

# Module 7 Lesson: Education: Divides and Possibilities

Chapter 8 explored the various functions of the institution of education. We looked critically at who gets educated, examining the intersections of race, class, gender, ability and disability in the United State and the world. The inequality we see in the institution of education provides the background of understanding why we need social change.

Chapter 8 also examined the potential for the institution of education to be a driver of social change. We explored the relationship between education, wealth, and income, and we looked at how our education system has changed over time, including the emerging movements to leverage education as a method for creating transformative social change. We also dove into the digital divide, a social change that impacts many of us, our families, and our communities.

## The Hidden Curriculum

Let's start by looking closer at the hidden curriculum. You'll recall it refers to the type of nonacademic knowledge that students learn through informal learning and cultural transmission. This hidden curriculum reinforces the positions of those with higher cultural capital and serves to bestow status unequally.

But, how does the hidden curriculum show up in educational settings? Take a look at two videos for more explanation:

- The first is 3:45 minutes:
  - [What is the Hidden Curriculum?](#)
- The second is 3:28 minutes:
  - [The Hidden Curriculum: Part 1 of 2: Norms, Values and Procedures](#)

The hidden curriculum is what educators teach students without even realizing it, through their interactions, modeling, and school or classroom culture; it consists of unspoken values, beliefs, norms and culture.

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Consider this question: Why is learning and understanding the hidden curriculum easier for some, and more challenging for others based on our social location?

## **Intersectionality**

Next, let's make some connections between content in Chapter 3 and Chapter 8.

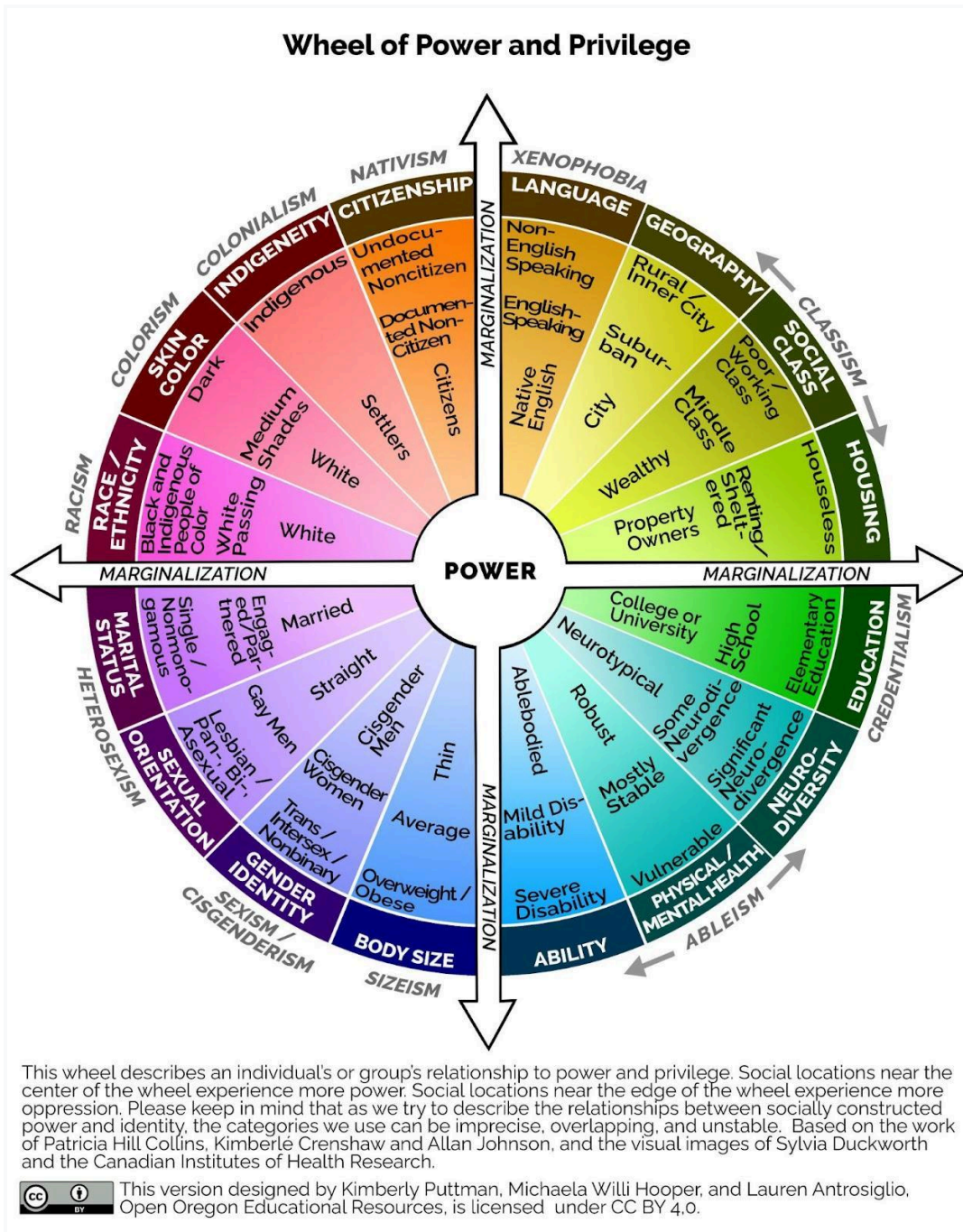
From Chapter 3, you might remember the concept of intersectionality. The experience of any group depends on the intersection of power and privilege based on the combination of their race, class, age, sexual orientation, gender, and other social locations.

Sociologists often look at inequality in education based on just race, or just class, or just gender, for example. However, we know that explanations that take multiple locations into account are more useful when we want to make sense of the social world.

Intersectionality is the idea that inequalities produced by multiple and interconnected social characteristics can influence the life of an individual or group. Intersectionality, then, suggests that we should view gender, race, class, or sexuality not as individual characteristics but as interconnected social situations.

Take another look at the intersectionality wheel introduced in Chapter 3. Imagine each concentric piece as movable wheels, creating a variety of experiences for individuals based on their combined social characteristics.

Where can you find yourself and your experiences living in society on the wheel?



[See image description below.](#)

Education is one of the institutions that best illuminates inequality in US society. However, if an educational institution or an instructor applies an intersectional understanding to their students' experiences, they can better engage with them

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understanding how various forms of oppression, discrimination, domination and other social processes intersect and influence each other.

For example, students in schools can belong to more than one marginalized group. A student may identify as being culturally different from his or her classmates, belong to a different socio-economic group, and may also identify as gay. This student's experience would be different than someone who is of a similar cultural and socio-economic group as the majority of the class, but who also identifies as gay.

Though these two students have an identity in common, their experiences in and around the classroom would likely be quite different because of their unique outlooks, as well as their unique social and cultural circumstances. They may not benefit from the same types of supports and would likely need educators and administration in schools to support and nurture their needs differently. An intersectional education lens takes various social, historical and political processes into consideration in order to best understand how to support the wide range of experiences of diverse students.

### ***Image description for Intersectionality wheel***

A multicolored wheel that visualizes an individual's or group's relationship to power and privilege. From a center that says power, two intersecting lines with arrows at each end point outwards and are labeled *marginalization*. There are 16 slices or segments in the wheel. Each segment represents categories of identities or social locations. Social locations near the center of the wheel experience more power. Social locations near the edge of the wheel experience more oppression and are more marginalized. Gray words outside the circle indicate forms of oppression and discrimination directed at people with those social identities.

Please keep in mind that as we try to describe the relationships between socially constructed power and identity, the categories we use can be imprecise, overlapping, and unstable.

Category descriptions and social identities/locations

- Race/Ethnicity: Black and Indigenous People of Color are the most marginalized identities, white passing is in the middle, and white is closest to the center of power. Racism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Skin color: Dark is the most marginalized identity, medium shades in the middle, and white closest to the center of power. Colorism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Indigeneity: Indigenous is the most marginalized identity, and Settlers are closest to the center of power. Colonialism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.

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- Citizenship: Undocumented is the most marginalized, documented non-citizen is in the middle, and citizen is closest to the center of power. Nativism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Language: Non-English speaking is the most marginalized identity, English speaking is in the middle, and native English is closest to the center of power. Xenophobia is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Geography: Rural/inner city is the most marginalized identity, suburb is in the middle, and city is closest to the center of power. Classism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Social class: Poor/working poor is the most marginalized identity, middle class is in the middle, and wealthy is closest to the center of power. Classism also affects people in this category.
- Housing status: Houseless is the most marginalized identity, sheltered/renting is in the middle, and property owner is closest to the center of power. Classism also affects people in this category.
- Education: Elementary education is the most marginalized identity, high school is in the middle, and college or university is closest to the center of power. Credentialism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Neurodiversity: Significant neurodivergence is the most marginalized identity, some neurodivergence is in the middle, and neurotypical is closest to the center of power. Ableism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Physical and mental health: Vulnerable is the most marginalized identity, mostly stable is in the middle, and robust is closest to the center of power. Ableism also affects people in this category.
- Ability: Severe disability is the most marginalized identity, mild disability is in the middle, and able-bodied is closest to the center of power. Ableism also affects people in this category.
- Body size: Overweight or obese is the most marginalized identity, average is in the middle, and slim is closest to the center of power. Sizeism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Gender identity: Trans/intersex/nonbinary is the most marginalized, cisgender women are in the middle, and cisgender men are closest to the center of power. Sexism and cisgenderism are forms of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Sexual orientation: Lesbian, bi, pan/asexual are the most marginalized identities, gay men are in the middle, and straight is closest to the center of power. Heterosexism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.
- Marital Status: Single/nonmonogamous are the most marginalized identities, engaged/partnered are in the middle, and married is closest to the center of power. Heterosexism is a form of oppression marginalized people in this category experience.

## **Attribution**

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