

# Social Location Mapping Wheel

## OVERVIEW

An important step with anti-oppression learning and practice is to more consciously understand the social identities (these may or may not be the identities that are most important to you) such as race, class, gender, etc. that each of us carry and their respective locations, that is, proximity to the ability to exert systemic power, within systems of oppression.

There are different ways one can explore their social identities and the respective locations of those identities, for example by writing a poem or journaling with reflection prompts. The tool offered here with this Social Location Mapping Wheel offers an opportunity to visually map one's identities based on their proximity to systemic power and then guides people through some reflection prompts for deeper understanding about the implications of their social locations.

Many of us will have both identities that have been *systemically prejudiced for* (considered superior and afforded rights) and some identities that are *systemically prejudiced against* (considered inferior and denied rights). For example in many societies, a white, heterosexual, disabled woman will be systematically prejudiced for in terms of race and sexuality while simultaneously being systematically prejudiced against in terms of disability and gender identity. It is also possible to experience a social location that occurs at the intersection of identities, such as how a Black woman in the United States faces certain kinds of discrimination that Black men and white women do not face. Kimberle Crenshaw coined the term *intersectionality* to describe these social locations that occur at the intersection of different identities.

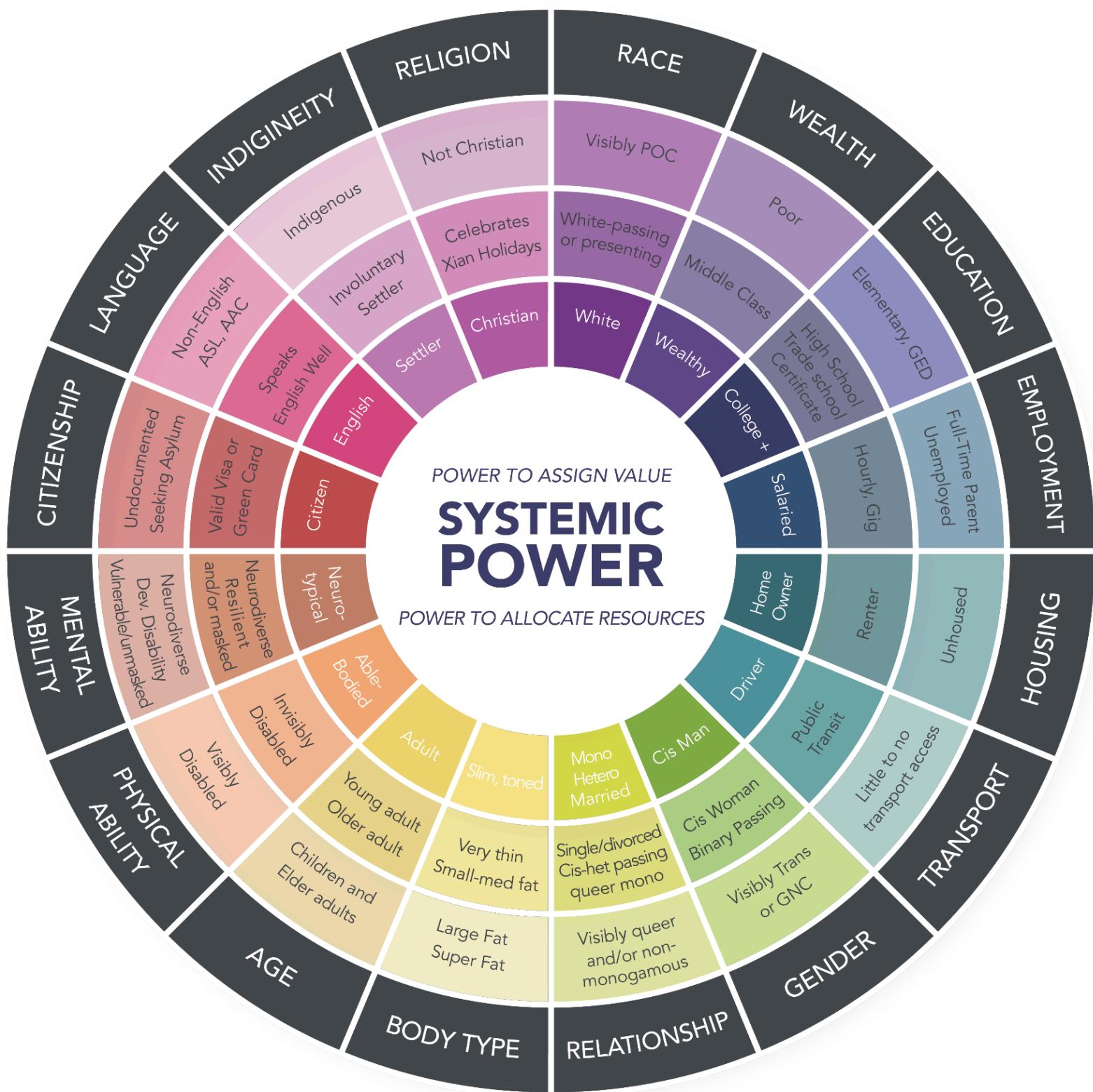
While social location will often be acutely obvious to people who have been oppressed by social systems of domination because of their day-to-day lived experience, many people in more dominant identities may not even be conscious of their social locations. For example, in societies where the standard is “white” and only those who are not white carry a racial identity, many white people may not think much about their identity or the power and rights afforded to it. Having lived a lifetime of having their identity normalized by society and their power perceived as just the way things are, people with dominant identities may not be aware of their positions within hierarchical societies until it is either pointed out to them, or they otherwise do some conscious learning about it.

Taking stock of one's social identities, their respective social locations, and the implications of this can be an important step in anti-oppression learning, especially for people with dominant identities. Although not often discussed in “polite society,” all of these power differentials will be present whenever people gather in groups whether they

are explicitly acknowledged or not. Making them more visible and understanding how power differentials are operating can equip people to make different choices with upholding or interrupting the status quo of hierarchical systems of human oppression.

The following Social Location Mapping wheel was adapted by Aravinda Ananda and Kara Bender from Tessa Watkins' Wheel of Privilege, which was based on the work of Sylvia Duckworth and Olena Hankivsky. It was created for an Anti-Oppression Foundations Curriculum for Work That Reconnects facilitators and is offered here on the Interhelp website for any who would like to use it.

This wheel features some identities that are prominent in the United States where this wheel was developed. Important social identities will vary based on local culture. For example, while Christian hegemony has some global reach, the dominant religion will vary based on where one is in the world. If you are using this wheel outside of a U.S. context, you will need to adapt as needed the identities (e.g. the dominant language spoken will of course vary according to country, or the dominant religion) and perhaps also the identity categories based on your local circumstances (e.g. while Indigeneity is a significant social identity in the United States which has an ongoing history of settler colonialism, and being a settler versus being Indigenous have very different social location, there may be other identity categories in other places that are not settler colonial states that are more relevant).



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### Abbreviation key

**POC** - Black, Indigenous or Person of Color, or Person of the Global Majority

**GED** - General Educational Development Test

**GNC** - Gender Non Conforming

**Cis** - Cisgender

**Mono** - Monogamous

**Hetero** - Heterosexual

**Het** - Heterosexual

**Dev. Disability** - Developmental disability

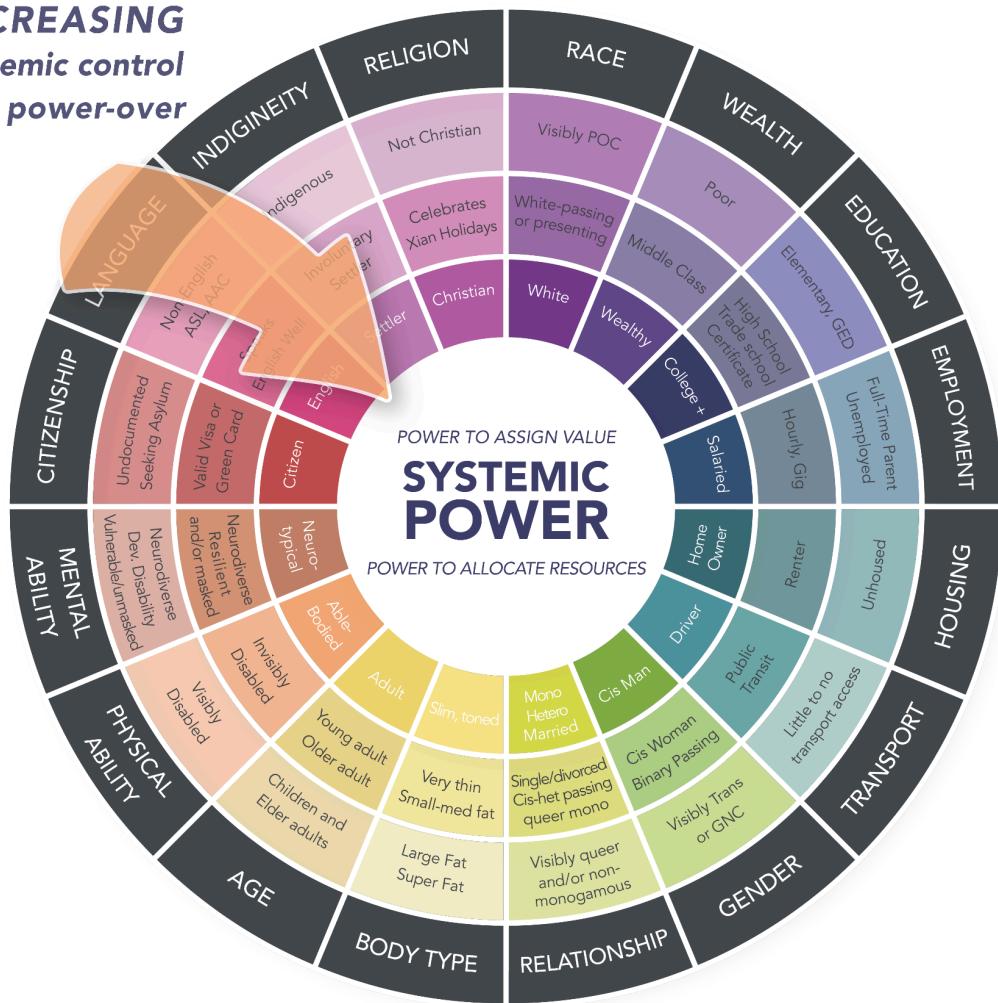
**ASL** - American Sign Language

**AAC** - Augmentative and Alternative Communication

**Xian** - Christian

In the outer black wheel are identity categories. Then, in the three middle rings are identities within that category arranged such that the identities closest to the center have the most systemic power to assign value (worth - superiority for their own identity groups, and inferiority for other groups) and systematic power to allocate rights and resources to their own group and deny the same to other groups. The way power is arranged is that those identities closest to the center have the greatest power to assign value and allocate benefits in their favor (and as such societal systems prejudice for their group, or in their favor), and those in the outer ring have the least systemic power in this way (and as such societal systems prejudice against these groups).

**INCREASING**  
*systemic control  
and power-over*

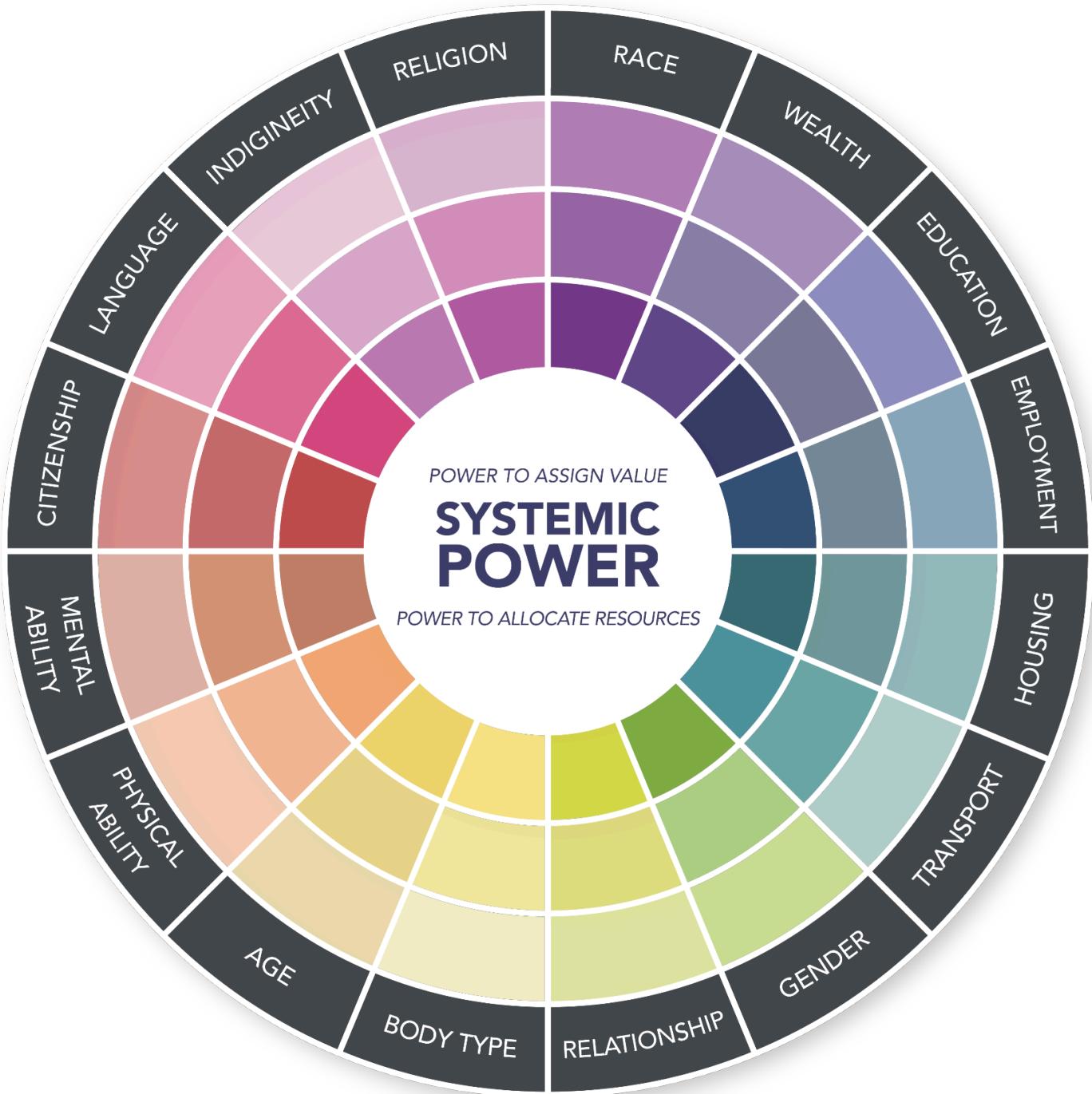


Because identity exists on a spectrum and is not a binary, the identities are listed with a spectrum. For example, with wealth, there are not only poor or wealthy people, there is a whole middle class. Or with race, it isn't that one is just white or Black, one may be mixed race, and consequently face a combination of systematic advantage and systematic disadvantage, or some combination of being both prejudiced for and prejudiced against.

### ACTIVITY: MAPPING YOUR SOCIAL LOCATIONS

Depending on our identities, social locations, and life experiences, this can be an activity that is more vulnerable for some than others, so this invitation is offered with care to map your social locations and identities.

**Using a wheel with the three inner circles blank, fill in your identities with their respective location in the inner, middle or outer ring.** If you like, you can print it out, or simply draw a wheel yourself\*.



\*Instructions for drawing a wheel yourself: Draw a circle at the center of your paper and write the words “Systemic power” in this inner circle. Then draw four concentric circles around the center circle. The parent wheel has 16 wedges, so you can recreate these by drawing a line across the circle horizontally and then diagonally cutting it into 4 pie wedges. Then draw a line through each of these “pie wedges” to get eight sections, and then through each of those to get 16 wedges. In the outermost circle, add the categories: race, wealth, etc.

Note, for some of your identities, you may have more than one location in a given category. For example, you may have mixed employment currently with a small salaried job, some gig work, and some time spent unpaid as a parent. Some of the categories may change over time such as wealth, so you may choose to fill in two locations for that category if more than one is important for your experience.

Adapting the wheel to contexts outside of the United States:

Depending on your local context, some of the categories may change as with the example given above of Indigeneity. If you are in a country that is not a settler colonial state, this may not be an important identity category. If that is the case for you, please feel free to skip this category and add another one if there is another identity not present that is significant in your context. Please also update language and religion if and as needed for your locality, and any of the other identities to reflect reality in your local context.

Click [here](#) to read about Aysu Miskbay’s translation of the social location mapping wheel into a Turkish context.

### **ACTIVITY: REFLECTING ON YOUR SOCIAL IDENTITIES AND SOCIAL LOCATIONS INVENTORY**

Look at your identities and what their locations mean about your relationship to systemic power and reflect on:

- Count up the identities in the innermost, middle and outer rings. Do you have more identities located closer to the center or closer to the periphery of the wheel?
- What does the location of your social identities mean for the value you have been assigned (superior to inferior)? What does the location of your social identities mean for how you have been systematically prejudiced for or prejudiced against? You can ask this question with each of your identities.
- Do some identities and their respective locations seem to have shaped your experience more prominently than others?

- How have the social locations of your identities impacted how you navigate through the world?
- What feelings, if any, does your social location and proximity to systemic power-over bring up for you? Some of this can be deeply painful. If that is the case for you, is there any care you can offer yourself in this moment? Remember that you are more than the values that the creators and enforcers of hierarchical societies would have you believe to be true about yourself.
- Keeping in mind that some of them may not be social identities prescribed by dominant society, what identities are most important to you?

Based on our identities, this can be a painful inventory. While understanding our own and others' proximity to oppressive power is an important skill for understanding systems of oppression and a baseline for changing these power arrangements, this is not just an intellectual activity. It may bring much to light that may be in need of healing, whether that is the internalization of a lifetime of messages that you are inferior, or the guilt that may arise when reflecting on a lifetime of being treated as if you are superior based on a given identity.