STAND UP PLACER

EMPOWERING SURVIVORS. SAVING LIVES.

# Session 22

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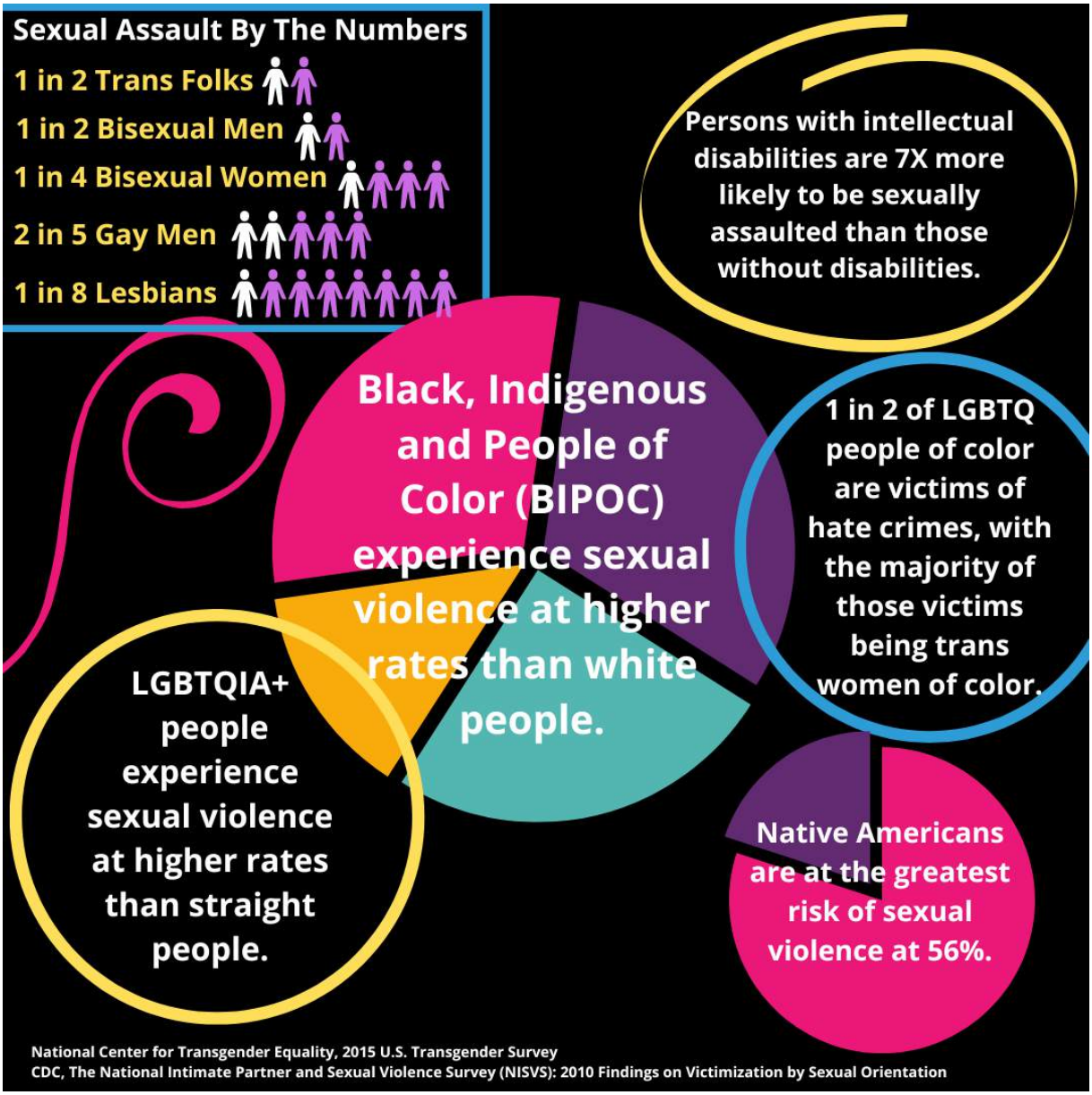
# Session 22

***Session Overview:*** This session covers the intersections of discrimination, oppression, racism and sexual violence.



# *Discrimination and Oppression*

CHAPTER 2

# Discrimination and Oppression

## Introduction

The relationship between advocate and survivor is critical. Even though you have likely chosen to train to become a counselor/advocate to help people, it is important to remember that a perceived power dynamic exists between survivors and advocates, between someone in need, and someone in a position to fulfill that need. Because of who we are and what we have gone through in our lives, it can sometimes be difficult to connect with and relate to people whose identities and experiences are very different than our own.

As a counselor/advocate, you play a vital role in upholding survivors' rights, but sometimes you may unintentionally reinforce a system of power, or reveal a mindset that underscores a historical trauma that then feels like it is being reenacted, this time with new players. Our perceptions are shaped by our own identities, cultures, and impressions of these systems. And to be fair, there is no way that any of us can anticipate the myriad ways we can unintentionally make someone feel unwanted, unwelcomed, or ashamed based on identity and difference. What you can do, however, is strive to make connections with survivors, and acknowledge that your experience is not theirs and therefore you have to let them guide their process. In doing this work, we must examine how our own experiences, cultures, and histories shape our view of the world along with creating biases and assumptions.

## Intersection of Discrimination, Oppression, and Sexual Violence

As you read these descriptions, take the time to create a mental image of what is happening in each case.

*While walking home from church one Sunday evening, a 24-year-old is abducted at shotgun-point and raped by six assailants. When interrogated by the sheriff, the assailants claim that the survivor consented to having sex with all of them for pay.*

*Two Milwaukee residents spot a drugged, naked, and bleeding individual running down a city street from a nearby apartment and call the police. The apartment's tenant catches up to the group on the street and convinces police officers that this was just a lovers' quarrel. Over the objections of the neighborhood residents, police accompanied the tenant and injured individual to the apartment. Later that evening, the tenant sexually tortured and strangled the individual to death.*

*A young couple moves to a small town where they connect with family and a supportive community. But sexual and domestic violence escalate in the relationship, resulting in a protection order against the batterer and a physical separation. Later, a fateful traffic stop would put the survivor in close proximity to the batterer who would within the week, strangle and incinerate the victim a few days shy of their 23rd birthday.*

*A woman, unable to care for herself or for any children, becomes pregnant as the result of a sexual assault. She is compelled to give birth, leaving her family to care for the child.*

*A young wanderer is welcomed into a group in a rural town. After the wanderer falls in love with one of the locals, others in the group become jealous and increasingly aggressive until they sexually assault and then murder the wanderer who was once welcomed into their group.*

When we hear about cases of sexual and physical abuse, our tendency is to focus on the initial trauma

and its aftermath. But in many situations, confronting sexual violence also means understanding and then navigating how the various aspects of power, privilege, identity, and social relations between identities complicate everything from feeling safe to finding justice to possible death. We will delve further into these concepts later in this chapter, but for now, these are our working definitions of these complex terms:

- Power simply means "ability" or "authority"
- Privilege in this instance means "unearned benefits" accompanying power
- Identity refers to markers that allow us to categorize populations of people
- Social Relations points to the dynamics of power and privilege between identity groups

We often don't realize the importance of identity as it relates to survivors, and how our own assumptions about identity affect our ability to effectively advocate for survivors. As was discussed in Chapter 1, the identity category of "woman" was (and in many ways continues to be) largely understood to mean heterosexual white cisgendered American women of a certain class, which led to services privileging that narrow group of people. Without challenge, as was the task of Sojourner Truth, this characterization becomes the norm, standard, or default way in which we conceptualize and understand the identity category "woman." Traditionally, service providers and the general public have seen these women as somehow more "legitimate" or "ideal" when they come forward as victims of sexual assault.

When reading the cases above, which ethnicities, genders, ages, abilities, and statuses came to your mind for the victims? And perpetrators? Without questioning our own programming of identity categories, it's easy to make assumptions, including the assumption that all members of a group have had the same experience, have access to the same resources, and will have the same experience during healing and recovery after an assault.

In reality, those who fall outside of the category of women with certain privileges – such as women of color, non-English speakers, children, high-risk populations (such as sex workers, the homeless, or substance abusers), low-income people, persons with disabilities, transpersons, men, those who are incarcerated or detained – could face barriers or dismissal in accessing services and advocacy.

In far too many instances, the initial assault leads to revictimization for victims of rape and battering when people working in systems and institutions charged with serving the public fail. Sometimes this is the result of biases ("those people don't matter anyway") or regulations that exclude certain categories of people (for example, limited services for the incarcerated). Some victim/survivors confront attitudes that convey "well, if you weren't in this country" or "if you didn't live that lifestyle," indicating that they are somehow essentially responsible for their own victimization.

Let's revisit the above cases at the start of this chapter, now with identity markers included and examine how our assumptions impact our understanding of each situation. Additionally, be sure to note how power, privilege, and social relations impact diverse identities.

*Recy Taylor, a 24-year old African-American woman, was walking home from church one Sunday evening in 1944, in Abbeville, Alabama when she was abducted at shotgun-point and raped by six white men. An all-white, all-male grand jury refused to indict the suspects. Once Recy's claim of rape became publicly known, white vigilantes torched her home* (Brown, 2018).

*In 1991, two young black women spotted 14-year old Laotian teen Konerak Sinthasomphone running down a Milwaukee street and called the police. The boy had escaped from the apartment of Jeffrey Dahmer, a white male who was able to convince two white male police officers that the boy was an adult, drunk, and upset from a lover's quarrel. Over the protests of the neighbors, Milwaukee police returned Konerak to Dahmer's apartment where Dahmer sexually tortured and strangled Konerak to death that evening. Before his arrest a couple months later, Dahmer would sexually torture, murder, and dismember four more victims* (Associated Press, 1991).

*Laura S., an undocumented Latina, came to the United States from Mexico as a young adult with her husband in the mid-2000s. Once connected with family among a community of Latino/a immigrants in a small Texas town, Laura would acclimate to*

*her new life in America. But her husband's sexual and domestic abuse would escalate as she became more empowered through work and education. An arrest and protection order would see her husband deported to Mexico. But a fateful traffic stop in 2009 resulted in Laura's deportation to Reynosa, Mexico. One week later, Laura had been strangled and incinerated in her vehicle by her ex-husband, a couple days shy of her 23rd birthday* (Stillman, 2018).

*In 2019, a physically and mentally incapacitated 29-year old Native American woman gave birth to a baby while housed at an Arizona healthcare facility. A male nurse was charged with sexual assault and vulnerable adult abuse after his DNA matched that of the infant's. No healthcare staff, including doctors and nurses responsible for her daily medications and hygiene, knew the woman was pregnant until she went into labor. The subsequent investigation revealed that the woman may have been assaulted numerous times over the years and that this may not have been her first pregnancy. She has been at this healthcare facility since age three* (Karimi & Boyette, 2019).

*Finally, in 1993, Brandon Teena, a 21-year old white transmale, with a police record for largely petty crimes, would connect with a group of disaffected white young adults in Lincoln, Nebraska. Two guys in the group, who had been previously incarcerated, would discover Brandon's assigned sex as female. They forced Brandon to strip as a means of humiliating him in front of his girlfriend, later gang raped him, and once they discovered Brandon had reported his assault (for which the assailants were not arrested), they shot and killed Brandon and everyone else in the house where he had been hiding. Afterwards, one of the assailants repeatedly stabbed Brandon in the chest to ensure that he was dead* (Minkowitz, 2018).

In thinking about these cases, some questions emerge. How is sexual violence used to establish and/or maintain power and control over another? How does law enforcement deny victims justice? Are we aware of how we value the lives of some populations over others to the point where when something does happen to the devalued, the social response is "well, they don't really matter anyway"? How do bias and prejudice factor into whether a victim gets help? What role does sexual and physical abuse play within the larger landscape of oppression?

Imagine how many well-meaning individuals recognized multiple instances of injustice against Recy, Konerak, and Brandon, but did nothing to prevent what would become trauma after trauma. Dahmer went on to kill four more men after Konerak's death. What kinds of attitudes create the "see-but-don't-see" culture that allowed healthcare workers to not notice gross violations to the most patently vulnerable people in our communities?

In exploring these questions, three things become very clear: 1) our biases, prejudices, and ignorance increase risk for targeted victimization of the vulnerable due to social isolation, physical disability, stigma, and/or discrimination; 2) long-standing discriminations (as a function of oppression) create distrust within communities toward systems and institutions; and 3) our multiple identities are **inseparable** – this notion becomes underscored in the presence of discrimination or violence. While we may be born equal, our respective social identities are imbued with varying degrees of value, power and privilege. The various systems and institutions established to sustain a civil society, have our biases and prejudices embedded within their frameworks.

How do we manage all of the various identities we carry and wear daily when some are more in/visible, targeted, and/or accepted than others? Are we aware of how much power and privilege is embedded in what we consider to be "normal," or "standard?" Are we aware of how much we participate (actively or passively) in systems of oppression that make groups of people targets for exclusion, marginalization, and/or disenfranchisement (being denied rights or privileges)?

Because sexual assault is so connected to issues of power and privilege, rape crisis work may be a force for social justice, or a way to help correct the denial of rights/recourse at the societal level. Therefore, our work begins with addressing our own understanding and assumptions not just about various categories of identities (such as gender, race, class, sexuality, ability, religion, or residency status), but also our relationship to those categories of identity and the larger culture that shapes them. Because we belong to more than one identity category, we are all both agents of and targets for oppression.

**When reading the first version of the stories, what images came to mind for the survivor-victims? For the perpetrators? Why do you think those images came to mind? Expanding this line of thought:**

**Q: In what ways do you think our work as sexual assault counselor/advocates is related to the larger world of oppression and discrimination?**

**Q: What are the connections between everyday systems of oppression such as sexism, patriarchy, and misogyny and sexual violence?**

**Q: What is 'Rape Culture' and where do we see it exhibited?' How do everyday acts of rape culture contribute to sexual violence?**

**Q: What are some other systems of oppression (racism, heterosexism, ableism, ageism, xenophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Semitism, classism, etc.) that create barriers to healing for rape survivors?**

**RESOURCE**

*The MSW@USC Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power and Privilege* by Jeremy Goldbach
https://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/diversity-workshop-guide-to-discussing-identity-power-and-privilege/

This toolkit provides clear explanations of topics related to social justice, along with group activities to enhance understanding.

Because of their assumptions, biases, and prejudices, people with privilege often do not see or do not care about others who are marginalized. This lack of awareness or caring can facilitate or exacerbate abuse and violence via inaction and silence. One could argue that silence, apathy, or indifference form the foundation for rape culture, or a normalizing of sexual abuse and violence, as well as the social conditions that make survivors' lives harder.

For those of us who do not belong to groups who experience individual discrimination backed by societal oppression, our privilege blinds us to the experiences of others, and we can deny that the oppression exists. For example, after Sinthasomphone's death, African Americans and LGTBQI+ communities protested against Milwaukee police because the police officers believed Dahmer, a white cisgender male, over the loud vocal protests of the black women who called in the incident, and because of stereotypes of the effeminate Asian male that affected the view of the victim. Even though the two officers on the scene denied any prejudice on their part, the individual experiences and collective histories of these two (often intersecting) marginalized communities reinforces for them that these two white male police officers were simply conducting business as usual.

While seemingly extreme, egregious acts of violence such as those at the start of this chapter begin as small assaults that become normalized and pervasive. When nurtured with the daily silence of others, microaggressions (subtle, sometimes unintentional expressions of prejudice) create exhausting environments for subordinate/marginalized populations, especially when coupled with the struggles of daily life. Here are some examples of seemingly harmless incidents that can be debilitating:

- Making slurs based on identity
- Assuming that someone has questionable residency status
- Expressing surprise at a person's command of English
- Assuming that everyone is heterosexual
- Remaining silent at offensive comments
- Creating work spaces intolerant of diverse experiences
- Claiming to not see color
- Assuming that a person of color is "the help"
- Making comments such as "Why can't you just be normal like us," or "Why do you have to keep bringing race up"

These small daily debilitating acts expose biases and assumptions we all hold as members of **dominant cultures** socialized to think and believe in the normalcy of everyday practices. Normalizing majority rules is one of the ways we accept the marginalization of others. In the US, at various times, we are all members of a dominant culture: from something as seemingly benign as right-handedness, to interconnected modes of dominance such

as white, heterosexual, able-bodied masculinity. We can unintentionally be oppressive by assuming everyone uses right-handed scissors; intentionally discriminatory in the policies we vote for, such as eliminating non-gender-specific public restrooms for transgendered populations, or the erasure of women's reproductive health rights; or, callous in ignoring institutionally-sanctioned violence, such as the use of excessive force by police against those marginalized by American society (such as people of color, the homeless, or children separated from their immigrant families).

As gender-based violence, sexual and domestic violence sit within the system of **oppression** (to unfairly hold one down or back) known as **sexism** (the belief in the superiority of one sex over others) that helps establish and maintain male-dominated or patriarchal societies. *California's Sexual Assault Training Standards: A Trainer's Guide* provides a generalized snapshot of how gender violence functions as a form of social control:

> Globally, patterns of systemic and institutionalized sexism, misogyny, and patriarchy may include: female infanticide, honor killings, sex trafficking, acid assaults, breast ironing, "curing" HIV by having sex with virgins, clitorectomy and vaginal suturing, or simply, denied access to education, reproductive health rights work, or money.
>
> With a historical perspective of women viewed as chattel property came the treatment of females as one of the spoils of war. As a method of European colonialism and expansion, U.S. manifest destiny, and U.S. sanctioned slavery, rape was used to display and enforce white supremacy, or the belief and practice that whiteness is superior to all other races, among indigenous and First Nation populations across the Americas and among Africans and the descendants of the Atlantic slave trade.
>
> In the 20th century, rape was utilized as part of a larger war strategy: an estimated 20,000 women and girls were raped and/or murdered in the second Sino-Japanese war, which became known as the Rape of Nanking; rapes of German and Russian women and children during WWII by the Allied Forces, as well as Nazi and Red Army occupying forces; and as part of ethnic cleansing in Rwanda, Bosnia-Herzegovina (sometimes publicly known as "community intimidation"), Kosovo, and Darfur. As much as women and children were targets for these atrocities, "conquered" men were secondary victims, as they were made to feel powerless to protect their families/communities.

It should be noted that **women are not immune to cultural elements that support and perpetuate sexism and other forms of oppression** simply because they are representative of members of a historically oppressed group. Women can and frequently do reinforce patriarchy, misogyny, and sexism.

While this discussion is an oversimplification of how power, privilege, and social relations impact diverse populations, it helps counselor/advocates consider how identity-based difference impacts a survivor's experience after an assault or abuse. The **unique** challenges faced by diverse "have-nots" are key factors in your work: those are the lenses through which survivors view our advocacy. In general, communities of color in the United States experience multiple facets of racism; and racism within a given system will impact different communities in unique ways. When seeking medical treatment, for example, black Americans may be the victim of race science attitudes that teach medical professionals to minimize black complaints of pain, where Latinos may not receive prompt medical treatment because healthcare providers assume an illegal residency status. In either case, both populations can become distrustful of medical professionals and may delay necessary treatments. Therefore, you will want to 1) remember that it is the survivor's experience that guides the recovery process, not your own, 2) remain sensitive to how various identities shape experience, and 3) know that gender-based violence is inextricable from other forms of oppression.

## Cultural Considerations in Providing Services to Different Marginalized Groups

Identity issues will factor into survivors' experiences in countless ways. They may point to their own identity as a causal factor for the violence ("this happened because I am _____."). This may then lead survivors into a spiral of blaming themselves or their culture for the violence.

Counselor/advocates can demonstrate sensitivity to social justice by developing knowledge and skills in two areas: 1) operating within an anti-oppression framework, and 2) building their cultural competency skills.

### Anti-Oppression Framework

An **anti-oppression framework seeks to comprehensively eliminate barriers** that reinforce marginalization, exclusion, and disenfranchisement. Some of the terms used to describe how different forms of oppression work together are:

- Intersectional
- Interlocking
- Overlapping
- Mutually-influenced

Simultaneously, we actively challenge imbalances and abuses of power, while working to rebuild systems with equity at their centers so that everyone has access and opportunity. The first step in doing so is to see where we fit into the picture: "Anti-oppressive practice now requires all practitioners to understand themselves as implicated in sustaining relations of domination, as benefitting from the status quo…." (Curry-Stevens, 2016, para 1). In other words, rape crisis and domestic violence organizations are not immune to the influence and power of oppression, as we do not operate outside of society and culture. In one sense, **our social justice goals begin with our own liberation from the ways in which we, as anti-sexual/domestic violence movements, participate in and benefit from interlocking systems of oppression.**

The following are principles that guide the integrated anti-oppression model from the Berkeley Student Collective (https://www.bsc.coop/policy/index.php/Anti-Oppression_Policy):

- Society operates within a socially-constructed hierarchy of difference where some people are valued and privileged, and others are marginalized and exploited.
- People do not belong to just one category or social location. Identities are complex and multiple; fluid rather than fixed. As a result, we can be both victims and perpetrators of oppression. We often re-create the relations of social power and control that also oppress us.
- The ideas, thoughts and beliefs of people who "belong" to groups that are highest on the social hierarchy create "dominant culture". Dominant culture becomes the standard or norm by which everyone is compared.
- People who are members of privileged groups have the power to control access to resources and information. This perpetuates the cycle of power and oppression for people who are not members of these groups. People who are marginalized and exploited experience limited access to the power to shape their own past, present and future.
- Not everyone from the same social group has the same experiences because people have many different lived experiences. When people have multiple marginalized identities, they do not merely face extra barriers; their lived experience is entirely different.
- Integrated anti-oppression work requires that individuals accept responsibility for their role in perpetrating oppression both interpersonally and systemically. To bring about change, individuals and systems must be changed.

By focusing on the anti-oppression framework, we reduce incidences of retraumatizing survivors, while contributing to larger anti-sexual violence efforts. As individuals within this framework, we learn how to work in solidarity with those whose experiences may be vastly different from our own, and how to

use our own power and privilege as an ally across our differences in the struggle for equity, inclusivity and justice: our collective liberation is at stake. To be clear, sexual violence not only causes personal injury to individual victims, but is also symptomatic of wider rape culture. Freedom from sexual violence is connected to various forms of oppression and is thus a human rights issue.

### Cultural Competency

Equity, diversity, and inclusivity happen with **intentional** and thoughtful action. A commitment to cultural competency embraces the idea of pluralism, which includes respect for the identity of diverse groups within our culture. Cultural competency promotes social justice, as it functions on some level as a corrective to historically marginalized populations. For our purposes, **cultural competency** can be understood as "the ability to understand, appreciate, and interact with persons from cultures and/or belief systems other than one's own."

To be clear, cultural competency is about **building a set of skills** that allow counselor/advocates to effectively engage interculturally. There is no one way to accomplish this, and there is no end to it: culture is broad, overlapping, intersecting, incalculable, and ever-changing; becoming culturally competent is a life-learning process of work performed primarily on oneself, then upon one's surrounding community; and the skills development can be viewed on a continuum from cultural destructiveness to cultural proficiency. The National Center for Cultural Competence at Georgetown University (NCCC) identifies three primary strategies for working towards cultural competency:

- Increasing [self] awareness – self-assessments that reveal exposure to, differences/similarities, or implicit bias are helpful in this phase;
- Increasing understanding and knowledge – education on social protocols, values, traditions, and histories that impact day-to-day quality of life; and,
- Developing skill sets – building the capacity to operate in ways that demonstrate the importance of culture as a protective factor from interpersonal violence.

Developing a critical consciousness is the "process of continuously reflecting upon and examining how our own biases, assumptions and cultural worldviews affect the ways we perceive difference and power dynamics" (Pinter & Sakamoto, 2005). As we strive to ensure that our services are available to all, we work to end bias and discrimination as a barrier to healing. This means that we have to reduce the likelihood of imposing our own values upon survivors, and challenge prejudicial or stereotypical beliefs. As a result, this work begins with a closer look at ourselves. "I know that I know nothing," attributed to Socrates, is an acknowledgement of one's own ignorance, which leads to the first step to knowledge via inquiry and wonderment.

### Increasing Self-Awareness

As a counselor/advocate, it will be important for you to be able to maintain healthy boundaries between you and survivors. One way to do this will be to have a good understanding of how you have been impacted by trauma, bias, and cultural programming. This is to ensure that you minimize any possibility of being triggered by the survivor's circumstances. But there are other triggers to watch out for related to your own identity and to that of others, including that of the survivor and their perpetrator(s). For this reason, it is important to explore our own understanding of identity, power, and privilege.

### Understanding Identity

Fundamental to our ability to help others is an understanding of how identity shapes our sense of self and view of the world. We are shaped by multiple identities, which can sometimes conflict or be contradictory. Identity can be thought of as the beliefs, qualities, characteristics, and personality elements that distinguish individuals from one another, yet allow those with commonalities to assemble into like identity categories and classifications. Equally as important, identity gives us a sense of belonging, as well as insight into how we see ourselves. Think about the multiple identities you carry with you on a daily basis. If you were to write down all of the "masks" or faces you wear on a daily basis, you may find the list innumerable, especially when thinking about your affiliations as well as physicality (for example, "mother," "immigrant," "Christian," and "lesbian").

**Q: Has there ever been a time when something happened to you – good or bad – and you believed it might be because of your identity?**

**Q: How did it feel to be unsure? Once you realized that your identity was involved, what was your reaction? Which identity was targeted?**

**Q: Can you think of a similar situation where you made a decision based on the identity that someone else represented?**

As counselor/advocates, it will be important to allow survivors to self-identify. Further, when survivors represent multiple identities that have been historically disenfranchised or marginalized, they are vulnerable to **interlocking systems of oppression**. For example, an undocumented immigrant Asian woman, who is a survivor, must negotiate immigration issues, racism, and sexism as she embarks on her road to recovery. Similarly, a Muslim gay man who has recently recovered memories of child sexual abuse may be searching his entire past to figure out whether his faith, orientation, or gender marked him as a target for child sexual predators.

*NOTE:* It is not okay to tell survivors that they are oppressed. Nor is it okay to suggest or confirm for a survivor that they were victimized because of their identity. Perpetrators are always responsible for their acts of sexual violence and physical abuse. But because society treats certain populations marginally, perpetrators believe that those lives are less than, and perhaps no one will believe the survivor. Identity is not the *cause* of a survivor's victimization; perpetrators devalue certain identities and target them for maltreatment.

## Identity, Power, and Privilege

Power simply means having ability or authority. Privilege characterizes the unearned rights, access, and opportunities granted to dominant cultures (such as majority populations or groups with power). Dominant cultures tend to organize structures, organization, and institutions around their own interests and values because this feels "natural" to them and they may feel entitled to do so. As a result, they are rarely motivated to change the status quo to become more inclusive.

But when viewed within the context of oppression, power and privilege unchecked can perpetuate inequality which, when passed on culturally and generationally, becomes embedded in our belief systems and values, and is eventually normalized. Threats or acts of violence (including domestic and sexual violence) are deployed by the dominant culture as a means of maintaining power and control.

We are all exposed to cultural programming embedded with beliefs that include stereotypes and negative assumptions. When we act against certain populations, or exert power and privilege to do so, it becomes discrimination. In order to ensure that sexual assault survivors do not experience discrimination as a barrier to healing, we must be aware of our own cultural programming, power, and privilege.

Consider reading one or both of these resources to enhance your knowledge about how racial power and privilege both illustrate dominant culture privilege, and make invisible the experiences of the nonprivileged. After reading, think about how this concept can be applied to privilege associated with other dominant cultures.

RESOURCES

*What I said when my white friend asked for my black opinion on white privilege.* Hutcherson, L. (2016, July 14). [editorial] https://goodblacknews.org/2016/07/14/editorial-what-i-said-when-my-white-friend-asked-for-my-black-opinion-on-white-privilege/

*Understanding White Privilege.* [article] Kendall, F. (2002). http://www.goldenbridgesschool.org/uploads/1/9/5/4/19541249/understanding_white_privilege_-_kendall_edited.pdf

**Q: Do I have a good understanding of the concept of "privilege" as it relates to oppression and discrimination?**

**Q: How does privilege make those with it, blinded to the mechanisms of discrimination? The impacts of discrimination?**

**Q: Which of these identities situates you as representative of a dominant culture (for example, gender, sexuality, religion, physical ability, class status, or educational status)?**

**Q: What are the prevailing narratives taught about the dominant cultures you belong to, such as thinking these things are equivalent: American = freedom; heterosexual = normal)?**

**Q: What are the main narratives taught about subordinate cultures you identify with (such as Muslim = terrorist; embodied disability = helpless)?**

**Q: Who benefits from perpetuating these dominant narratives? Why?**

**Q: What biases, prejudices, and stereotypes come from the dominant narratives?**

To be clear, privilege is about unearned rights or entitlements based on group identity. Privilege is not something that can be surrendered, like cancelling a credit card. The only way to minimize the effects of dominant culture privilege is to work toward equity via anti-oppression strategies such as equity and justice, access, and opportunity. No one escapes cultural programming, which, at a minimum, leads to assumptions, prejudices, or stereotypes we form about various identities; or, when extreme, leads to bias, discrimination, and support for oppressive treatment at the societal level. Neither the dominant narrative nor the modifiers is "naturally occurring," or "organic;" these modifiers reveal cultural programming, or our attitudes and values that circulate across society and are passed down generationally.

As a counselor/advocates, you will want to first comprehend your own social positioning, cultural programming, and prejudices in order to ensure they do not negatively impact your interaction with survivors. Survivors also identify with both dominant and subordinate cultures; as a result, they may express many of the same prejudices held by larger society such as: all men of a certain race/ethnicity are rapists; immigrants don't deserve access to social services; or women are naturally inferior to men. Experiencing a sexual assault from someone who fits an existing bias may reinforce those attitudes and beliefs for the survivor, their families, or other advocates. You will want to dispel these myths in ways that do not reinforce these beliefs and that redirect the survivor to productive healing strategies.

This type of work is transformative and has the ability to heal wounds, whether from an assault or from historical injustice. As previously stated, there is no way to know all of the different ways in which ignorance, bias, prejudice, or discrimination will show up in this work. Understand that even your missteps will provide an opportunity to improve and grow – doing so will demonstrate your level of commitment to anti-oppression work.

### Increasing Understanding and Knowledge

In the past, anti-oppression and discrimination education and training for sexual assault and domestic violence programs came in the form of "Cross-Cultural Day." This day focused on building advocates' empathy via a mix of activities including presentations, videos, small group and experiential exercises, and large group discussion, intended to increase counselor/advocate awareness and sensitivity to cultural differences in working with survivors. One of the most popular ways of tackling the "isms" was a "diversity panel" where a mixture of women of different ethnicity, orientation, religion, and ability would discuss the impact of gender-based violence on their representative communities.

"Cross-Cultural Day" provides a constructive space to discuss emotionally charged topics, with minorities' voices speaking to the legacy of pain seeded by historical forms of oppression. But, without an anti-oppression framework, these sessions risked creating environments where trainees turned inward, racked with "privilege guilt," and vying for whose situation was worse. Despite the nonscientific, generalized approach, "Cross-Cultural Day" institutionalized the movement's commitment to intentional anti-oppression work. Further, it created a sustained anti-oppression dialogue within the movement that

compelled deeper discussions, exposed gaps in our knowledge, expanded our focus, and revealed opportunities to build solidarity across differences.

In reality, anti-oppression and discrimination work is not something that can be "learned" in one day. To be clear, it is a practice that requires moment-to-moment awareness of the relationship between a people and its society. Since much has changed from the early 1970s, our understanding of the issues and our approaches to the work have become more complex and layered. We continue to center the experiences of marginalized populations with a vision for liberation from oppression for all.

This work challenges us to go beyond mere empathy; we have to be intentional in our actions toward social change. In other words, it is not enough to witness the pain of others and feel bad for them. Your action as a counselor/advocate strengthens our ability to resist and prevent violence for all, whether perpetrated by individuals, the state, or individuals supported by the state, systems, or institutions. This means increasing our knowledge on the issues – risk factors, prevalence, co-related negative impacts (such as substance abuse, homelessness, and incarceration)—and linking them to larger social issues. By doing so, we are able to better support survivors, create more inclusive services, and fight for equitable treatment.

Heterosexist attitudes can be subtle, such as assuming a person is heterosexual upon meeting them for the first time at a party or at work. Heterosexist discrimination toward lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual, queer, intersex, asexual, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, genderqueer (LGBTQI+) begins with marking those identities as outside of "normalness." This discrimination means exclusion, criminality, denial of full participation in society, internalized self-hate, and perhaps most damaging, denial of one's true complete self. Heterosexist discrimination can lead to life-changing if not life-threatening experiences for LGBTQI+ folks: rejection from family, peers, and larger society escalates LGBTQI+ risk for homelessness, substance abuse, chronic unemployment, prostitution, poverty, suicide, and homicide.

The threat of violence, as with all forms of oppression, serves as a constant reminder (both implicit and explicit) for marginalized groups to "stay in your place" "you're not welcome here," and "you don't matter." In addition to high profile cases like Brandon Teena and 21-year old Matthew Shepard whose 1998 murder led to the 2009 federal hate crime prevention legislation, discrimination and violence targeting the LGBTQI+ community is on the rise, with transgender women being particularly vulnerable. The Human Rights Campaign Foundation (2019) reports that of the 22 transgender women murdered in 2018, 82% were women of color and 64% and were under 35-years of age. What stands out about this report and others that track hate crime against LGBTQI+ individuals, is the particularly way in which they were killed: stabbings and set on fire are included among the most common method, along with gunshots to the head. Many had been left in open areas such as roadsides, dumpsters, and open fields.

**Q: Could heterosexism have contributed to poor police response in Konerak's case? Would they have come taken the same actions if Konerak had been a 14-year old drugged, naked, and bleeding girl?**

**Q: In what ways did heterosexism contribute to any of the other scenarios at the start of this chapter?**

**Q: How does the "normalness" of heterosexism impact women's sexual and reproductive health?**

**Q: Identify at least three times in your own life when you've caught yourself incorrectly assuming someone's sexual orientation – did it change the way you got to know people personally?**

The more we educate ourselves, the more we are able to combat the myriad ways discrimination takes on the form of normal. Also, we come to understand that "normal" is often defined by those with the power to shape faith, laws, government, education, media, institutions, beliefs, and practices to conform to those norms. In truth, sexual and gender diversity exist on continuums that allow for a range of identities, intimate relationships, and social interaction. The concepts that capture those individuals who feel the presence of the male and female sex – "two-spirit," "third gender," "four genders," "female-husbands,"

and "male-wives" – existed within indigenous cultures and societies thousands of years ago, and these people were often spiritual leaders or priests.

As societies change, each generation redefines itself and its priorities. One of the most empowering acts of liberation is the right to self-identify and to self-determination, which ultimately leads to self-knowledge. Influenced by civil rights, the LGBTQI+ movement gained momentum after the 1969 Stonewall riots, which erupted after years of police harassment intended to quash the rights of LGBTQI+ folk to live life openly. From the late 20th century forward, LGBTQI+ folks have defined and redefined identity not in relationship to heterosexuality, but in accordance to what is self-affirming and distinct from other non-heterosexual and gender nonconforming individuals. As communities gain agency and awareness, we develop language and concepts to better define our experiences. Below is a (non-exhaustive) list of terms to inform our knowledge and understanding of sexual and gender diversity.

First, briefly define each of the terms in the middle column. Then share with other counselor/advocates or friends/family members to see if everyone has the same understanding. Then spend some time looking up these terms. Record a more correct answer if necessary, and record anything new you learned in the far right column.

| Term | What I thought it meant... | What I've since learned... |
|---|---|---|
| *Sex* | | |
| *Sexuality* | | |
| *Sexual Orientation* | | |
| *Gender* | | |
| *Gender expression* | | |
| *Gender expansive* | | |
| *Genderqueer* | | |
| *Gender fluid* | | |
| *Cisgender* | | |
| *Bigender* | | |
| *Intersex* | | |
| *Orientation* | | |
| *Queer* | | |
| *Trans** | | |
| *Gender nonbinary* | | |
| *Gender nonconforming* | | |
| *Misgendered* | | |
| *Lesbian* | | |
| *Gay* | | |
| *Bisexual* | | |
| *Asexual* | | |
| *Agender* | | |
| *Other terms...* | | |

Because the world can be a hostile place to social minorities, many folks from historically oppressed or marginalized groups learn survival skills including the masking aspects of identity. As an example, many LGBTQI+ individuals, adopt non-gender-specific language to navigate or subvert the heterosexist world. LBTBQI+ survivors will want and need to know that you, as a counselor/advocate, are sensitive to sexual and gender diversity issues; some fear assistance especially if they are not living an openly LGBTQI+ lifestyle and risk family and friends finding out. The language you use will be revealing of your own heterosexist programming to which we are all exposed or it will signal to survivors that communicating with you will be safe. Familiarize yourself with these terms, the community, and its diversity.

### Developing Skill Sets

As a counselor/advocate, you will demonstrate your ability to be trauma-informed and survivor-centered, to be empathetic, to use active listening skills, to promote empowerment-based options, to use critical thinking and problem-solving skills, and to advocate for survivors. Further, it is imperative to recognize how culture functions as both a protective and risk factor for sexual and domestic violence.

In addition to common beliefs, practices, traditions, values, artistic expressions, similarities in ethnicity, history, experience, culture can also mean everyday life. As previously stated, it is not realistic or possible to know the depth, breadth, richness, and nuances of every culture you will encounter with survivors. Just know that all of the cultures associated with each survivor influences their experience, their thinking, and their decision-making.

For some cultures, you will work not only with the survivor, but also with parents, partners, or extended family, as may be customary or part of their tradition. This may be a good thing or a bad thing. As you become more skilled, you will need to navigate these dynamics in such a way that you are always operating in the best interest of the survivor. For example, while an adult survivor may have extended family members in a hospital waiting area, they may feel uncomfortable going into details of their assault, or they may not want to disclose information in front of family members for fear of reprisals toward the harm-doer. In those moments, you will realize that it is customary to have family around in times of crisis, but the individual survivor is not able to advocate for privacy on their own behalf – so you will wait until the time is right and take your cues from the survivor.

You may also have to advocate for survivors as they navigate several systems such as during an interview with law enforcement, or during a forensic exam at a hospital. Cultural considerations here may include:

- Recognizing the barriers to accessing support and resource include: individual, traditional, and societal attitudes; attitudes towards seeking service; language barriers, including discussing sexual assault; or physical barriers for those with mobility issues, such as ascending/descending stairs; and sensitivity level in the community.
- Understanding the cultural contexts of sexual assault is crucial in providing the best support for the survivor – what is the meaning of the assault to the survivor, and what is the meaning of the assault for the survivor in the context of their family and community?
- Supporting the need for service provision in the preferred language of the survivor or with a qualified interpreter – the counselor/advocate should NOT be used as an interpreter as this creates a confusion of roles, eliminates client confidentiality, and places you in the position of investigator.

For us to be really good at cultural understanding, we have to decenter ourselves and center the survivor. Here is a guideline for understanding how dominant cultures works, and tips on how to reframe the situation with the survivor in the center.

As an example of decentering ourselves, consider how things may be experienced completely differently for an older person who was born and raised outside of the United States. Consider something as simple as greetings used the first time you meet someone. Handshakes, bows, salutes, cheek-kissing ("la bise"), hugs, and more are all ways of making an acquaintance. But also think about the first time you extended your hand to greet someone, and they did not immediately return the gesture, as it was unfamiliar to them. In that moment we realize that our way is not the only way.

## Conclusion

We cannot assume that our way of knowing matches that of the survivors with whom we work. Each survivor brings with them a unique set of characteristics that shape their own social and cultural programming. As counselor/advocates, we have a responsibility to convey to survivors that they belong, that they matter, and that they are not responsible for the abusive actions of others. Doing so is an act of solidarity and liberation.

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