



# Positionality

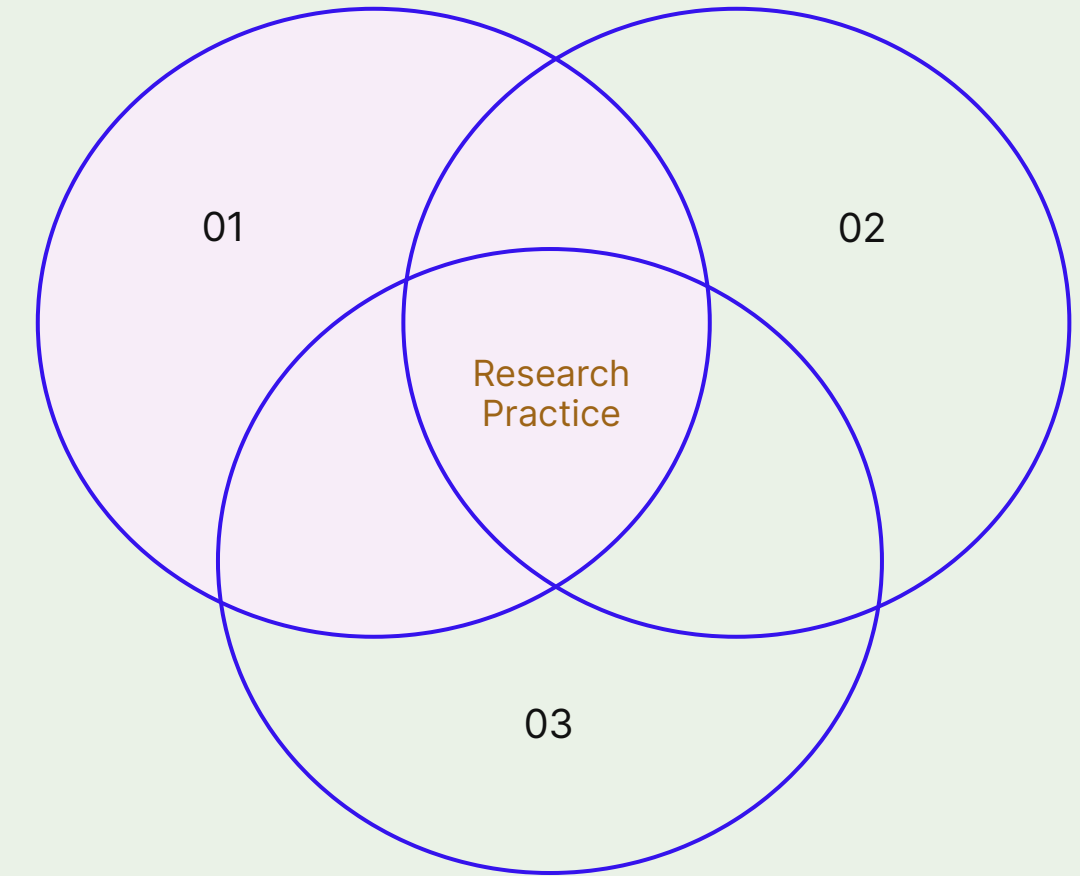
Doing Better Research Series

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# WORKSHOP SERIES: 3 PARTS



01

## INTERSECTIONALITY

A means for thinking about identity, systems of power and oppression, and resultant social injustices.

02

## POSITIONALITY

Understanding of the self (what one knows and believes), and how these positions are brought into research.

03

## REFLEXIVITY

Examination of one's self and role, in order to challenge personal actions and assumptions, with attention to bias.

# what we'll cover

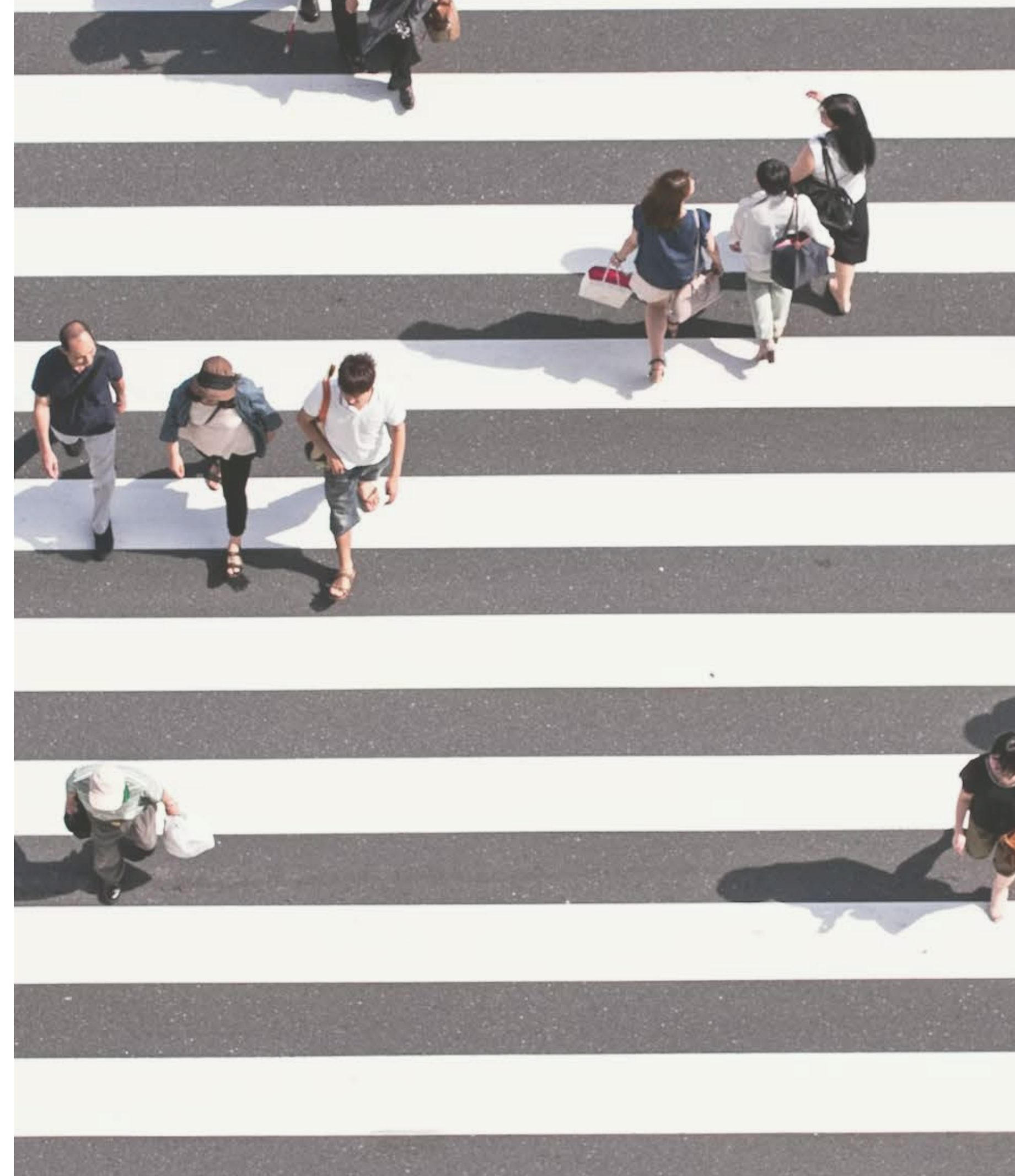
- 01 defining positionality and why it matters
- 02 exercise: mapping our positionality
- 03 positionality and research

## Positionality

We are all positioned in unique and intersecting vantage points.

**We navigate the world through our embodied experiences** of race, gender, sexual desire, ability, class and other identity markers.

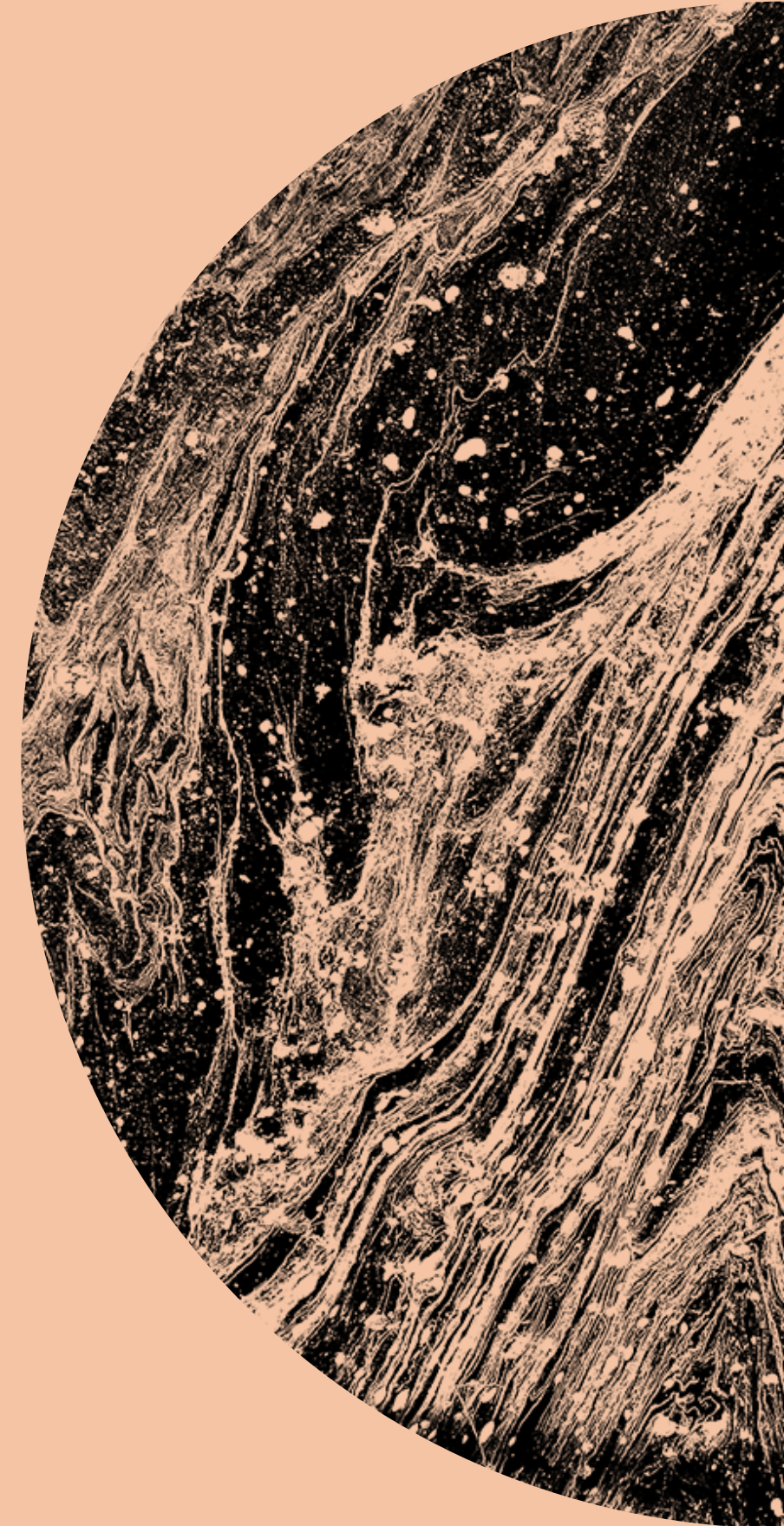
Our **realities are co-created** between the **subjectivities of these identities and the social power** assigned to these categories (social location).





## social location

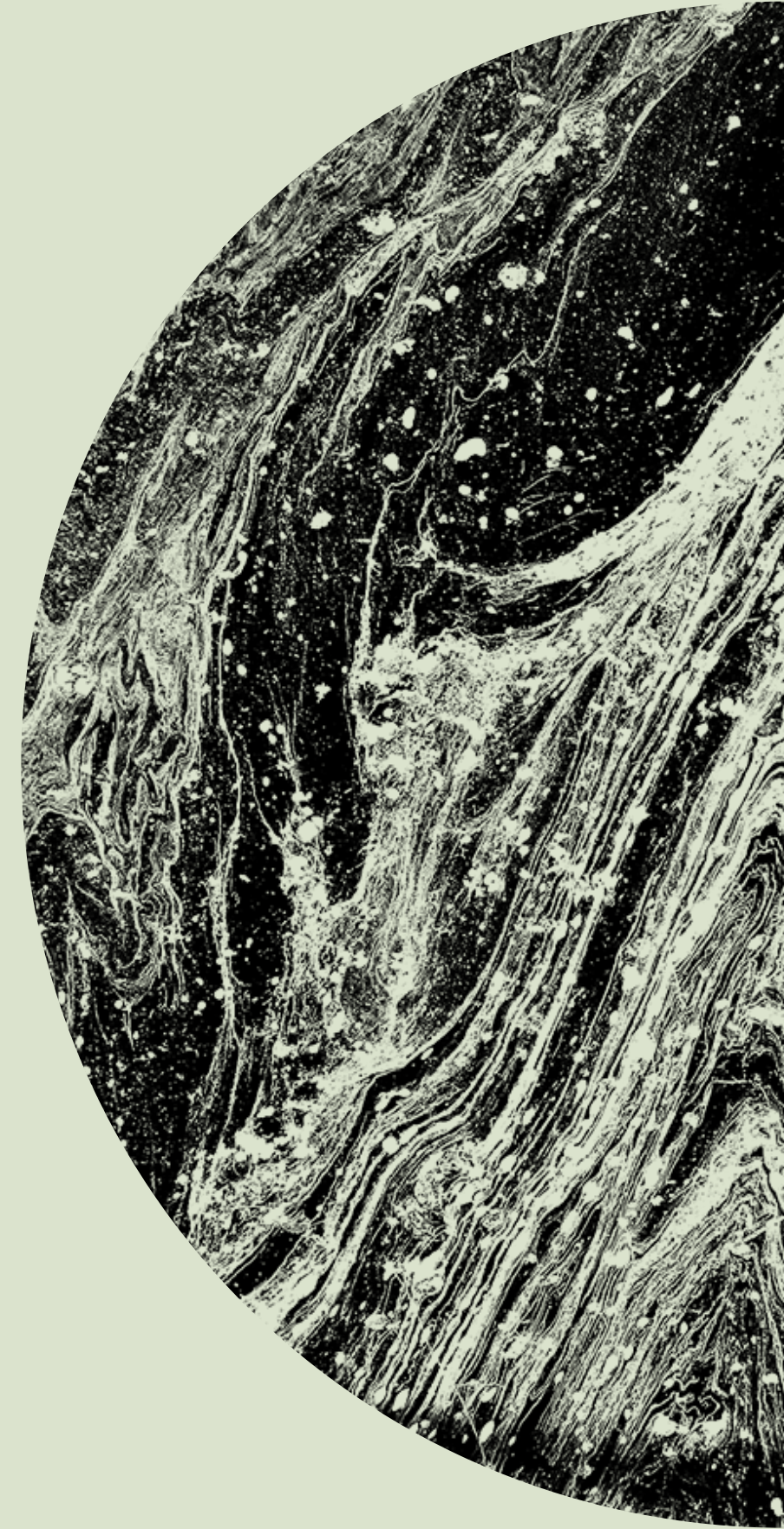
- **Position within power hierarchies** created through historical, political, economic, geographic, kinship-based and other **socially stratifying factors**
- **Hierarchies** of class, race, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality and gender operate at various levels that affect an individual or group's social location
- **Status**- the ways individuals or groups create and understand **hierarchical distinctions** between themselves and others
- Structural privilege and vulnerability
- **Shifts across multiple spatial and social scales**, and shapes the **relations of power** within those spaces





## positionality

- Positionality includes:
  - our **social identities** (complex, fluid)
  - the **location** where we are situated
  - our **social reality** inscribed on our bodies and **personal/ collective histories**
- Positionality influences:
  - the **perspectives** we hold
  - our **understanding of the world** (and way of being in it)
  - how the **world sees** and interprets us
- Understanding positionality (of self and other) helps us:
  - challenge our biases**
  - better **understand participants' lived experiences**
  - reflect on the ways we approach, conduct and interpret our research



# positionality and knowledge production

*We can only ever understand something from a point of view*

## 'Situated Knowledges'

- **Facts or data** are not waiting to be discovered; they are **made, interpreted**
  - a **social product**, whether expressed in numbers, words, images or other media
  - mediated by the **positionality of the inquirer**
- Qualitative research is often not generalizable, but rather it produces '**situated knowledges**' (Haraway 1991)
- 'Statistical truths' are also situated knowledges vulnerable to emotive/political manipulations

## Subjectivity

- Researchers (and participants) have their own **values, social identities, experiences, perspectives, cultures, and assumptions** that they bring to the research
- Researchers **assume** what the significant questions/ variables are based on their own **experiences and positionality**
- **Ideological assumptions** are often embedded in the questions we ask



'While scholars might not acknowledge the **elements that inform their research**, the elements are nevertheless there, invisibly so. (...)one's **personhood is also a *condition* for knowledge claims**, rather than a deterrent to understanding.'



– A. Cerwonka & L. Malkki 2007



# positionality and knowledge production

## Reflexivity

-Process of **critically reflecting on our role** in the knowledge that was produced

-**Provide readers the tools** to recognize how we produced data

-Attention to how research **tools and methods** influence research

-Making the **researcher** a visible component in the research; **transparency** about our own social identities **in relation** to the social position of our participants





# A short recap



Source:  
UCLA  
Library  
Lab



# social identities/ backgrounds



age

race/ ethnicity

gender

sexual orientation

class, socioeconomic status

(sub)culture, religion/spirituality

geographic location/history

ability

citizenship, immigration status

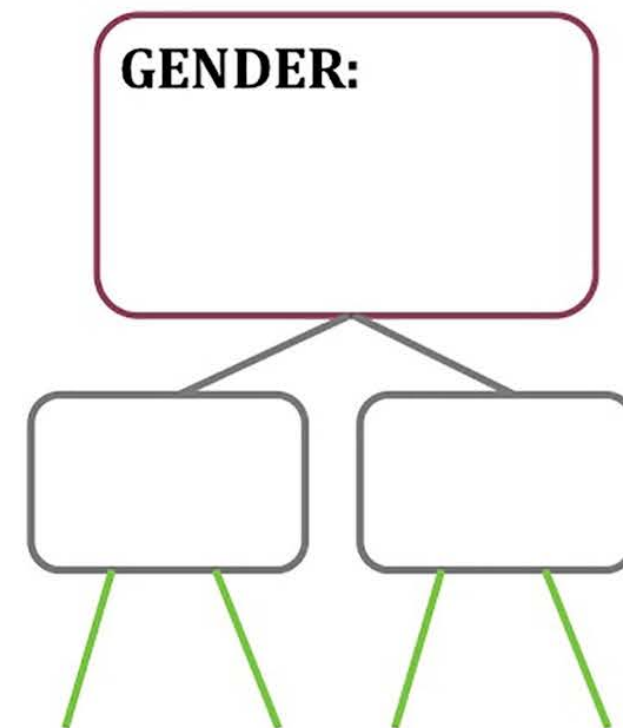
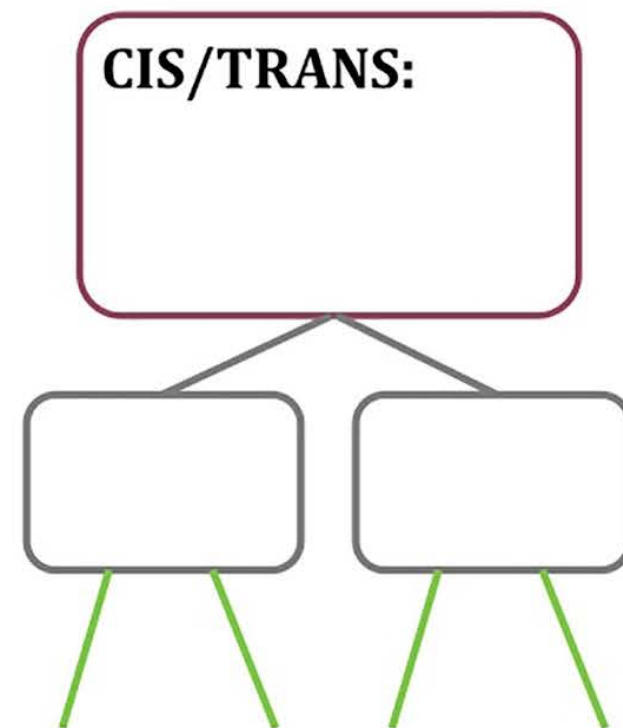
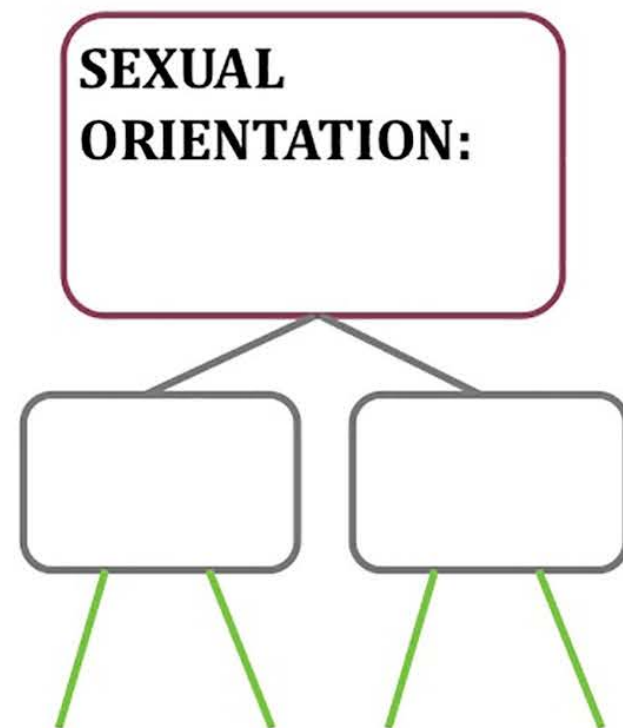
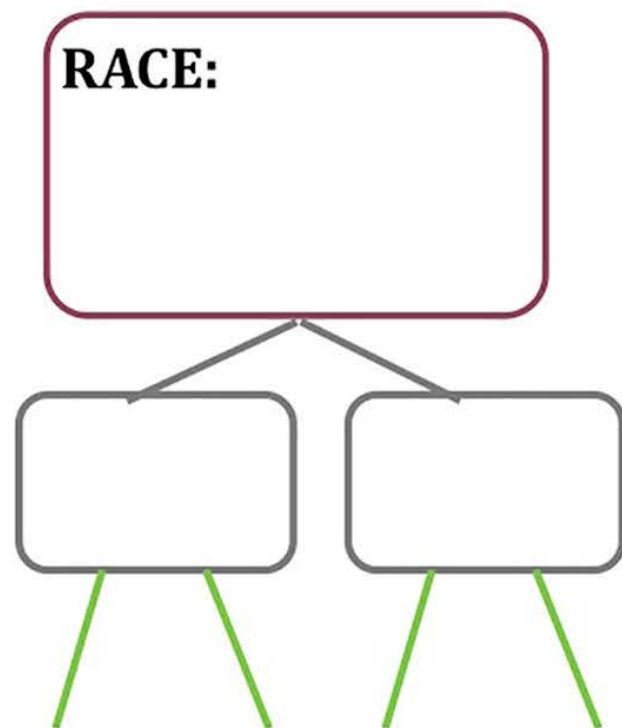
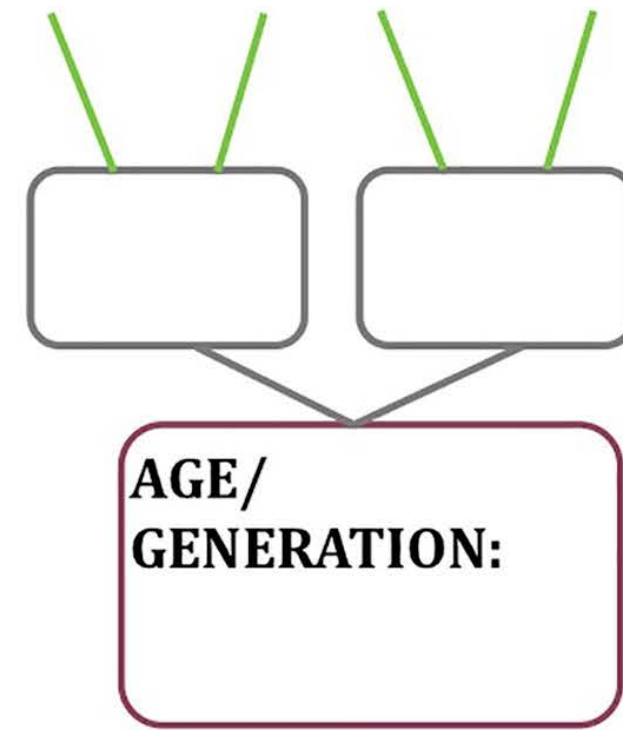
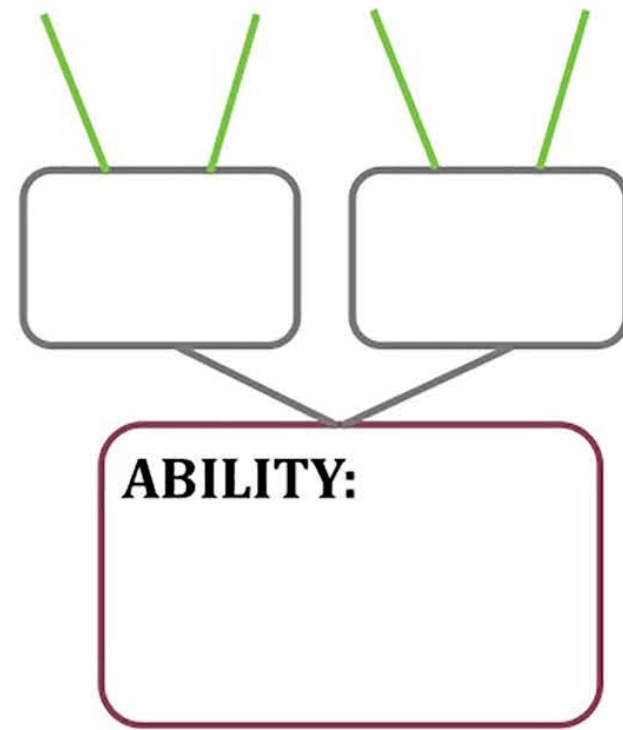
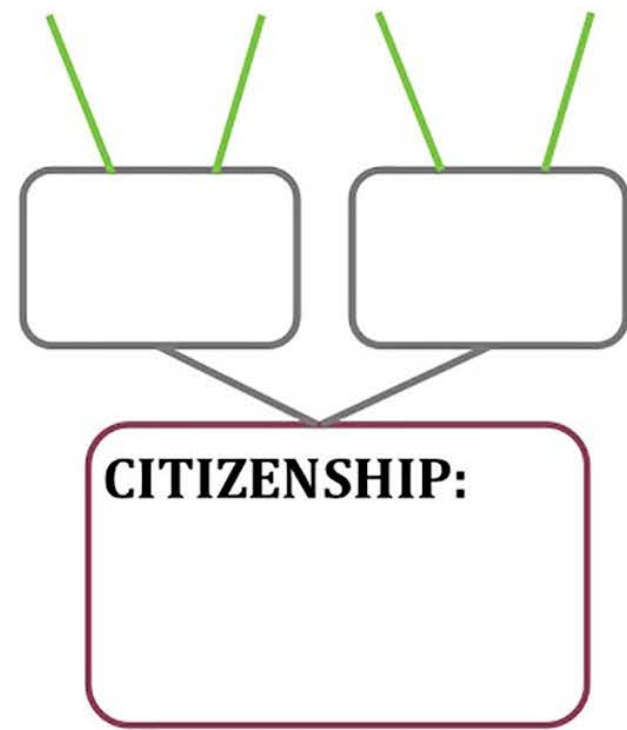
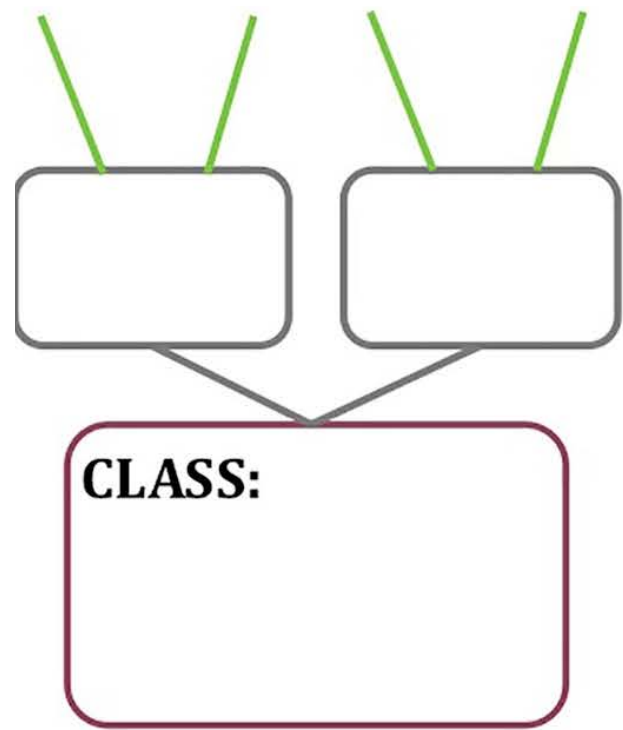
relationship/ parental status

employment

education

political affiliation

language (first and second)





# Completed Positionality Map

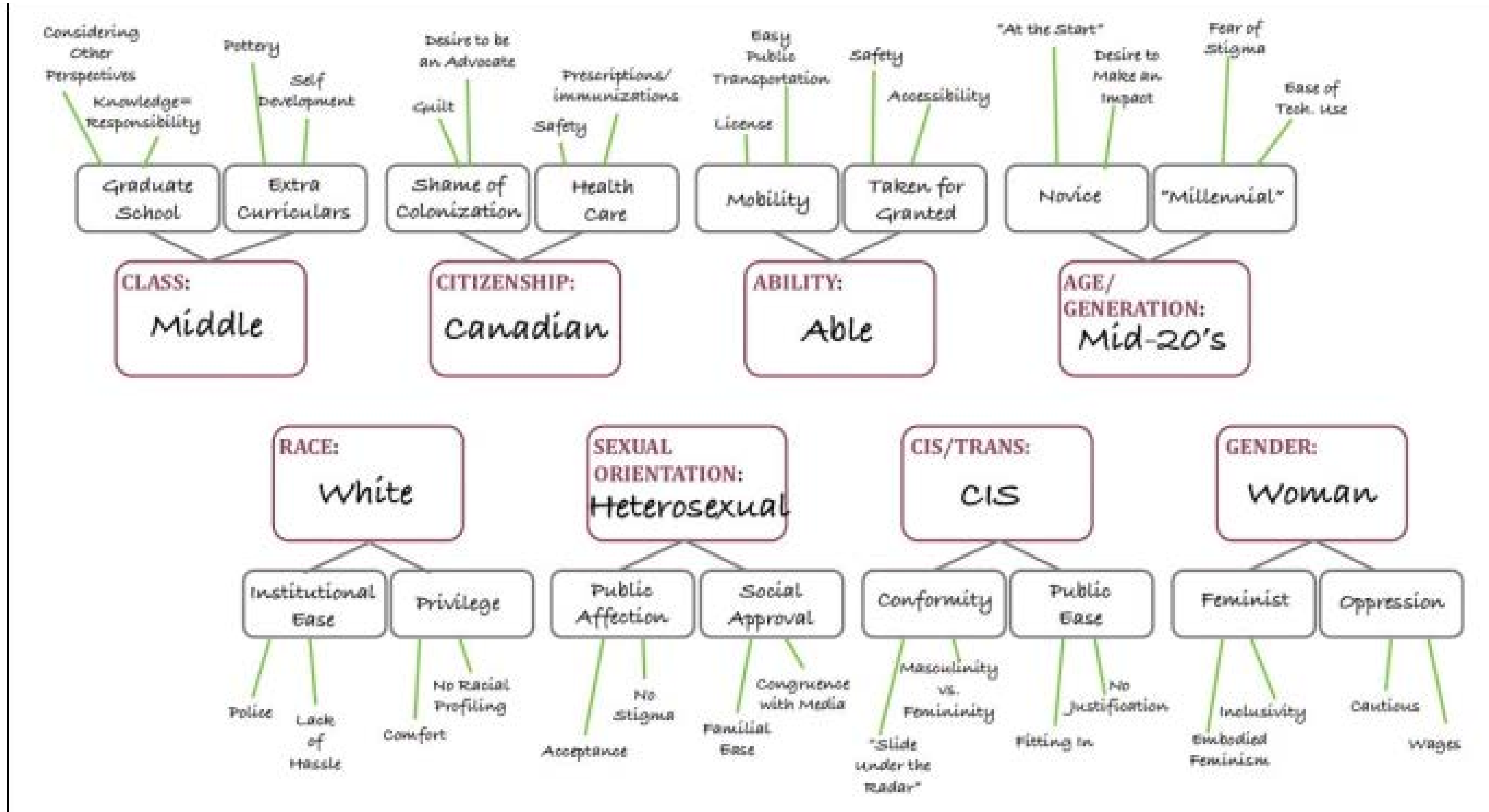


Figure 2. Completed positionality map (DI)

From Jacobson & Mustafa 2019

## summer's map example

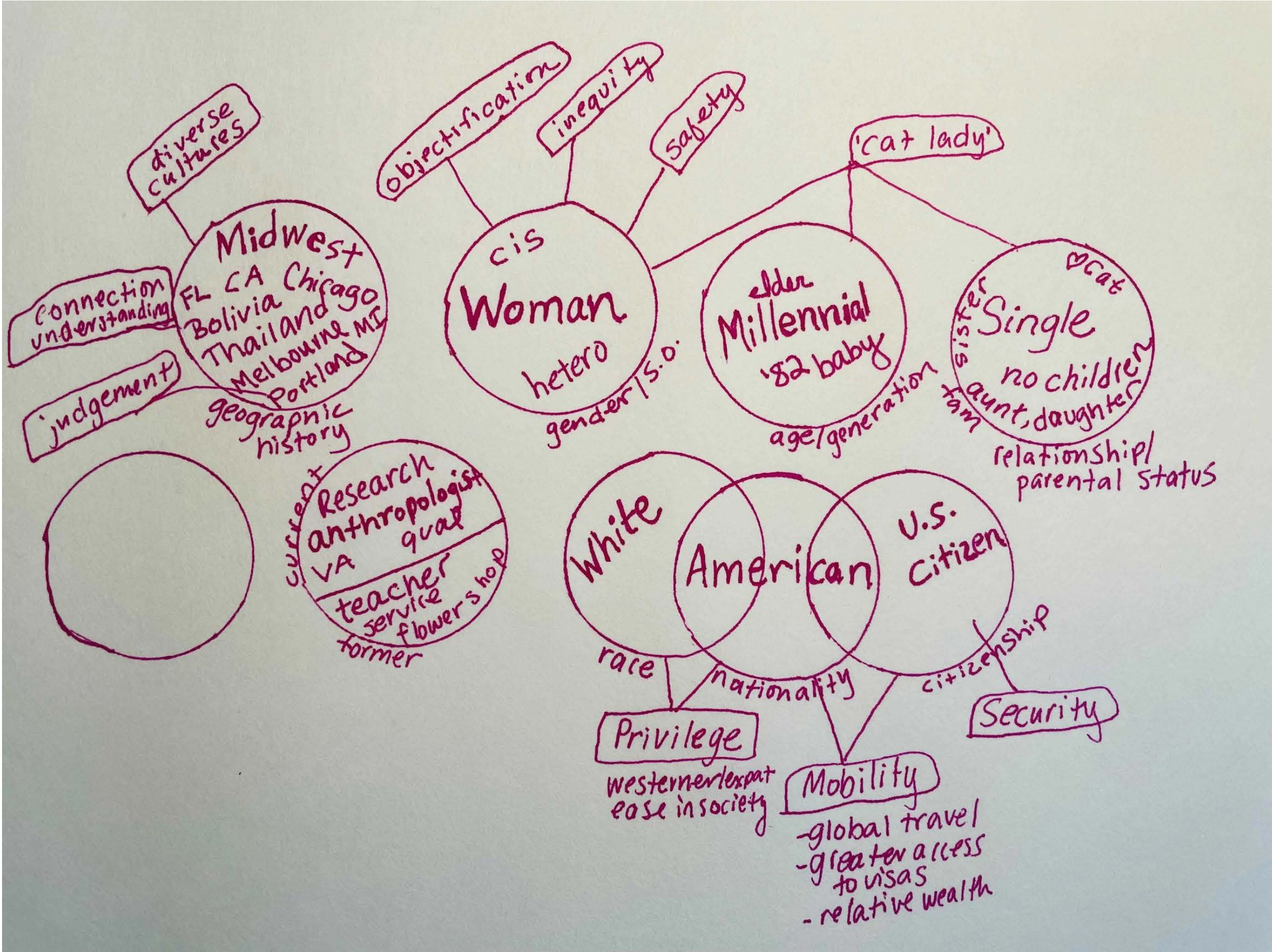
±

<b>Social Group</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>Impacts on life</b>
<i>Gender</i>	Woman	Feminism
		Disadvantage
	Cis	Ease, Advantage
<i>Race</i>	White	Social/institutional ease
		Privilege
<i>Social Class-Now</i>	Middle/ Upper Class	Comfort
		Self-care
<i>Veteran Status</i>	Non-Veteran	Outsider





megan's map example





# workshop activity

mapping our social identity

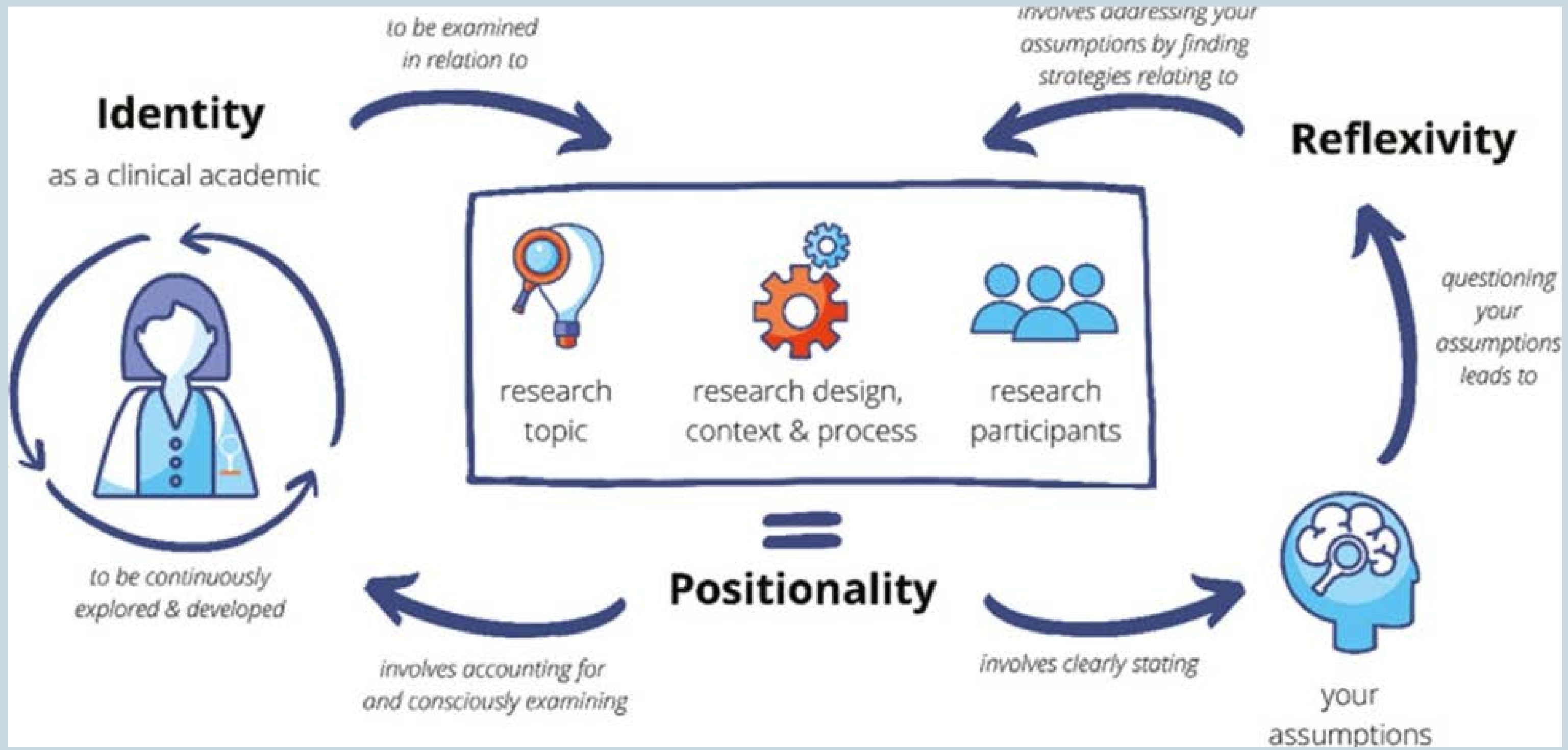
using the provided template or drawing your own version, **map your own positionality** with whatever **identities** you believe most **impact your day-to-day life**

Workshops are cool 😎





# positionality and research



source: Wilson et al (2022)

## identities that have impacted my hsr practice (Summer)

<b>Social Group</b>	<b>Identity</b>	<b>Impacts on life</b>	<b>Emotions/consequences for HSR</b>	<b>Intersections</b>
<i>Gender</i>	Woman	Feminism	Inclusivity, social-justice orientation	As an upwardly mobile white woman, need to recognize the distinct disadvantages of women of color without diminishing/whitewashing WOC contributions and strengths. Believe experiences.
		Disadvantage	Fewer promotions, opportunities	
	Cis	Ease, Advantage		
<i>Race</i>	White	Social/institutional ease	More access to all advantages: education; social services; housing	
		Privilege	More believed	
<i>Social Class-Now</i>	Middle/ Upper Class	Comfort	Risk making assumptions about financial ability and time availability	
		Self-care	Time for personal development and growth, therapy	
<i>Veteran Status</i>	Non-Veteran	Outsider	Values emphasized by some veterans don't always align with own	



# ways to integrate positionality into research

- Ongoing reflection—individually and as teams, formally and informally
- Positionality statements
  - Currently no common definition
  - Not common in health services research journals
  - Disciplines rooted in qualitative methods sometimes require some acknowledgement of positionality



# Writing about Positionality

Reflecting on interactions/ relationships with research participants is more common practice in social science disciplines

## Position as Researcher

Because ethnographic fieldwork is personal, it is important to situate myself in relation to the research process, particularly so because there have been few accounts from western academic work in Thailand that reflect upon 'processes involved in the production of its knowledge' (Cook & Jackson 1999, 21). I will try to acknowledge the effects of my own position on the research carried out by describing my own identity, background, character, values and emotional responses. Throughout this thesis I will use a reflexive approach that can be referred to as 'narrative ethnography,' enabling the reader to 'identify the consciousness which has selected and shaped the experiences within the text' (Tedlock 1991, 77-78). In an effort to be as transparent as possible, I will discuss the interactions and relationships I developed with western men and Thai women and how these dynamics influenced the overall research process and knowledge produced.

recruited via ads placed in local forums of *Thaivisa.com*, a web site designed for Westerners living in Thailand. The later ethnographic fieldwork involved participant observation at *farang* social gatherings, bars, and restaurants, informal interviews, and participation in daily activities with Western men and their social and kin networks. Lafferty's position as a relatively young, heterosexual, white American woman who shared language, cultural references, and experiences as a *farang* facilitated access and rapport. On the other hand, her age and gender set her apart and presented a challenge to gain access into men's social groups. Some men initially questioned the intent of her research, wary that she 'had some feminist agenda to push' while others half-jokingly referred to her as an undercover tax collector or sex spy. Over time, Lafferty earned trust through repeated contact and reciprocal participation, offering as much information about herself as she was asking from informants. She also engaged in masculine behaviors such as bar banter and drinking beer, activities that allowed access to the bar scene central to male *farang* communities. She continued to occupy a complex gendered position, but many informants came to speak of her as 'one of the guys' and invited her into other masculine circles such as fraternal clubs.

# Example Positionality Statement in Research

Davis, S. M. (2018). The aftermath of #BlackGirlsRock vs. #WhiteGirlsRock: considering the disrespectability of a Black women's counterpublic. *Women's Studies in Communication* 41, 269–290.

*“Before I present the findings, and in the spirit of self-reflexivity, I acknowledge my standpoint as an educated Black American woman. I am not an avid participant in Black online spaces such as comments sections, but I have observed the interactions of other users, advocated for Black online spaces, and am intrigued by the use of language to mark and protect cultural identities. I acknowledge that my positionality influenced this project to some extent; my member resources proved to be important tools that helped me make meaning of the text.”*



# Example of Group Positionality Statement



## The Science of BDSM

### MISSION

The Science of BDSM Research Team is led by professor of social psychology, Dr. Brad Sagarin, and composed of academics and community members. Members of the team include graduate and undergraduate students in a variety of fields, professors of psychology, clinical psychologists, and kinky people who are interested in supporting research. The team aspires to produce and disseminate quality research on BDSM (bondage/discipline, dominance/submission, sadism/masochism), and kink related topics.

The team seeks to understand the nature, dynamics, motivations, and effects of BDSM activities and relationships. To do so, it is committed to designing and conducting ethical studies, thoughtfully analyzing and interpreting data, and disseminating the results in as objective a manner as possible.

The team assumes that many people do BDSM for psychologically healthy reasons, and believes that de-pathologizing BDSM will help the scientific community and the BDSM community. The team anticipates that its research will yield a mix of findings, some congenial to a view of BDSM as healthy and some not, and it is dedicated to being open and transparent about all of its findings.

questions to  
consider  
when  
thinking and  
talking about  
positionality

- (1) Consider positionality for *each* project.
- (2) Who are you in relation to the research?
- (3) How does this shape how you think about the topic? Interact with participants? How the research was conducted?
- (4) What have you done to account for, acknowledge, and/or mitigate your influence on this research?



discussion

**(1) How does positionality influence the type of research you pursue/prioritize and questions you ask?**

**(2) How does my positionality shape research practice?**

*Share an example of how your positionality might influence a project. (past, present or hypothetical)*

**(3) How might your positionality impact interactions with research participants?**

*Can you think of different examples from your research experience?*

Idea development

Rationale/background

sources

Funding mechanism/source

Study design

Inclusion/Exclusion criteria

Recruitment approach

Data collection

Analysis approach

Findings

Dissemination

# Sources

UCLA Lab:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fTHFud7fr8c>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORrF7cKktrQ&t=2s>

Holmes, Andrew Gary Darwin. "Researcher Positionality – A Consideration of Its Influence and Place in Qualitative Research – A New Researcher Guide." *Shanlax International Journal of Education*, vol. 8, no. 4, 2020, pp. 1-10. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.34293/education.v8i4.3232>

Wilson, C., Janes, G., & Williams, J. (2022). Identity, positionality and reflexivity: Relevance and application to research paramedics. *British paramedic journal*, 7(2), 43-49.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC9662153/>

**Social Identity Map: A Reflexivity Tool for Practicing Explicit Positionality in Critical Qualitative Research**

<https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1609406919870075>

Positionality workshop powerpoint

<https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/E5T36>





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