CULTURALLY INFORMED TRAUMA AND GRIEF RECOVERY TOOLKIT

AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Intersectionality: The Way Our Oppressions and Privileges Combine to Create Opportunities and Challenges

"Sexism isn't a one-size-fits all phenomenon. It doesn't happen to Black and White women the same way." KIMBERLÉ CRENSHAW

People belong to different social groupings, positions, or locations based on their characteristics. These social locations or positions, in part, shape their identity. Each person has multiple social locations and positions based on their race, ethnicity, class, religion, birth country, sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, age, and disability status. In the United States and around the world, some social locations and positions have more power, perceived importance, legal protection, and resources than other social locations and positions. For example, in the category of age, adults are afforded more power, importance, and access to resources than children or aging individuals. Similarly, people who are White; middle or high-income earning; male; Christian; U.S. born; heterosexual; or able-bodied have more power and access to resources than people of color; low income earning; women; transgender; or intersex; non-Christian; immigrants or refugees; or individuals with disabilities.

Intersectionality is a term that was developed by pioneering law professor, Kimberlé Crenshaw, J.D., to describe how a person's social locations or positions can interact to create unique disadvantages and unjust treatment. For example, a Black transgender person will experience different life challenges compared to someone who is White and transgender or a Black person who identifies as male and was born a male. We know from research that, compared to individuals who have social locations or positions with less power, those with more power have: (a) better physical and mental health, (b) more education, (c) live in safer neighborhoods, (d) consistent access to nutritious foods, and (e) financial stability. These inequalities can be worse for individuals who have multiple positions with less financial, political, or social power.

Intersectionality is important to consider when someone is dealing with trauma and loss. For example, a bisexual cisgender man of color who has been sexually assaulted might be denied access to resources based on race, gender, and sexual orientation, making it harder to get help in coping with his assault, both within his racial or ethnic community and within mainstream society. It is also important to consider the power held by people who are privileged within different communities, as these individuals often define the group's cultural norms. Specifically, it is often the case that cisgender men and heterosexual members of a racial or ethnic group have more power and authority over other members of a particular group, and therefore can define how trauma and loss are dealt with in a community.

A person coping with being overlooked due to their intersecting oppressed social positions and trauma or loss can experience both stress and strength. They may struggle with finding help from others due to multiple types of discrimination, such as racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, ableism, religious discrimination, and xenophobia. They may also find ways to cope with their trauma and loss in meaningful ways through the help of others. Therefore, it's important for people with multiple oppressed social positions to identify safe people and spaces where their concerns are recognized and supported. It is also important to remember that those with the lowest status in an already marginalized group need people with common goals to support them as they seek help in coping with trauma and loss. For more information on interpersonal trauma, violence, and abuse, *see* here. To learn about collective trauma, *see* this. To learn more about how to heal and thrive, *go to* here.