

Dismantling Intersectional Oppression

Issue: Systemic injustices intersect across environment, race, gender and all other forms of oppression. Identifying the underlying mechanisms which enable systemic and intersecting injustices enables us to mitigate their harm. Intersectional justice calls us to work together across oppressions and become a movement of movements.

Grounding in Unitarian Universalism: Our faith calls us to witness for justice. We affirm respect for the interdependent web of all existence. An unfortunate aspect of the interdependent web is intersectional oppression. Greater awareness of intersectional oppressions makes our anti-racism, animal wellbeing, environmental, economic, and other justice work much more effective. This work calls us to decenter individualism for our collective liberation.

Topics for Congregational Study: Intersectional oppressions reinforce each other therefore a holistic approach grounded in awareness is required to mitigate harm and expand justice. No one escapes formative acculturation. This catches each of us in a web of oppression. By examining and acting to undo this acculturation, we gain liberation and justice for all.

Some questions to consider:

1. What is intersectionality, and how has that definition evolved? What does it mean to approach oppressions in an intersectional way?
2. How can understanding humans' perceived dominance over other species and nature inform how humans oppress humans? What was the original oppression?
3. How are people socialized into various overlapping supremacy systems, creating a white heterosexual patriarchy dominated culture that serves the interests of the powerful?
4. What are current illustrations of intersectionality, intersectional oppression, and intersectional justice in your community?
5. What is our ethical obligation to individuals - individual humans, individual nonhuman animals, etc.? Does individual suffering matter regardless of species?
6. How can we as UUs build transformative relationships of trust and accountability across race lines?
7. What human economic, social, cultural, and/or religious systems degrade or destroy the quality of life experienced by all inhabitants of Earth?
8. Animals eating other animals is part of our evolution and has seemed normal and natural. If healthful and ample plant based food is accessible and affordable by human animals, is it ethical to exploit nonhuman animals for food?
9. Douglas Hofstadter in his book I Am a Strange Loop subscribes to the concept known as the narrative self: the notion that the idea of the self is ultimately a hypothetical construct – a story our brains spin which generates the illusion that there is a single, stable and unified locus of willing, thinking and choosing which constitutes our “I.” Hofstadter posits a scale based on the degree to which an entity can generate stories of self which he calls soul. The scale is normalized to humans, so humans are at 100% soul and mosquitos, with virtually no ability to create stories of self, have perhaps 0.01% soul. How does this idea fit with the inherent worth and dignity of all beings?
10. How do different racial and economic strategies get applied to different racial groups, often disguised in neutral-sounding yet coded language which pretend to be colorblind while actually having racialized impacts?
11. Five years from now, what difference would you see in your community if a highly effective widely drawn coalition worked together for intersectional social justice? What existing groups might come together to form the coalition?

Courageous conversations, reflection, and action can foster our abilities to decenter whiteness and other positions of power and privilege. Working inside and outside our congregations, we can build trust by following the leadership and direction of our most vulnerable neighbors.

Possible Congregational/Regional Actions:

Actions can include street protest, advocacy work, resource sharing, local, regional, and national campaigns, letter-writing, community asset building, and more. The key is organizing with strategic

accountability while building sustainable communities of resistance. Intersectional solutions should be sought which emerge from the complex web of our interrelatedness, rather than from the fallacy that justice is a zero-sum game. This work could happen in the areas of environmental racism, mass incarceration and police brutality, reproductive freedom, immigration, access to quality health, food, and education systems, animal wellbeing, and more. For example:

1. Provide ongoing training and education in antiracism and anti-oppression on a multi- and inter-generational basis to all who wish to deepen their understanding of the impacts of intersectional white supremacy and intersectional human supremacy.
2. Build local relationships with people of color and other oppressed people, inside and outside our congregations, so that agendas and strategies for social justice efforts respond to the real vulnerabilities they face.
3. Educate congregations and regions about intersectional justice, including the historically disproportionate impacts of pollution and climate change on people of color, economically disenfranchised communities, and nonhuman species.
4. Mobilize UUs to participate in community organizing that is guided by accountable partnerships.
5. Work to understand and dismantle white supremacy culture in the environmental movement and other organizations charged with protecting the web of life.
6. Study the overlapping impacts of global climate change and white supremacy in current climate disasters and governmental response and rebuilding, and the impacts of nonhuman individuals in those communities
7. Learn about the economic, environmental, cultural, and spiritual impacts of separating first nations peoples from their traditional lands.
8. Host a compassionate potluck to invite discussion about the challenges and celebrations of our relationships with other species, the humans who labor to provide our food, and the economic and social forces that shape those processes.