

Disability & Identity

Lesson Plan for BC Curriculum

Materials

- Copies of the attached worksheet for the whole class (large print version included)
- Copies of the suggested pre-reading article OR access for students to devices to read it on
- Access to a screen/projector, and the appropriate laptop hardware to screen a short film
- Copies of the film transcript for those who prefer to read along
- Patience and a willingness to get curious with the class

Background Information

This lesson plan draws on ideas of the fluid identities and intersectionality to explore the experience of disabled identity and its intersections with sexuality and gender. While not explicitly addressed in the film accompanying this lesson plan, the intersections of race and colonialism with these identity constructions and labels are also present and crucial to address in the classroom setting. Working to move past the idea of disability as an isolated and fixed identity, this lesson aims to get students to consider how disability, sexuality, and gender can be fluid and overlap, while accounting for the ways that white supremacy and colonialism constrain what “normal” bodies and identities look like.

Curricular Competencies

PHE 9/10

- Explore and describe factors that shape **personal identities**, including social and cultural factors
- Analyze strategies for **responding** to discrimination, stereotyping, and bullying
- Develop **skills** for maintaining healthy relationships and responding to interpersonal conflict

English Language Arts 9/10/11

- Recognize **how language constructs and reflects personal and cultural identities**
- Explore the impact of personal, social, and cultural contexts, values, and perspectives in oral texts
- Construct meaningful personal connections between self, text, and world
- Respectfully **exchange ideas and viewpoints** from diverse perspectives to build shared understandings and extend thinking

Social Justice 12

- Explain different perspectives on past and present people, places, issues, and events, and distinguish between worldviews of the past or present (perspective)
- Compare and contrast continuities and changes for different groups and individuals at different times and places (continuity and change)

Rationale

In this lesson, students will explore their own intersectional identities and how they may have changed over time, and how structural and ideological systems like colonialism and white supremacy produce ableism. Students will explore what labels they identify with and why, and where they learned what is “normal” and valuable.

This lesson can be used in a more traditional sex-ed/relationship health context in PHE curriculum, or can be used to explore language, power, and communication in an ELA or Social Justice context.

Further resources on disability and intersectionality can be found at:

<https://www.nccsdclearinghouse.org/intersectionality-of-identities.html>

A more general primer on intersectionality can be found at:

<https://www.nccj.org/intersectionality>

Lesson Plan

1. Have the students read the following working definition <https://www.talilalewis.com/blog/working-definition-of-ableism-january-2022-update> AND the following short article <https://www.adcouncil.org/all-articles/its-time-to-expand-the-narrative-about-queer-disabled-communities>
2. Have the students complete the first half of the worksheet *My Identity: Intersections and Structures*
3. Watch the film **Disability & Identity**.
4. Discuss the film as a class. Optional guiding questions (adapt as needed based on the subject):
 - a. What was the message of the film?
 - b. What are some of the intersectional identities that we know the interviewees have. What identities do we not know? What is left out by not knowing this?
 - c. How do the interviewee’s disabilities impact their sexuality/gender and vice versa?
 - d. What are some challenges that the individuals experienced around identity?
 - i. Are any of these similar to challenges that non-disabled, other LGBTQ+, or other groups face?
 - ii. What challenges are specific to disabled, or disabled LGBTQ+ people?
5. Have student complete the second half of the worksheet.
6. Discuss the film as a class. Be mindful that for many students, these identities might be fluctuating or they may not feel comfortable discussing their honest answers. Optional guiding questions (adapt as needed based on the subject):

- a. (If previous education allows for connections to colonialism, racism, power and privilege)
 - i. How might race contribute to how disabled identity is thought about?
 - ii. Thinking back to the definition of ableism we read, what are some parallels we can draw between whiteness, ablebodiedness, and heterosexuality?
 - 1. Who is assumed as the default in these labels?
 - 2. Why do you think these ideas became the default or “normal.” Who gains power? Who gains privilege?
 - 3. Is there an assumed binary present in these labels? What is the assumed opposite? Is it constructed positively or negatively?
 - a. What other binary labels do we apply to people around us?
 - 4. What opportunities for thinking outside of these binary labels do the interviewees offer us? What are the benefits of understanding oneself as intersectional or beyond the binary?
 - iii. Thinking about what we’ve watched and read, what does intersectionality mean to you?

Ultimately, students should leave this lesson understanding that identities are complicated, intertwined, and varying. No one person will have the same experience of their identity and it’s accompanying labels because of the ways that they overlap and change in meaning across time, culture, and location.

For students in all grades, the connections across different forms of oppression and identity should be made. For students in in upper-level courses, thinking across the systems of power and privilege that construct identity as it relates to gender, sexuality, race, and disability, rather than solely individual identity itself should be made explicit.

My Identity: Intersections and Structures

disability & identity film worksheet

INTERSECTIONALITY

Intersectionality is a tool for thinking about how power and oppression exist in systems that are linked and overlapping. Intersectional theory understands that people can be discriminated against or experience privilege from multiple sources at once, and be target by for, and experience markers of their identity such as disability, race, class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, etc. at the same time. We are all of our identities at once, as our different identities do not exist independently of each other. You cannot be only your race in one moment and only your sexuality or gender in another. These overlaps are sometimes called *intersectional identities*.

Consider your own life and identities to answer the questions in Part One in ways that feel honest and comfortable to you.

Complete the questions in Part Two after watching the film. Use the Wheel of Power and Privilege on the third page to help you.

Part One: Pre-Watching Questions

1. What are some of the identity labels that you navigate (i.e., girl, Black, Indigenous, gay)? Which ones were given to you or emerge as a result of your life circumstances, and which are ones that you feel or have discovered for yourself?
2. What part(s) of your identity are the most emphasized or important in your family? Why do you think this is the case?
3. Choose at least two identity labels that are important to you. How do you experience both of those identities at once?
4. Think about the identity labels that you chose as important to you. Why do you think those are especially important to you? Who or what told you that those are important? (Hint: this might be people like parents or teachers, or things like school, religion, media, etc.)

My Identity: Intersections and Structures

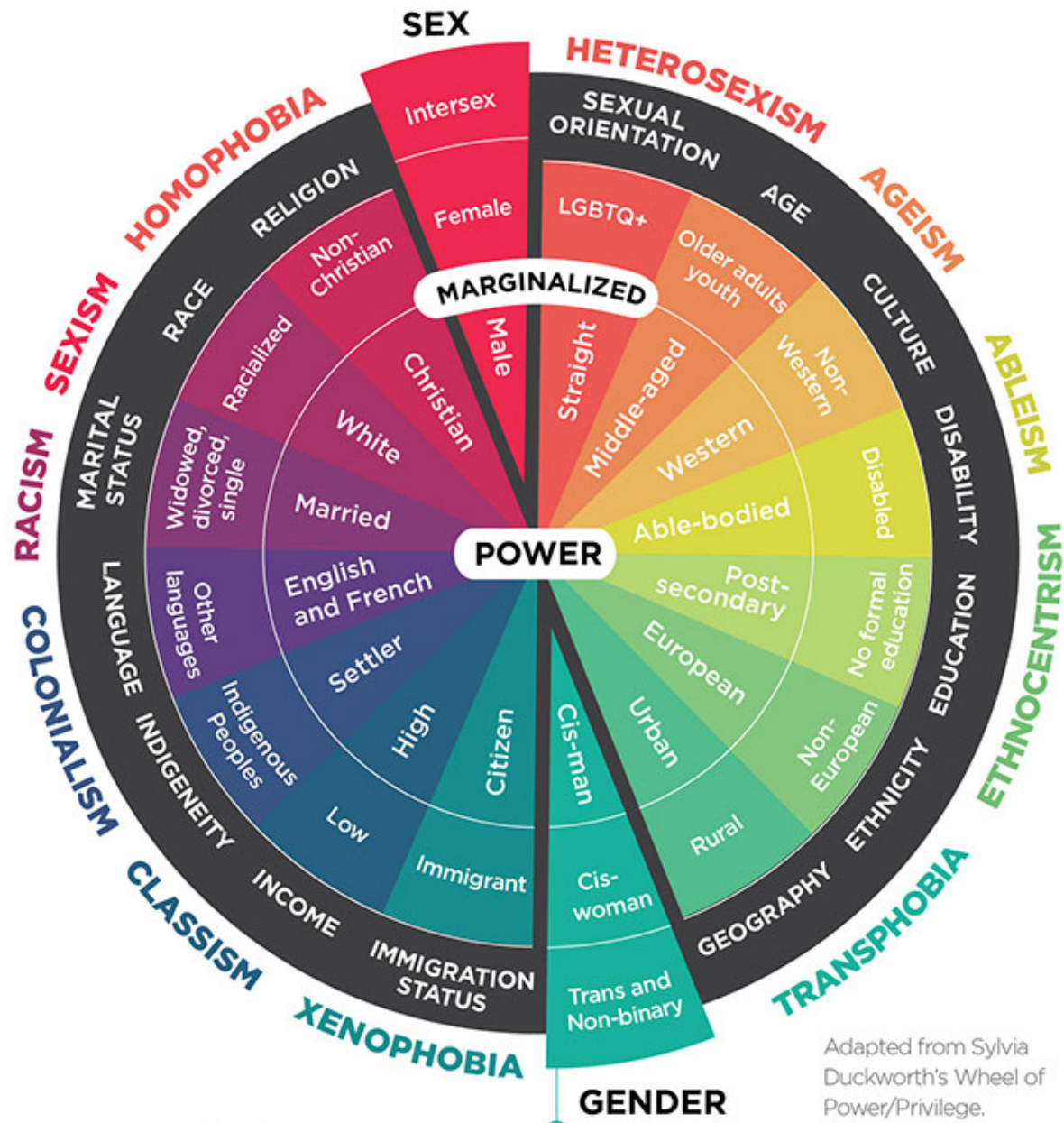
disability & identity film worksheet

Part Two: Post-Watching Questions:

1. Colonialism and white supremacy are major systems of power that label certain bodies as “normal.” What ideas of “normal” are the interviewees grappling with in the clips? What ideas of normal are left unnamed?
2. Not only do structures of white supremacy and colonialism create ideas of normal, they also can combine categories of normal. For instance, whiteness (the colonial normal) might be seen as “healthy,” whereas Blackness or Indigeneity can be seen as unhealthy, disabled, or sick. What other categories can you see being combined in relation to disability, race, gender, or sexuality? (Hint: sometimes these can show up as stereotypes or ideas about people being mentally
3. Not only are identities intersectional, they can also change and flow. At one point, Em (they/she) says “, I have a hard time like really sticking with one label.” How might this pressure to stick to one label reinforce the ideas of “normal” that you listed above?
4. Do you have any identities or ways of understanding yourself that have changed over time? How have other people reacted to your identity if it has/hasn’t changed?
5. What does seeing disability as an identity, rather than just a diagnosis or medical label do?

My Identity: Intersections and Structures

disability & identity film worksheet



Some gender identity terms include:

Agender	Genderfluid	Gender neutral	Transgender man
Bigender	Genderqueer	Non-binary	Transgender woman

Diagram sourced from:

Bauer, Greta. 2021. "Quantitative Intersectional Study Design and Primary Data Collection."

CIHR Meet the Methods 3(1)

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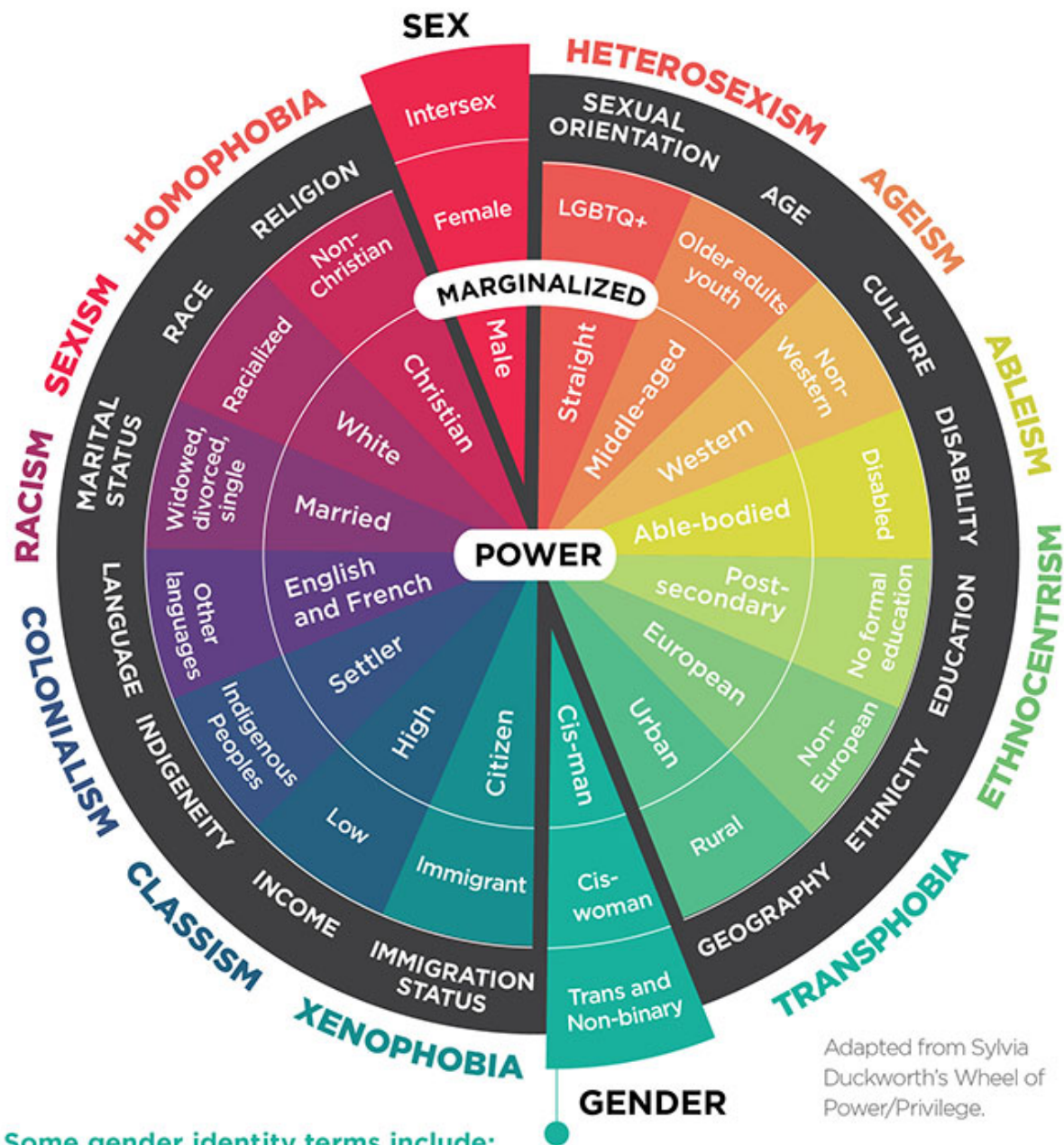
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Disability & Identity Documentary Transcript

Sonny (They/Them) 0:01

Gender, disability, and sexuality are so intertwined. Yeah. Like not only with my lived experience, but like when I'm doing research or learning about things, like, it's really hard not to notice the connections between like, I mean, gender and sexuality is, is a very obviously and directly connected because for some reason our categorization of sexuality is based on gender, whole other thing.

Tia (She/Her) 0:23

So, so I have the privilege, I've had the privilege of being born as able bodied, and then being able to experience like being disabled. And I say that as a privilege because it's been such a learning experience. And that's totally like, in hindsight, obviously, like, going through it, it still is really challenging and difficult. But I feel like I have such an appreciation for a wide variety of experiences now, because I've been able to kind of like, view things from different perspectives.

Sonny (They/Them) 0:55

Coming to terms with like, gender, and sexuality and disability it's really interesting to discover, like a desirability that's not based on social ideas and societal, i-ideas of what is desirable, like, what do I find desirable in myself? What kind of what kind of things do I want to present with

Em (They/She) 1:19

I struggled for the longest time to actually know who I am as a person. Um, and I think learning about... and I still struggle with that, like, it's really hard to be able to identify that when you're masking your entire life.

Tia (She/Her) 1:33

Going through that journey of like, reestablishing your own identity, and recognizing that like, you're, as a person, you're not a static being like you are always changing and growing, that's a tough thing to relearn.

Em (They/She) 1:49

I have a hard time with labels, because I feel like I-I get really stuck on the like little specifics... and little things that don't really fit that just don't really fit with that labels. So, I have a hard time like really sticking with one label. But if I were to define my gender would be closest to agender. So I would say that gender scripts are gendered expectations. If I'm on my own, and I'm not interacting, it pretty much means nothing to me, because I just, I'm just, I'm just Em.

Sonny (They/Them) 2:18

if I put together an outfit, and I look in the mirror, sometimes I look in the mirror and I go like, well, I look hot, but I don't look like me. So the goal is to look in the mirror and look hot and look like me.

Em (They/She) 2:29

I kind of like start having an issue with the whole gender thing when people are like, act like a girl or a woman because... I just know, they're trying to impose that gender on me, rather than just kind of view me as a person, just, just as a normal person.

Sonny (They/Them) 2:49

I think labels are incredibly powerful. Like I said, like, you know, disabled as a political position is incredibly powerful. Um, Non-binary as a gender identity is an incredibly powerful political position. But labels are not the end all be all, you don't need to use labels, you don't need to use any labels that don't fit you... uh, and you don't need to be in a rush to find labels,

Tia (She/Her) 3:12

Like I've struggled with that word, like disabled and like the label of it, because of like imposter syndrome, I think and like always feeling like I wasn't disabled enough. Especially like, having been able bodied before and like that, like before I was injured... I was like the strongest one of my sisters, and I was like, you know, I was like, super involved with karate, and like other like musical theater and like very active person. And I really prided myself on that and then it was like, suddenly, I wasn't that person anymore.

Em (They/She) 3:44

Generally, with my sexuality, I will say that I would... I've kind of always gone with a bunch of different labels. I think at first, for a very, very long time I was so preoccupied with masking and kind of like really playing that role to try and socially like fit in, because I wasn't diagnosed yet, so I had no idea I had a disability I didn't really understand why people didn't like me, I just knew they didn't like me. Um, and I will try anything and everything, so I really didn't give myself a chance to like kind of really get to know myself.

Sonny (They/Them) 4:18

I can't think of a way to say that isn't that this isn't corny, but liking yourself makes you feel desirable because you desire yourself... and that gives you the confidence to present in a way that probably makes other people like you as well.

Tia (She/Her) 4:34

Disabled people can be- can be happy, can be healthy, can be everything under the sun. You know?

Sonny (They/Them) 4:41

I think you can also change what labels you use. I think there's a lot of pressure to figure out who you are what you are and then stick to that because if you change it "it was a phase" or and I think it's important to know that like things like... I feel like saying things will like things do change makes it seem like they weren't true before. Something can be true one day and not true another, I can have certain needs one day and not have those needs another day, that doesn't mean that I didn't have these needs or that I'm not disabled.

Tia (She/Her) 5:13

It was like mourning the loss of the person you once were, and that, like really struck a chord with me... because it was like, yeah, like I I really had to kind of like, mourn past Tia, you know, but future Tia now has like this amazing experience and learning from it and I wouldn't change a thing.

Em (They/She) 5:30

I feel that labels don't really resonate with me, uh because they feel restrictive. Um, they feel like they're not fully... first of all, I struggled to fully kind of grasp them as a social construct, uh but they also feel like they don't fully fit all of what's in my head.

Tia (She/Her) 5:50

My scope of my own self was so narrow before, and then like really trying to like, widen it, and that opens so many new possibilities for like, new ways of exploring myself new, like ways of interacting with people with interacting with plants, animals, life

Em (They/She) 6:04

Storytelling. RPS, I would write a lot as well read a lot of novels. So, I guess yeah, fictional tropes are really what tends to be the main way in which I engage in... I guess my sexuality.

Tia (She/Her) 6:22

It's not something that is viewed in media right, like you don't have the represen- you don't, we don't have- don't have nearly enough representation of disabled people in like romance novels, and romance TV. I love romance novels, as I've talked about with you before. So like, like when I- I just yeah, like, like, there's not enough conversations about like, what that means for like, engaging physical intimacy, because disabled people are sexy, disabled people are sexual beings too, and have agency and like, you know, want to engage in those kinds of relationships, and some of them don't, but some of them do to, like, you know, just like any other person, like, we're people!

Em (They/She) 6:59

A lot of the relationships or the sexual encounters I've had with people over the years were mostly encounters where it was through conversations, long distance, um, anything that didn't have to involve me being in physical contact with others, and I find that, you know, hearing other autistic people also describing their experience with sexuality, that seems to be something that comes back a lot.

Tia (She/Her) 6:59

In the last like, year... yeah, year or two, I've really, like really put a hold on like, like physical relationships and like physical intimacy, because like, there are very few ways that I can engage in those kinds of like, like, relationships without there being pain.

Sonny (They/Them) 7:46

When you let go of the social scripts of what sex is supposed to be like, it can actually be very, very fun. And sometimes, you know, having a disability or... being not a binary man or woman, trying to think how to put that, um, it kind of forces you to reassess and challenge those scripts, which is challenging, and can be awkward and hard. But it can also be really, really rewarding, because then you're thinking about like, well, what is it that I actually want? What actually works for me, what works for my partner? You know, you're opening the doors to exploring different things, and really figuring out like, how do I actually enjoy every moment of this.

Tia (She/Her) 8:29

When someone I think identifies as disabled, who engages with that, like identity, it creates this really amazing space, because we recognize that there's so many different ways of being in the world that are not confined to one's body. And they're not confined to one's experiences. Like, there's not one way of viewing the world or being in the world, at one any given point of time. And so, it really like cracks open, like, every, like everything that you kind of like, had assumed before.

Sonny (They/Them) 9:04

Disability, sexuality, and gender are socially constructed. That does not mean that they are not real, it doesn't mean that they don't deeply affect everybody's lived experience and they are, like, ingrained into almost every facet of life and society, and social interaction. Um, but those things are socially constructed, which means that we can change how we navigate conversations around those things and how we navigate, um, what we learn about those things, how we talk about those things, how we teach them...um, and I think that's kind of an important thing to know. That like... yeah, that they're socially constructed, but that doesn't mean that they're not real, it just means that they can be deconstructed or reconstructed or reconfigured.