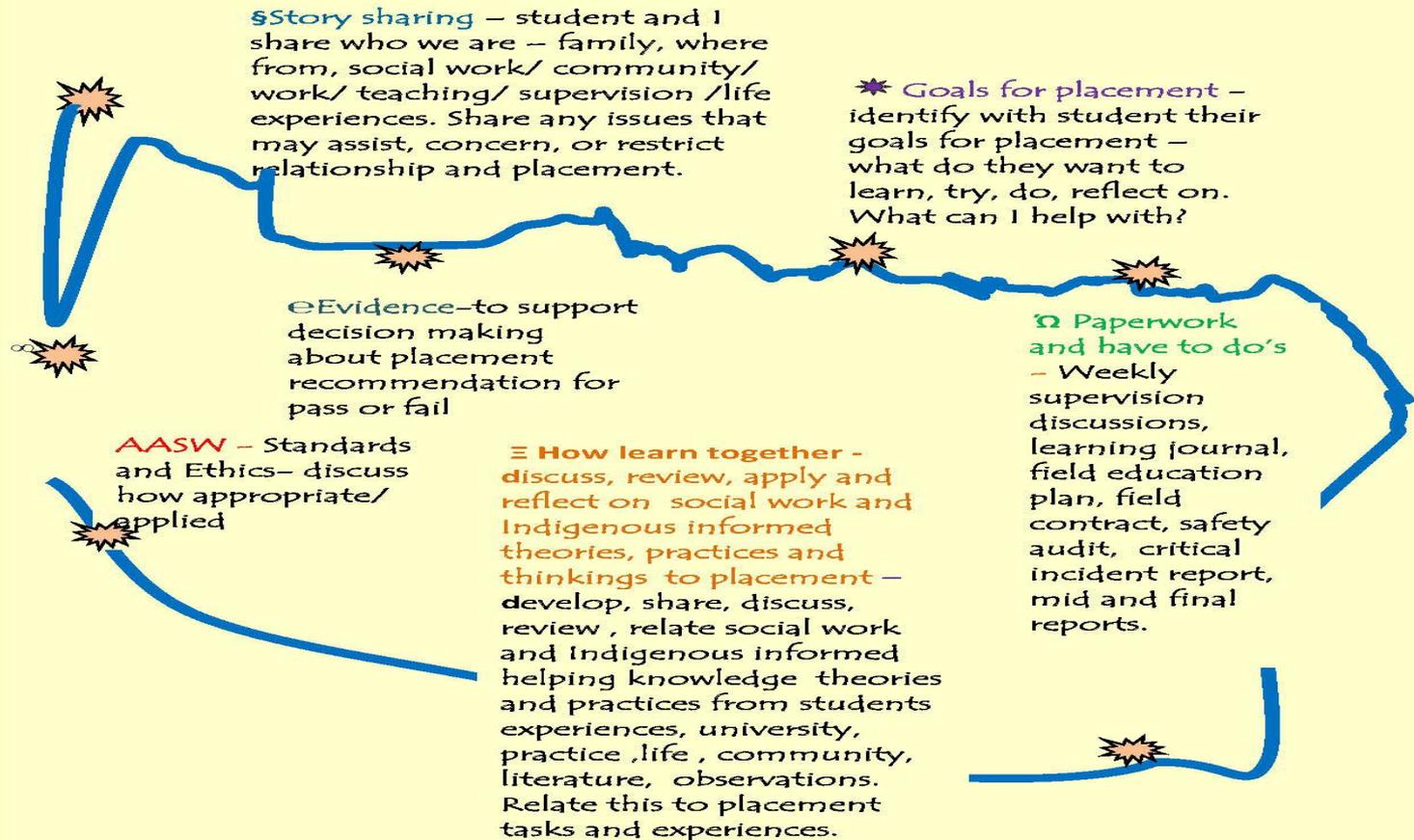
Hi (Student)

Welcome to supervision!- it was great to talk to you today. Thanks for the conversation and the emails. Below are some thoughts and ideas to set the scene. Could you please read through this and tell me what you think. This is how I see supervision. You might see it differently. Please let me know how I can meet your supervision needs now, or as we go. I have also tried to put in some parts about you that I got from today - they may not be right - please correct or add to them if you wish. I am very open to ideas and input.

cheers

Norah

Map of supervision (draws on Learning Map ideas, *Yunkaporta, 2009)



Hosken, 2010 **Example of the beginning of a 'Welcome to Supervision Letter'** used by me (Anglo-author) in Distance Social Work Student Supervision in Western Australia and Victoria with Indigenous students.

Thank you for listening.