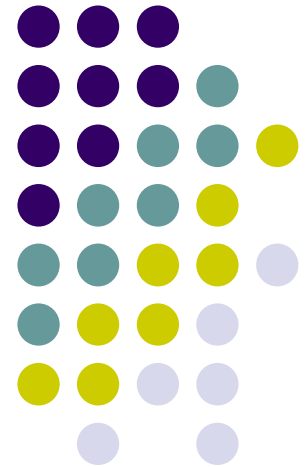
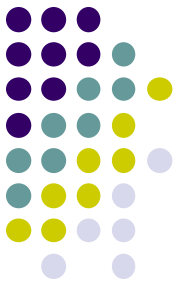


# White Families & White Privilege: Intersectionality, Critical Self- Reflexivity, and Shifting the Center

Bethany L. Letiecq, PhD  
Human Development & Family Science  
George Mason University  
Office: 703-993-5076  
Email: [bletiecq@gmu.edu](mailto:bletiecq@gmu.edu)

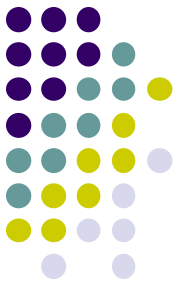


# Shifting the Center



- Shifting the center is critical to studying R/C/G in ways that transform existing social arrangements
- It means including voices that have been unheard or silenced because those voices were from the non-dominant group or were marginalized in our social world
- Knowledge and understanding of our society has been constructed by those in power...because they have had the most access to systems of education and communication
- Our justice-based work includes reconstructing what we know to include those perspectives and lived experiences that have not been heard or understood or have been silenced and marginalized...

# Shifting the Center



- Goal: Reconstructing knowledge
- Goal: Engage the self in a reflexive process of transformation.
- Goal: Seek to change self/systems of power/privilege rather than seek to change those marginalized and oppressed by systems of power
  - Conformity and assimilation of those on the margins does not eradicate unearned privilege

# My work and approach: Shifting the Center

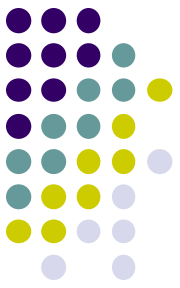


- My colleagues and I work in **partnership** with individuals and families who reside on the social and economic margins of our society
- Our approach is called Community-based Participatory Research and Action (CBPR)
- Together, we collectively work to:
  - Build **trusted** partnerships
  - **Understand** each other and our lived experiences recognizing we occupy different social spaces, face different challenges, and have access to different opportunities
  - Better **align** services/interventions
  - Be more **responsive** to families, meeting them where they are to promote well-being and positive outcomes
  - Change systems to address/redress structural violence and inequality

# Engagement “ASKS”?



- Let's create GRACIOUS SPACE  
(<http://www.ethicaleadership.org/>)
- Let's listen with open hearts and minds
- Let's keep our egos, judgments, and assumptions in check
- Let's create a safe space to allow for vulnerability and growth
- Let's be gentle with the self and others
- Let's commit to testing out at least one new skill in our relational toolkit



# Intersectionality

**Goal of intersectionality:** to transform knowledge so it is more inclusive, comprehensive, complex, and fair, thereby fostering social justice

Recognizes that our lives are structured and regulated by social systems....

See:

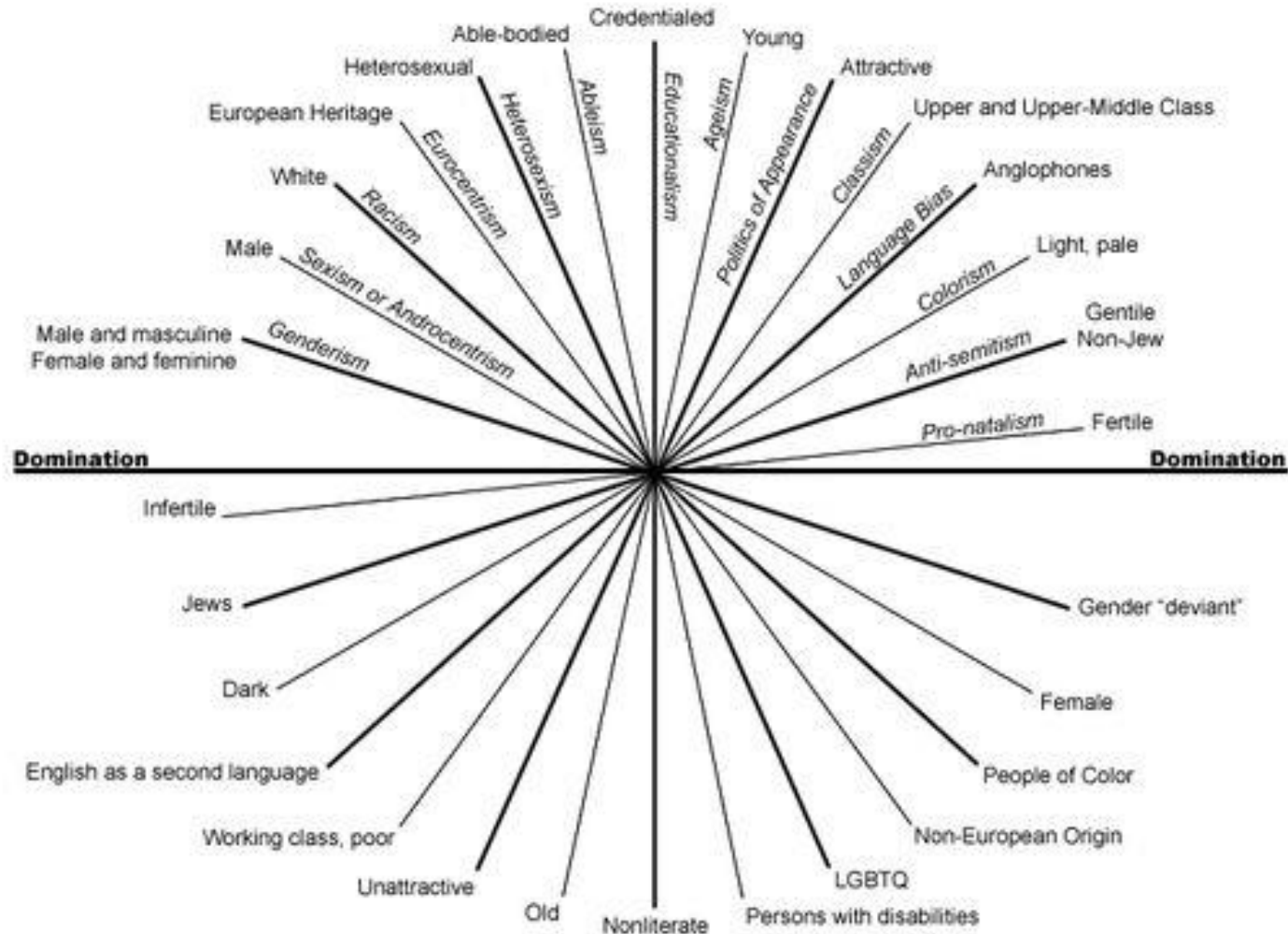
[http://socialdifference.columbia.edu/files/socialdiff/projects/Article\\_\\_Mapping\\_the\\_Margins\\_by\\_Kimblere\\_Crenshaw.pdf](http://socialdifference.columbia.edu/files/socialdiff/projects/Article__Mapping_the_Margins_by_Kimblere_Crenshaw.pdf)

# Matrix of Privilege and Domination

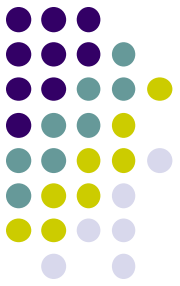


## Intersecting Axes of Privilege, Domination, and Oppression

Adapted from Kathryn Pauly Morgan, "Describing the Emperor's New Clothes: Three Myths of Educational (In)Equality,"  
 The Gender Question in Education: Theory, Pedagogy & Politics, Ann Diller et al., Boulder, CO: Westview, 1996.



# PRACTICE #1



## ***“Get on the LINE”***

- How can we work to authentically connect with the self and another person (without judgment or bias)?
- Recognize we are all connected



# Practice #2

## Critical Self-Reflexivity



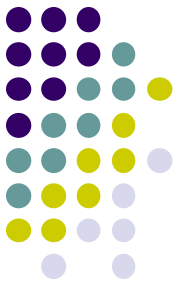
- Self-reflexivity: the process of exercising critical consciousness
- It is a process that depends on the idea of a transforming self, continuously emerging and changing as we interact with others, the environment, and the public
- Self-reflexivity is a “**dialogue with the self**” about its fundamental assumptions and values
- Through this radical process of critiquing our beliefs and ideologies we remain open to change

# Critical Self-Reflexivity



- Pollner (1991) describes radical reflexivity as “an ‘unsettling,’ i.e., an insecurity regarding the basic assumptions, discourse and practices used in describing reality”
- Reflexivity incorporates a critical examination of past and present, of what passes as ‘good’ knowledge and practice, and how this influences our ways of knowing/practicing

# Critical Self-Reflexivity



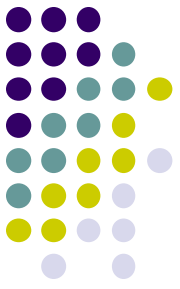
- Reflexive process: ‘Expert’ knowledge about reality questioned
  - Objectivism = assumes development of value-free knowledge and practice possible
  - Objective knowledge = the ‘rational’ standard against which all other forms of knowledge and practice are judged
  - Our view of reality and explanations/accuracy of that reality taken for granted as the “right” way of knowing

# Critical Self-Reflexivity



- Reflexivity questions existence of objective reality/knowledge
  - Recognizes that we construct the world and our knowledge of the world based on our White majority theoretical assumptions
  - These assumptions have a major influence on intellectual/social practice → form the basis for defining, judging, and valuing others

# Critical Self-Reflexivity

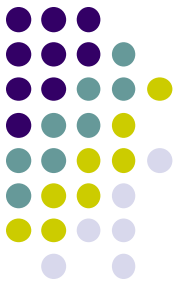


## Question everything!

- Who is “expert” and who has expert knowledge?
- Whose values are being honored?
- Whose view of reality is privileged?
- What is in the best interest of families...Whose families?
- Why do we act the way we do...If our goal is connection, how are we doing?
- What are our goals again?

**Ask: What must life be like....?**

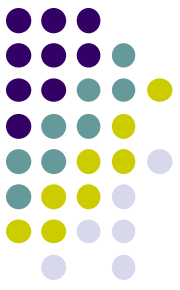
# Intersectionality and Reflexivity



- Examining social location based on R/C/G
  - Situating self/others within social structural systems of power and privilege
- Recognizing “standpoint epistemology”
- Deconstructing “knowings”

[http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/chimamanda\\_a\\_dichie\\_the\\_danger\\_of\\_a\\_single\\_story.html](http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/eng/chimamanda_a_dichie_the_danger_of_a_single_story.html)

# Challenges and Opportunities



## Being Stuck: Getting unstuck

- Guilt, shame, judgment: Create Gracious Space
- Criticism: Generate compassion, empathy, and cultural humility
- Power: Share power and develop mutuality
- Control: Allow for vulnerability; Lead by being led
- Aloneness and disconnection: Build bridges, foster partnerships, seek help, grow supports, connect, be an ally, take action
- Status quo: ***You must be the change you wish to see in the world –Ghandi***