

Contextualizing Community

In this module we'll be thinking about what it means to enter into a community with which you are not familiar. Not only do we need to learn about the community we are entering, but we also need to learn about ourselves and *how* we are entering and engaging the community.

Contextualizing Community Module Learning Outcomes

Through this module you will be able to...

1. Build skills for learning about communities and community organizations
2. Reflect on the connection between positionality, knowledge construction, and intellectual humility
3. Develop an understanding of cultural humility and self-awareness and how those concepts impact community engagement
4. Consider how systemic and institutional issues may impact community outcomes and experiences

The Complexity of Community

Oftentimes when we talk about community, we talk about it in oversimplified ways. In doing so, we tend to dilute the complexity, richness, and history of people, the environment, and the thing that brings them together. We lose sense of the humanness of those that exist within these communities and can even tend to ignore the very voices of those we want to work with. So as we develop our sense of community, we'll be paying special attention to the way we view and **understand communities**.

However, understanding the community alone is not enough. We also need to develop an **understanding of ourselves** and think about what preconceptions we may have about a community before entering it. Such preconceptions can drastically color our experiences and how community partners perceive our presence. If we come to believe we have all the answers, the chances are high that we'll be dismissive of the direction those in the community may want to take the project.

Further still, we need to **consider the bigger picture** that our communities exist within. That is to say, no community exists in a vacuum. Our communities are impacted by larger systems and structures. For example, a nonprofit focused on advancing green energy in rural Wisconsin may be impacted by limited federal funding, a spread of scientific misinformation, or resistance from local politicians. Similarly, a child struggling with math may be struggling for reasons beyond being challenged by the curriculum. If the child is facing hunger, homelessness, or discrimination, the problem may only be exacerbated. As discussed in the Intro to Community Engagement module, we want to think beyond the individual and consider the root causes of issues. **In this module, we'll focus on these three areas; understanding community, understanding ourselves, and understanding the big picture.**

In this first section we'll focus on our understanding of community. Click to the next page, where we'll explore what assumptions we may have about community and how those assumptions can negatively shape the outcome.



Image created by the Morgridge Center for Public Service

Quiz: Assumptions about Community

Welcome to East Cityville, an historic neighborhood in Cityville that hosts a number of community organizations that often work with university volunteers and partners. Imagine that this semester you'll be working with a nonprofit in East Cityville to support the implementation of a local farmers' market. Prior to going to the community, you're trying to learn a little more about it....



Image created with clip art by the Morgridge Center for Public Service

Taking a very simplistic view of East Cityville, examine this graphic and identify **three characteristics** of the community that stand out. What assumptions might you make about the community based on this image? (there are no wrong answers)

Asset-based Understandings of Community

On the previous page you saw a caricature of a community and were asked to consider some things that stick out about that community upon first glance. You probably noticed a few different things, such as:

- A lack of nutritious food choices
- Abandoned buildings, dirty
- Few green spaces
- Limited access to public transportation

Certainly, at first glance, these **observations inform our understanding of a community**. We may consider these observations to be detriments to the community. In fact, it is quite common for volunteers or those outside of the community to classify these observations as issues that need to be solved, even before they have developed a deeper understanding of the community.

This can be a dangerous and harmful misstep. For example, consider an undergraduate student - we'll call them Reya - from outside of Madison who moved here and learned of a community that they perceived to be food insecure. Let's say Reya organizes a food drive without any input from folks in the community. Through a fairly exhaustive and intense effort, Reya only manages to collect about 100 cans and boxes of food. Not a lot, but pretty good. Reya learns of a church in the community that accepts food donations, so she brings the food there. When she's there, she gets a tour of the church from the Pastor. During the tour, Reya learns that the church offers a variety of community support services. They have a small food pantry, but it turns out the residents in the community are actually incredibly interested in growing their own food. The church's community garden is at capacity and the church has been working tirelessly to raise money and recruit volunteers to expand the garden so some of the fresh grown food can be used to feed kids during summer school programs.

While Reya's food donation in this example isn't harmful, it isn't exactly helpful either. Reya spent a great deal of time working to organize the food drive, including making flyers, putting out boxes, coordinating pick-ups and more. Wouldn't Reya's energy and time have been better used to support the church's efforts to expand their community garden? Even the cost of printing, bus fare, and other materials could have been funneled into a donation that would allow a food pantry to order food in bulk, equating to more bang for your buck. (In fact, food banks would often [prefer cash donations](#) because they can generally turn your dollar into strategic purchases) If Reya was truly interested in making an impact, **wouldn't it have been wiser to talk to folks in the community to understand their needs and interests?** Or even simply just understanding what sort of food they might need. The point here is that while Reya's efforts may have been well-intentioned and didn't cause harm, there are many ways in which she could have made a more meaningful and useful impact.

Much like how Reya learned more about the community by talking with the Pastor, East Cityville is the same. **Once you've made connections with the community you can begin to see the many ways in which the community is already organizing around the things you may be interested in supporting.** Connecting with residents of East Cityville, you might learn that:

- Residents operate a community garden out of the church to provide fresh produce to those in the neighborhood
- A group of teachers and school staff supervise after school play at the school to give kids an after school activity
- The "rundown" building is actually used to showcase local art, including graffiti and sculpture.
- An online Facebook group is used for members of the community to coordinate car pooling efforts



Image created with clip art, by the Morgridge Center for Public Service

The way in which we perceive community and the effort we make to understand them greatly shapes the outcome, whether positive or negative. **Not only do our assumptions risk perpetuating harmful stereotypes, but they often hinder productive work from actually being accomplished.** In community engagement, we try to develop an "asset-based" viewpoint that allows us to organize and support

community strengths, which can lead to increased project sustainability and impact. Asset-Based Community Development is defined as:

Asset Based Community Development builds on the assets that are found in the community and mobilizes individuals, associations, and institutions to come together to realize and develop their strengths. This makes it different to a Deficit Based approach that focuses on identifying and servicing needs

Kretzmann, J. P., & McKnight, J. (1993). Building communities from the inside out (pp. 2-10). Evanston, IL: Center for Urban Affairs and Policy Research, Neighborhood Innovations Network.

Positionality and Knowledge

There's this common view of college and academia as being disconnected from the real world - an ivory tower of resources and knowledge. And that viewpoint is certainly grounded in some reality. There's a history of academics and college students "parachuting" into communities ready to implement and test new theories, ideas, and programs without any sustained investment or involvement from the community.

We discussed this idea more in the Intro to Community Engagement module when exploring the **motivations and intentions** that guide our interest in engaging with the community. Another way of exploring this idea is through the lens of **positionality**. Positionality is defined as "*the stance or positioning of the researcher in relation to the social and political context of the study—the community, the organization or the participant group*" (Coghlan & Brydon-Miller, 2014). Unsurprisingly, it's a pretty academic definition. Basically, it means the ways in which our **identities, both personal and professional, impact our relationship** to the group we are working with.

Later in this section we'll talk more about the roles of **power and privilege**. But for now, it's important to think about how our positionality (or identities) can inform our perceptions or even biases about communities we may engage with. One bias that often impacts academia is **intellectual superiority**, which is essentially the belief that one's affiliation with an institution (in our case, UW) makes our knowledge more valid, even when it's about topics or communities we have no actual connection to. This can look like a low-income community advocating against pollution in their neighborhood, but the effort not being supported until research studies are published to prove the existence of negative health impacts from the pollution. Or it could be a community partner coming in to speak to your class, but you not feeling that their discussion is as relevant to your learning as the slides the professor reviewed last week.

This bias truly serves as a disadvantage to our ability to understand the world and one another. Another idea we'll explore later on is **cultural humility**. But for now, we can talk about cultural humility's cousin, **Intellectual Humility**. The social and personality psychologist Mark Leary, quoted in a [Vox article](#)

[Links to an external site.](#)

on the subject, defines this as, "the recognition that the things you believe in might in fact be wrong" (2019). It's recognizing that there are multiple ways of knowing and multiple ways in which we experience reality and being open to understanding those other ways.

The video below does a pretty good job of demonstrating how our realities and ways of knowing can be informed by some incredibly complex and deeply rooted parts of ourselves. Give it a view and interact with the questions throughout.

[Lera Boroditsky Ted Talk: How language shapes the way we think](#)

Understanding Community Partners

Oftentimes when we are given the opportunity to engage with a nonprofit or community organization, there can be a tendency to look at the organization with a shallow lens that is restricted to the specific programs or tasks we may be working with. For example, while you may have experience serving food at a soup kitchen, you likely have a much more limited understanding of how the organization orders and prepares food. You probably haven't learned how long the organization has been around and how the need has grown over the years.

By working with community organizations we have the opportunity to learn about this history, the organization, and the community in a rich multitude of ways.

Frequently, organizations will offer some of this information on their website, where they can share their **mission statement** and history. Often they'll also list their values, goals, or other similar ideas. So let's take a look at _____, a local organization in _____.

[Insert mission/vision/history from a local community organization]

[We have omitted a quiz, which asks students to explore the website of a local community organization and find certain information]

Working with Different Populations

As noted earlier, community can be a broad term and in many ways much of this training is intended to be broad. It'd be impossible to give an overview of how to work with every population or community. The basic idea of **treating everyone with respect and kindness is a great starting point**, but you may need to do a little more learning depending on the community you may be engaging with. For example, engaging with children in schools often comes with specific policies or expectations that ensure the safety of the child. In the world of COVID-19, many schools are implementing specific policies for virtual engagement with students for activities such as tutoring.

Oftentimes your community partner will offer this specified knowledge in their orientations, but **it never hurts to do some self-guided learning**. For example, if you are working with a population that is unfamiliar to you, such as trans or gender nonconforming folks, you may realize that you know little about that community or how different people identify. Perhaps you need to learn a bit more about how to address people with their [chosen pronouns](#).

You may be excited about the opportunity to engage with communities with which you are unfamiliar. However, it is important to note that **communities bear no responsibility in teaching you about their culture or identity**. We should not be asking others to drudge up their trauma or exoticize others for our own learning. We are fortunate to live in the age of Google, where an infinite amount of information is just seconds away. For this section, I will leave you with this quote from Audre Lorde and link you to [an article](#) that expands on this topic.

"[People of color] are expected to educate white people as to our humanity. Women are expected to educate men. Lesbians and gay men are expected to educate the heterosexual world. The oppressors maintain their position and evade their responsibility for their actions"

- Audre Lorde

Understanding Ourselves

Self-awareness

Building our own understanding of ourselves, also called **self-awareness, is a key life skill**. It allows us to take a more objective look at ourselves and consider how others see and interact with us. It can also allow us to gain a better sense of our own strengths, weaknesses, and values, which in turn can lead to more intentional and beneficial engagement. Another way to think about **self-awareness is as a form of reflection**. Which means taking intentional time to ponder and critically think about the activities we want to participate in.

A few examples of questions you might ask yourself before volunteering with a new organization might be:

- How do my values mesh with the values espoused by the organization?
- How comfortable or familiar am I with the population that I would be working with?
- Why am I engaging in this opportunity? Am I trying to build career skills or am I actually passionate about the cause?
- Am I a good listener? How can I make sure I am listening to the needs of the community partner throughout the process?
- What are my fears or concerns about volunteering? Where do those fears come from?

While you may not have immediate answers to these questions, if you've never even considered them, then that could be a problem. Becoming more self-aware is the realization that **we are not and never will be perfect, but that we do have the power to improve how we relate to others and understand ourselves**. In this section, we'll explore a few different concepts that can inform how we understand ourselves and how we relate to others.

We'll talk more about cultural humility in the coming slides, but for now, check out this video from folks across Madison discussing the importance of self-awareness and cultural humility within community engagement.

[Morgridge Center video on Self-awareness](#)

Social Identity

Social Identity groups are based on the physical, social, and mental characteristics of individuals. They are sometimes obvious and clear, sometimes not, often self claimed and frequently ascribed by others.

Definition from UW Multicultural Student Center

Our identities shape how we experience and view the world. Some identities may give us power or privilege, such as being college students - which grants many people access to educational resources and certain career opportunities. While other identities, such as being a trans woman can lead to increased likelihood of experiencing discrimination and oppression - like being barred from certain restrooms or public spaces. Social identity often informs our **positionality**, which we discussed earlier. The important thing to note about social identities is that they are **socially constructed**. That is to say, that our identities may give us power or privilege, or put us at a disadvantage, simply because we exist in a social system that has categorized people based on perceived or constructed identities. We have done this throughout history. However, just because our identities are socially constructed, does not mean that they do not have real impacts on our lives. That is why it is important that we work to understand our own and others' identities and the ways in which our social systems and institutions privilege and oppress different people.

Here are a few examples of common identity categories:

- Race (i.e. white, Black, indigenous...)
- Gender identity (i.e. gender nonbinary, trans man, cis woman...)
- Sex (i.e. intersex, male...)
- Religious affiliation (i.e. Muslim, agnostic, Catholic...)
- (Dis)ability status (i.e. Able-bodied, deaf, wheelchair user...)
- Socioeconomic status (i.e. wealthy, working class...)
- Sexual orientation (i.e. Asexual, straight, queer...)

The intention of this section is not to assign blame or guilt to anyone based on their identity. We should all be able to love ourselves for who we are. However, in order to best understand others and the social systems that construct our collective world, **it is important that we strive to understand our own identities and the way in which they shape our reality.**

Below is an image of a **social identity wheel**¹. Draw the wheel on your own sheet of paper and note your identity as it relates to each category. For example, as a white person, under race I would write "white," under ethnicity, "European ancestry," and so on. Then, consider the questions in the center of the circle. If you're unsure what any of the social identity categories mean, check out this [terminology guide](#).

Social Identity Wheel

(Adapted from "Voices of Discovery", Intergroup Relations Center, Arizona State University)



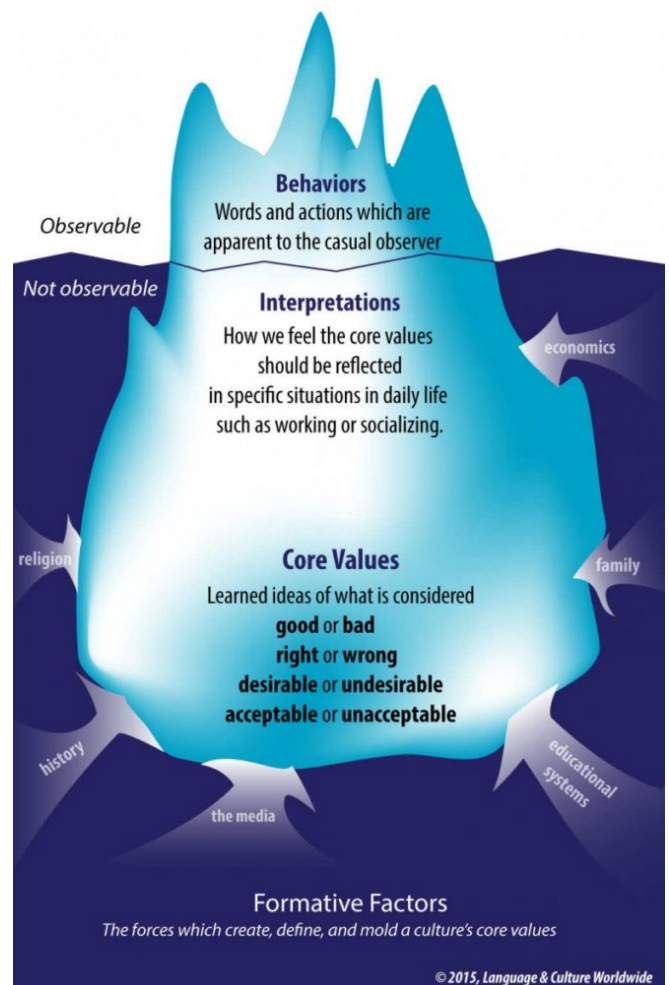
¹ University of Michigan program on intergroup relations. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://igr.umich.edu/about>

What is culture?

For many of us, the word might be vague. It encompasses food, maybe dress or celebrations. Those are certainly parts of culture, but culture runs much much deeper. I like to use the metaphor of an iceberg, pictured here. At the top, the part that sits on the surface, we think of those **observable pieces of culture**. How someone dresses. How one speaks. How or what someone celebrates. But the larger part of the iceberg that sits below the water encompasses so much more. It holds **our core values, as well as our interpretations of those core values, and how we live out those values and ideas**.

Let's look at an example. You might be familiar with the Hindu festival, Holi, which is celebrated in the spring, often with colorful powders. In fact, you may even see this holiday celebrated on campus. The Madison Hindu Students Association has hosted this celebration in previous years. But the meaning of the holiday, the part of the iceberg we can't as easily see, often gets lost in the fanfare. The holiday is intended to celebrate the end of winter and the arrival of spring, but for many Hindu people the holiday also symbolizes the victory of good over evil and has many spiritual connotations. The colors also have their own symbolism and represent values and hopes for those that celebrate. For example, red symbolizes love and fertility.

All this is to say that culture is incredibly, deeply rooted in us. And even the way each one of us may live out parts of our culture(s) varies with each person. You likely belong to many different cultures. For example, you're a Badger and UW has its own culture. You may also be Christian and a member of the LGBTQ+ community, both of which also have their own cultures. The interplay between our identities and cultures can have large impacts on us.



Even further complicating the iceberg, is the **infinite number of outside factors**, such as history, media, and religion, as demonstrated in the image² above, that also shape how we understand, express, and experience different parts of our cultures. Let's continue with the example of Holi. Having spiritual roots, the celebration is of course heavily shaped by religion. For Indian immigrants, the celebration of Holi may not look the same if they are no longer living in an area with a large Hindu population. A global pandemic, like COVID-19, that makes gathering in large groups risky would also be a factor that shapes how the holiday is celebrated.

Culture is a complex, constantly evolving idea. And no one experiences any aspect of culture the same way. As you engage with others, you will find that the world is full of people with cultures, lives, and histories drastically different from your own. In the next section we'll examine **cultural humility** as a way of understanding and valuing the rich diversity of our world and those we may work with.

Cultural Humility

Are you familiar with the term **Cultural Competency**? Maybe you've taken a "cultural competency" training or attended a diversity and inclusion workshop. While that learning is certainly important, there's an issue with the term "competency." It may make sense to gain competency regarding technical skills like using Excel or grant writing, but suggesting one can become *competent* regarding not just one culture, but many cultures is quite a leap. Even if we think we have a strong understanding of a culture or a group of people, we likely are not competent.

Cultural Humility on the other hand is a much more appropriate term. I like it because it doesn't treat learning about others like a checklist, where you read a chapter on the LGBTQ+ community and cross it off your list. Cultural Humility asks us to recognize that we'll never know everything, but what we can do is be open to learning. Specifically, **cultural humility asks us to recognize the many different ways of living in, experiencing, and understanding the world and not assign value to those different methods**. Without sounding too corny, it asks us to recognize the beauty and complexity of the world we live in and to approach it with a sense of humility and open-mindedness.

² Language and Culture Worldwide, LLC. (2021, January 11). *Cultural Iceberg* [image]. from <https://languageandculture.com/iceberg-or-beacon-how-the-cultural-iceberg-guide-us-toward-greater-inclusion/>

The history of this term actually stems from Public Health literature and this video below of the original scholars, Melanie Tervalon and Jann Murray-García (1998), does a pretty great job of explaining it. View the clip and engage with the questions throughout.

[Cultural Humility](#)

Implicit Bias

Implicit Bias is defined as the "attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. These biases, which encompass both favorable and unfavorable assessments, are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control."

Definition from [Kirwan Institute](#)

Whether we like to admit it or not, **we all have implicit biases**. Because we are socialized beings, we internalize different messages about others that can unconsciously shape our behavior. These messages can come to us from a number of different sources - the media, schooling, religion, and our peer groups. They often inform our preferences, beliefs about others, and understanding of what is "normal."

Interestingly enough, my mom, a white woman in her sixties from northern Wisconsin, provided me with an excellent example of this recently. We were talking about different shows we've been watching. My mom still uses cable at times and was explaining that she was flipping through the channels and realized that she was inadvertently bypassing shows that seemed to focus on Black characters. In talking with me she explained that she thought those shows weren't for her or relatable to her. In doing so, she essentially generalized and dismissed the stories of those she saw as different than herself, only furthering her lack of understanding and appreciation for others. This story reminds me of a [Ted talk by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie](#).

Fortunately my mom is now able to name and recognize that bias she was enacting, but for her 60+ years of life, she had likely been behaving without any awareness of that tendency. **That is implicit bias**. Her unconscious disinterest in Black stories and othering that occurred as a result. And it impacted me too growing up. As a result I was rarely exposed to stories about non-white characters, limiting my ability to understand others. The hopeful part of this story is that my mom was able to recognize this tendency and by becoming aware of it, and ultimately work to change it. We chatted and I gave her some recommendations of shows to watch that center on Black characters, shows that she ended up really enjoying. By recognizing that we all have implicit bias as

a result of our socialization, **we can begin to work on becoming more aware of those biases and challenging them.**

Reflection Moment:

- 1. Growing up, what sort of shows or books did you engage with? Who were the main characters in those stories? Do those patterns still align with your current viewing/reading habits?**
 - 2. Thinking about the community organization and population you'll be engaging with this semester, what ideas do you have about the organization or the people? Do you have any concerns/excitements/uncertainties? Where do those ideas stem from for you?**
 - 3. What value, if any, do you think *cultural humility* offers for respectful community engagement?**
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Understanding the Big Picture

No social issue exists in a vacuum. Just as individuals and communities are complex, so too are the issues and experiences they encounter. The relationships we have with communities can also be complex and informed by histories of harm, exploitation, and power. There are no easy fixes to issues like poverty, systemic racism, or climate change. If there were, we would have solved them already. It is normal for community engagement to fill us with pride and a sense of positivity for having an impact on another person. And certainly those small acts are important and can be impactful, but when we zoom out and gain a sense of the bigger picture, new opportunities arise. In this final section, we'll be exploring approaches to community engagement that allow us to consider the bigger picture and can move us towards actions and engagement that can help us build lasting social change.

Band-aid Solutions and Root Causes

There are no easy answers to issues like poverty, racism, or climate change. As humans, the enormity of these issues and their complicated nature can often be too

large for us to fully grasp. But as humans, we also feel a need to do something. To make ourselves feel at least a little bit better about the pain we see around us. Perhaps you're concerned about climate change and working to cut your meat consumption to lower your carbon footprint. Or maybe you're concerned about police brutality and add a series of posts to your Instagram Story.

These are not bad actions, but they could be considered **band-aid solutions**. Band-aid solutions are superficial, temporary fixes or solutions that do not deal with the actual cause of an issue. Serving food at a soup kitchen could also be considered a band-aid solution. While it is an excellent *and needed* service, it does not do much to change the systems that make food insecurity a reality.

Digging deeper into the **root causes** of food insecurity may however yield better results. For example, if an individual lives in a food desert (an area where it is hard to find affordable, healthy food) perhaps organizing a community garden or local farmers market that accepts food stamps would provide more sustained support and independence. Or if an individual working full-time does not make enough money to secure housing *and* food, it may make sense to advocate for a living wage. Back to the sustainability example, while it is of course great to reduce one's own carbon footprint, it may also be worthwhile to advocate for the [100 companies responsible for 71% of Greenhouse Gas emissions](#) to lower their carbon footprints.

This section is in no way intended to belittle the importance of direct service, band-aid solutions, or advocacy. We should always be working to support those in our community, but **we can also push ourselves to think harder and more critically about how to truly build a better world**. Imagine living in a world where soup kitchens weren't necessary because the factors that lead to food insecurity are being addressed. Where you didn't have to worry about purchasing a "green" product because all products are made with sustainability in mind. These don't have to be dreams, we can work to make them a reality. But it requires us to take a more critical lens and often get involved beyond showing up for a volunteer shift.

Systems of Power and Privilege

Related to our discussion of root causes and band-aid solutions on the previous page, is the idea of systems of power and privilege. We also discussed these ideas as it relates to social identities. Now let's unpack these words a bit more. **Power and privilege are dynamics and systems that can play out at an individual and institutional level**, meaning that they can impact our interpersonal relationships, as

well as how groups of people are treated by systems or institutions. Here are some very basic definitions of those terms:

- Power - The ability or authority to decide what is best for others. who has access to resources, or what is perceived as normal.
- Privilege - A set of unearned or earned advantages, rights, freedoms, or benefits given to a group of people based on group membership.
 - privileged groups are *considered* to be the normative groups, while everyone else is minoritized and othered
 - privileged group membership is not a choice and individuals often are not aware of how these advantages benefit them

Definitions adapted from University of Wisconsin Multicultural Student Center Social Justice Educators (2019)

Power and privilege operate in a number of different ways, whether it be based on race, class, religion, or a multitude of other identities. As members of the University, we also inherently hold power and privilege that we are likely unaware of, especially as it relates to working with community partners. **At an individual level, this could be called educational privilege**, as not everyone has access to higher education or deems it necessary, yet we know that in our society your collegiate affiliation can often be viewed as a marker of status or success, thus granting us certain privileges. **At an institutional level**, our affiliation with the University grants us access to certain power, resources, and credibility. All of these things, especially when not considered or acknowledged, can negatively impact the relationships we form with community partners.

Let's dig into what this can look like at UW. Let's imagine a scale, with community resources on one side and UW resources on the other. The UW side, replete with diverse financial resources, institutional credibility and prestige, top-tier technology, and hoards of students, staff, and faculty, among ample other resources, has the scales tipped in its favor. On the community partner side, we're likely to find less people, less money, and outdated technology, as nonprofits tend to be understaffed, underfunded, and under-resourced. If we want to build **equitable partnerships**, we need to be aware of how these dynamics can impact the relationships we build and how we approach community.

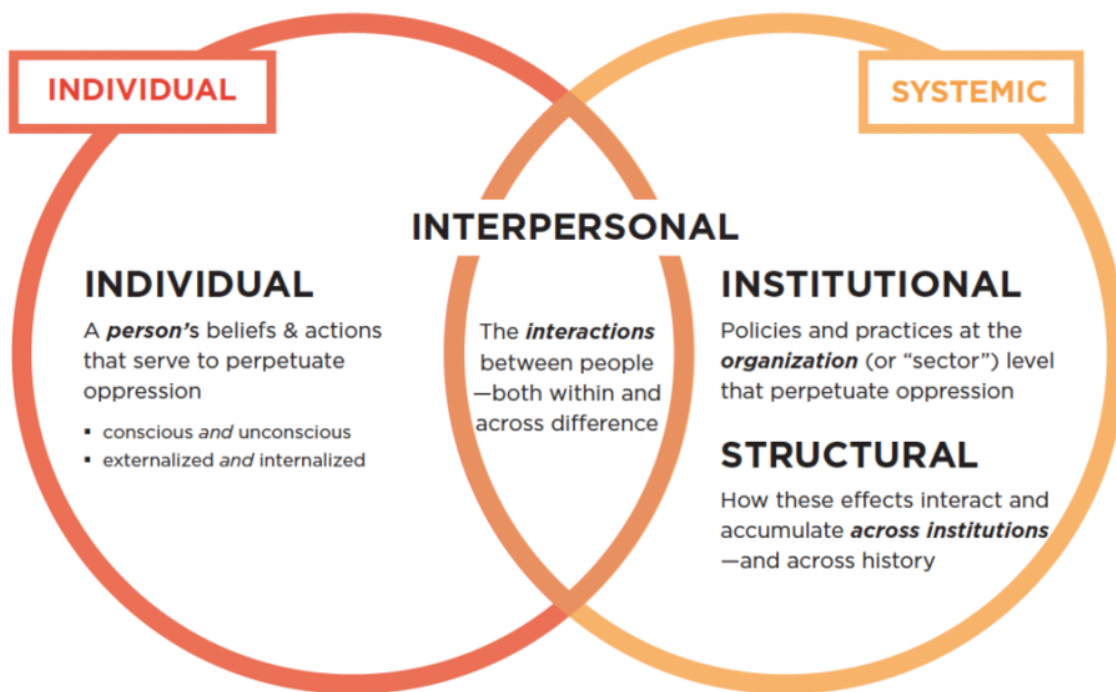


Image from the National; Equity Project³

To bring all of these ideas together, let's look at this Venn Diagram, called **the Lens of Systemic Oppression**, from the [National Equity Project](https://www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression). As we discussed earlier in this module, we all have implicit (and for some of us, explicit) biases that occur within us. Those biases may not always be enacted or targeted at anyone, but when they do play out through our **interactions with others** in situations like hiring, legal procedures, or relationships, they become interpersonal because they can impact another person or group of people. Then, as we look into our institutions and infrastructures that are composed of people interacting with or making decisions about people - the way **those biases can be enacted to shape policy or inform how an institution treats others** - those biases and forms of oppression become systemic.

There's this kind of weird joke in a lot of families - that we all have that one aunt or uncle who is a little bit....racist, homophobic, sexist, you name it. And because we are family and we maybe believe that person's behaviors or ideas have little impact outside of the family sphere, we let the behavior slide. But let's imagine that that relative is the CEO of a large company and that even if he/she behaves more appropriately in the office setting, their biases may impact who they decide to hire, fire, promote or treat as an

³ National Equity Project. *Lens of Systemic Oppression*.
<https://www.nationalequityproject.org/frameworks/lens-of-systemic-oppression> [2022, May 1]

equal in the work space. **When unexamined, these biases can impact the types of institutions and systems that are created and how others must operate within them or are treated by them.** This is all to say, that our biases have impacts beyond what we may be able to conceptualize. If this material feels somehow irrelevant to you, I encourage you to reflect on why you feel that way. We all have an impact on the world around us, and we all have a bit of work to do to build a better world.

Dig Deeper

Another important example of educational privilege is **knowledge credibility**. As representatives of the university, especially academics, we may often be viewed as if our understanding of an issue is more credible or reasoned than that of the members of a community. Whose knowledge or ways of knowing are accepted and seen as valid is an enormous example of privilege. It is not uncommon for students to enter communities, that they know next to nothing about, to believe that their understanding of a social issue or the community, because of one book they read in class, is more informed than the understanding of someone who has perhaps lived in the community for many years. Not only is this an example of privilege, it is simply disrespectful and rude. Check out this [short essay from Bright Magazine](#) that explores this idea more.

Reflection Moment

What is your reaction to the power and privilege material we've covered? How have these ideas impacted your life? What impact could it have on the community or project you will be working with?