

PART I

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Doing Diversity for Cultural Competence,  
Social Justice, and Inclusive Excellence



## CHAPTER ONE

# Five Faces of Oppression\*

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Someone who does not see a pane of glass does not know that he does not see it. Someone who, being placed differently does see it, does not know the other does not see it. When our will finds expression outside ourselves in actions performed by others we do not waste our time and our power of attention in examining whether they have consented to this. This is true for all of us. Our attention, given entirely to the success of the undertaking, is not claimed by them as long as they are docile. . . . Rape is a terrible caricature of love from which consent is absent. After rape, oppression is the second horror of human existence. It is a terrible caricature of obedience.

—Simone Weil

I have proposed an enabling conception of justice. Justice should refer not only to distribution, but also to the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and cooperation. Under this conception of justice, injustice refers primarily to two forms of disabling constraints, oppression and domination. While these constraints include distributive patterns, they also involve matters that cannot easily be assimilated to the logic of distribution: decision-making procedures, division of labor, and culture. Many people in the United States would not choose the term *oppression* to name injustice in our society. For contemporary emancipatory social movements, on the other hand—socialists, radical feminists, American Indian activists, Black activists, gay and lesbian activists—oppression is a central category of political discourse. Entering the political discourse

in which oppression is a central category involves adopting a general mode of analyzing and evaluating social structures and practices that is incommensurate with the language of liberal individualism that dominates political discourse in the United States. A major political project for those of us who identify with at least one of these movements must thus be to persuade people that the discourse of oppression makes sense of much of our social experience. We are ill prepared for this task, however, because we have no clear account of the meaning of oppression. While we find the term used often in the diverse philosophical and theoretical literature spawned by radical social movements in the United States, we find little direct discussion of the meaning of the concept as used by these movements.

In this chapter, I offer some explication of the concept of oppression as I understand its use by new social movements in the United States since the 1960s. My starting point is reflection on the conditions of the groups said by these movements to be oppressed: among others women, Blacks, Chicanos, Puerto Ricans and other Spanish-speaking Americans, American Indians, Jews, lesbians, gay men, Arabs, Asians, old people, working-class people, and the physically and mentally disabled. I aim to systematize the meaning of the concept of oppression as used by these diverse political movements, and to provide normative argument to clarify the wrongs the term names.

Obviously the above-named groups are not oppressed to the same extent or in the same ways. In the most general sense, all oppressed people suffer some inhibition of their ability to develop and exercise their capacities and express their needs, thoughts, and feelings. In that abstract sense all oppressed people face a common condition. Beyond that, in any more specific sense, it is not possible to define a single set of criteria that describe the condition of oppression of the above groups. Consequently, attempts by theorists and activists to discover a common description or the essential causes of the oppression of all these groups have frequently led to fruitless disputes about whose oppression is more fundamental or more grave. The contexts in which members of these groups use the term *oppression* to describe the injustices of their situation suggest that oppression names, in fact, a family of concepts and conditions, which I divide into five categories: exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence.

In this chapter I explicate each of these forms of oppression. Each may entail or cause distributive injustices, but all involve issues of justice beyond distribution. In accordance with ordinary political usage, I suggest that oppression is a condition of groups. Thus before

explicating the meaning of oppression, we must examine the concept of a social group.

### Oppression as a Structural Concept

One reason that many people would not use the term *oppression* to describe injustice in our society is that they do not understand the term in the same way as do new social movements. In its traditional usage, *oppression* means the exercise of tyranny by a ruling group. Thus many Americans would agree with radicals in applying the term oppression to the situation of Black South Africans under apartheid. Oppression also traditionally carries a strong connotation of conquest and colonial domination. The Hebrews were oppressed in Egypt, and many uses of the term *oppression* in the West invoke this paradigm.

Dominant political discourse may use the term *oppression* to describe societies other than our own, usually Communist or purportedly Communist societies. Within this anti-Communist rhetoric both tyrannical and colonialist implications of the term appear. For the anti-Communist, Communism denotes precisely the exercise of brutal tyranny over a whole people by a few rulers and the will to conquer the world, bringing hitherto independent peoples under that tyranny. In dominant political discourse it is not legitimate to use the term *oppression* to describe our society, because oppression is the evil perpetrated by the Others.

New left social movements of the 1960s and 1970s, however, shifted the meaning of the concept of oppression. In its new usage oppression designates the disadvantage and injustice some people suffer not because a tyrannical power coerces them, but because of the everyday practices of a well-intentioned liberal society. In this new left usage, the tyranny of a ruling group over another as in South Africa, must certainly be called oppressive. But oppression also refers to systemic constraints on groups that are not necessarily the result of the intentions of a tyrant. Oppression in this sense is structural, rather than the result of a few people's choices or policies. Its causes are embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutional rules and the collective consequences of following those rules. It names, as Marilyn Frye puts it, "an enclosing structure of forces and barriers which tends to the immobilization and reduction of a group or category of people" (Frye, 1983a, p. 11). In this extended structural sense oppression refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of

often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions, media and cultural stereotypes, and structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms—in short the normal processes of everyday life. We cannot eliminate this structural oppression by getting rid of the rulers or making some new laws, because oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions.

The systemic character of oppression implies that an oppressed group need not have a correlate oppressing group. While structural oppression involves relations among groups, these relations do not always fit the paradigm of conscious and intentional oppression of one group by another. Foucault (1977) suggests that to understand the meaning and operation of power in modern society we must look beyond the model of power as “sovereignty,” a dyadic relation of ruler and subject, and instead analyze the exercise of power as the effect of often liberal and “humane” practices of education, bureaucratic administration, production, and distribution of consumer goods, medicine, and so on. The conscious actions of many individuals daily contribute to maintaining and reproducing oppression, but those people are usually simply doing their jobs or living their lives, and do not understand themselves as agents of oppression.

I do not mean to suggest that within a system of oppression individual persons do not intentionally harm others in oppressed groups. The raped woman, the beaten Black youth, the locked-out worker, the gay man harassed on the street are victims of intentional actions by identifiable agents. I also do not mean to deny that specific groups are beneficiaries of the oppression of other groups, and thus have an interest in their continued oppression. Indeed, for every oppressed group there is a group that is *privileged* in relation to that group.

The concept of oppression has been current among radicals since the 1960s, partly in reaction to Marxist attempts to reduce the injustices of racism and sexism, for example, to the effects of class domination or bourgeois ideology. Racism, sexism, ageism, homophobia, some social movements asserted, are distinct forms of oppression with their own dynamics apart from the dynamics of class, even though they may interact with class oppression. From often heated discussions among socialists, feminists, and antiracism activists in the last ten years, a consensus is emerging that many different groups must be said to be oppressed in our society, and that no single form of oppression can be assigned causal or moral primacy (see Gottlieb, 1987). The same discussion has also led to the recognition that group differences cut across individual lives in a multiplicity of ways that can entail privilege and oppression for the same person in different

respects. Only a plural explication of the concept of oppression can adequately capture these insights.

Accordingly, I offer below an explication of five faces of oppression as a useful set of categories and distinctions that I believe is comprehensive, in the sense that it covers all the groups said by new left social movements to be oppressed and all the ways they are oppressed. I derive the five faces of oppression from reflection on the condition of these groups. Because different factors, or combinations of factors, constitute the oppression of different groups, making their oppression irreducible, I believe it is not possible to give one essential definition of oppression. The five categories articulated in this chapter, however, are adequate to describe the oppression of any group, as well as its similarities with and differences from the oppression of other groups. But first we must ask what a group is.

### The Concept of a Social Group

Oppression refers to structural phenomena that immobilize or diminish a group. But what is a group? Our ordinary discourse differentiates people according to social groups such as women and men, age groups, racial and ethnic groups, religious groups, and so on. Social groups of this sort are not simply collections of people, for they are more fundamentally intertwined with the identities of the people described as belonging to them. They are a specific kind of collectivity, with specific consequences for how people understand one another and themselves. Yet neither social theory nor philosophy has a clear and developed concept of the social group (see Turner et al., 1987).

A social group is a collective of persons differentiated from at least one other group by cultural forms, practices, or way of life. Members of a group have a specific affinity with one another because of their similar experience or way of life, which prompts them to associate with one another more than with those not identified with the group, or in a different way. Groups are an expression of social relations; a group exists only in relation to at least one other group. Group identification arises, that is, in the encounter and interaction between social collectivities that experience some differences in their way of life and forms of association, even if they also regard themselves as belonging to the same society.

As long as they associated solely among themselves, for example, an American Indian group thought of themselves only as “the people.” The encounter with other American Indians created an awareness of difference: the others were named as a group and the first group

came to see themselves as a group. But social groups do not arise only from an encounter between different societies. Social processes also differentiate groups within a single society. The sexual division of labor, for example, has created social groups of women and men in all known societies. Members of each gender have a certain affinity with others in their group because of what they do or experience, and differentiate themselves from the other gender, even when members of each gender consider that they have much in common with members of the other, and consider that they belong to the same society.

Political philosophy typically has no place for a specific concept of the social group. When philosophers and political theorists discuss groups they tend to conceive them either on the model of aggregates or on the model of associations, both of which are methodologically individualist concepts. To arrive at a specific concept of the social group it is thus useful to contrast social groups with both aggregates and associations. An aggregate is any classification of persons according to some attribute. Persons can be aggregated according to any to number of attributes—eye color, the make of car they drive, the street they live on. Some people interpret the groups that have emotional and social salience in our society as aggregates, as arbitrary classifications of persons according to such attributes as skin color, genitals, or age. George Sher, for example, treats social groups as aggregates, and uses the arbitrariness of aggregate classification as a reason not to give special attention to groups. “There are really as many groups as there are combinations of people and if we are going to ascribe claims to equal treatment to racial, sexual, and other groups with high visibility, it will be mere favoritism not to ascribe similar claims to these other groups as well” (Sher, 1987a, p. 256).

But “highly visible” social groups such as Blacks or women are different from aggregates, or mere “combinations of people” (see French, 1975; Friedman and May, 1985; May, 1987, chap. 1). A social group is defined not primarily by a set of shared attributes, but by a sense of identity. What defines Black Americans as a social group is not primarily their skin color; some persons whose skin color is fairly light, for example, identify themselves as Black. Though sometimes objective attributes are a necessary condition for classifying oneself or others as belonging to a certain social group, it is identification with a certain social status, the common history that social status produces, and self-identification that define the group as a group.

Social groups are not entities that exist apart from individuals but neither are they merely arbitrary classifications of individuals according to attributes that are external to or accidental to their identities. Admitting the reality of social groups does not commit one



to reifying collectivities, as some might argue. Group meanings partially constitute people's identities in terms of cultural forms, social situation, and history that group members know as theirs because these meanings have been either forced on them or forged by them or both (cf. Fiss, 1976). Groups are real not as substances, but as forms of social relations (cf. May, 1987, pp. 22–23).

Moral theorists and political philosophers tend to elide social groups more often with associations than with aggregates (e.g., French, 1975; May, 1987, chap. 1). By an association I mean a formally organized institution, such as a club, corporation, political party, church, college, or union. Unlike the aggregate model of groups, the association model recognizes that groups are defined by specific practices and forms of association. Nevertheless it shares a problem with the aggregate model. The aggregate model conceives the individual as prior to the collective because it reduces the social group to a mere set of attributes attached to individuals. The association model also implicitly conceives the individual as ontologically prior to the collective, as making up, or constituting groups.

A contract model of social relations is appropriate for conceiving associations, but not groups. Individuals constitute associations; they come to together as already formed persons and set them up, establishing rules, positions, and offices. The relationship of persons to associations is usually voluntary, and even when it is not, the person has nevertheless usually entered the association. The person is prior to the association also in that the person's identity and sense of self are usually regarded as prior to and relatively independent of association membership. Groups, on the other hand, constitute individuals. A person's particular sense of history, affinity, and separateness, even the person's mode of reasoning, evaluating, and expressing feeling, are constituted partly by her or his group affinities. This neither means that persons have no individual styles, nor are unable to transcend or reject a group identity. Nor does it preclude persons from having many aspects that are independent of these group identities.

The social ontology underlying many contemporary theories of justice is methodologically individualist or atomist. It presumes that the individual is ontologically prior to the social. This individualistic social ontology usually goes together with a normative conception of the self as independent. The authentic self is autonomous, unified, free, and self-made, standing apart from history and affiliations, choosing its life plan entirely for itself.

One of the main contributions of poststructuralist philosophy has been to expose as illusory this metaphysics of a unified self-making subjectivity, which posits the subject as an autonomous origin or an

underlying substance to which attributes of gender, nationality, family role, intellectual disposition, and so on might attach. Conceiving the subject in this fashion implies conceiving consciousness as outside of and prior to language and the context of social interaction, which the subject enters. Several currents of recent philosophy challenge this deeply held Cartesian assumption. Lacanian psychoanalysis, for example, stood by the social and philosophical theory influenced by Cartesian assumptions, which conceived the self as an achievement of linguistic positioning that is always contextualized in concrete relations with other persons, with mixed identities (Coward and Ellis, 1977). The self is a product of social processes, not their origin.

From a rather different perspective, Habermas indicates that a theory of communicative action also must challenge the “philosophy of consciousness,” which locates intentional egos as the ontological origins of social relations. A theory of communicative action conceives individual identity not as an origin but as a product of linguistic and practical interaction (Habermas, 1987, pp. 3–10). As Stephen Epstein describes it, identity is “a socialized sense of individuality, an internal organization of self-perception concerning one’s relationship to social categories that also incorporates views of the self perceived to be held by others. Identity is constituted relationally, through involvement with—and incorporation of—significant others and integration into communities” (Epstein, 1987, p. 29). Group categorization and norms are major constituents of individual identity (see Turner et al., 1987).

A person joins an association, and even if membership in it fundamentally affects one’s life, one does not take that membership to define one’s very identity, in the way, for example, being Navaho might. Group affinity, on the other hand, has the character of what Martin Heidegger (1962) calls “thrownness”: *one finds oneself as a member of a group, which one experiences as always already having been*. For our identities are defined in relation to how others identify us, and they do so in terms of groups that are always already associated with specific attributes, stereotypes, and norms.

From the thrownness of group affinity it does not follow that one cannot leave groups and enter new ones. Many women become lesbians after first identifying as heterosexual. Anyone who lives long enough becomes old. These cases exemplify thrownness precisely because such changes in group affinity are experienced as transformations in one’s identity. Nor does it follow from the thrownness of group affinity that one cannot define the meaning of group identity for oneself; those who identify with a group can redefine the meaning and norms of groups’ identity. Indeed, oppressed groups have sought to confront their oppression by engaging in just such redefinition.

The present point is only that one first finds group identity as given, and then takes it up in a certain way. While groups may come into being, they are never founded.

Groups, I have said, exist only in relation to other groups. A group may be identified by outsiders without those so identified having any specific consciousness of themselves as at group. Sometimes a group comes to exist only because one group excludes and labels a category of persons, and those labeled come to understand themselves as group members only slowly, on the basis of their shared oppression. In Vichy France, for example, Jews who had been so assimilated that they had no specifically Jewish identity were marked as Jews by others and given a specific social status by them. These people “discovered” themselves as Jews and then formed a group identity and affinity with one another (see Sartre, 1948). A person’s group identities may be for the most part only a background or horizon to his or her life, becoming salient only in specific interactive contexts.

Assuming an aggregate model of groups, some people think that social groups are invidious fictions, essentializing arbitrary attributes. From this point of view, problems of prejudice, stereotyping, discrimination, and exclusion exist because some people mistakenly believe that group identification makes a difference to the capacities, temperament, or virtues of group members. This individualist conception of persons and their relation to one another tends to identify oppression with group identification. Oppression, in this view, is something that happens to people when they are classified in groups. Because others identify them as a group, they are excluded and despised. Eliminating oppression thus requires eliminating groups. People should be treated as individuals, not as members of groups, and allowed to form their lives freely without stereotypes or group norms.

This author takes issue with that position. While I agree that individuals should be free to pursue life plans in their own way, it is foolish to deny the reality of groups. Despite the modern myth of a decline of parochial attachments and ascribed identities, in modern society group differentiation remains endemic. As both markets and social administration increase the web of social interdependency on a world scale, and as more people encounter one another as strangers in cities and states, people retain and renew ethnic, locale, age, sex, and occupational group identifications, and form new ones in the processes of encounter (cf. Ross, 1980, p. 19; Rothschild, 1981, p. 130). Even when they belong to oppressed groups, people’s group identifications are often important to them, and they often feel a special affinity for others in, their group. I believe that group differentiation is both an inevitable and a desirable aspect of modern social

processes. Social justice requires not the melting away of differences, but institutions that promote reproduction of and respect for group differences without oppression. Though some groups have come to be formed out of oppression, and relations of privilege and oppression structure the interactions between many groups, group differentiation is not in itself oppressive. Not all groups are oppressed. In the United States, Roman Catholics are a specific social group, with distinct practices and affinities with one another, but they are no longer an oppressed group. Whether a group is oppressed depends on whether it is subject to one or more of the five conditions I shall discuss below.

The view that groups are fictions does carry an important anti-determinist or antiessentialist intuition. Oppression has often been perpetrated by a conceptualization of group difference in terms of unalterable essential natures that determine what group members deserve or are capable of, and that exclude groups so entirely from one another that they have no similarities or overlapping attributes. To assert that it is possible to have social group difference without oppression, it is necessary to conceptualize groups in a much more relational and fluid fashion.

Although social processes of affinity and differentiation produce groups, they do not give groups a substantive essence. There is no common nature that members of a group share. As aspects of a process, moreover, groups are fluid; they come into being and may fade away. Homosexual practices have existed in many societies and historical periods, for example. Gay men or lesbians have been identified as specific groups and so identified themselves, however, only in the twentieth century (see Ferguson, 1989, chap. 9; Altaian, 1981).

Arising from social relations and processes, finally, group differences usually cut across one another. Especially in a large, complex, and highly differentiated society, social groups are not themselves homogeneous, but mirror in their own differentiations many of the other groups in the wider society. In American society today, for example, Blacks are not a simple, unified group with a common life. Like other racial and ethnic groups, they are differentiated by age, gender, class, sexuality, region, and nationality, any of which in a given context may become a salient group identity.

This view of group differentiation as multiple, cross-cutting, fluid, and shifting implies another critique of the model of the autonomous, unified self. In complex, highly differentiated societies like our own, all persons have multiple group identifications. The culture, perspective, and relations of privilege and oppression of these vari-

ous groups, moreover, may not cohere. Thus, individual persons, as constituted partly by their group affinities and relations, cannot be unified; they are heterogeneous and not necessarily coherent.

## The Faces of Oppression

### *Exploitation*

The central function of Marx's theory of exploitation is to explain how class structure can exist in the absence of legally and normatively sanctioned class distinctions. In precapitalist societies domination is overt and accomplished through directly political means. In both slave society and feudal society the right to appropriate the product of the labor of others partly defines class privilege, and these societies legitimate class distinctions with ideologies of natural superiority and inferiority.

Capitalist society, on the other hand, removes traditional juridically enforced class distinctions and promotes a belief in the legal freedom of persons. Workers freely contract with employers and receive a wage; no formal mechanisms of law or custom force them to work for that employer or any employer. Thus, the mystery of capitalism arises: When everyone is formally free, how can there be class domination? Why do class distinctions persist between the wealthy, who own the means of production, and the mass of people, who work for them? The theory of exploitation answers this question. Profit, the basis of capitalist power and wealth, is a mystery if we assume that in the market goods exchange at their values. The labor theory of value dispels this mystery. Every commodity's value is a function of the labor time necessary for its production. Labor power is the one commodity that in the process of being consumed produces new value. Profit comes from the difference between the value of the labor performed and the value of the capacity to labor which the capitalist purchases. Profit is possible only because the owner of capital appropriates any realized surplus value.

In recent years, Marxist scholars have engaged in considerable controversy about the viability of the labor theory of value this account of exploitation relies on (see Wolff, 1984, chap. 4). John Roemer (1982), for example, developed a theory of exploitation that claims to preserve the theoretical and practical purposes of Marx's theory, but without assuming a distinction between values and prices and without being restricted to a concept of abstract, homogeneous

labor. My purpose here is not to engage in technical economic disputes, but to indicate the place of a concept of exploitation in a conception of oppression.

Marx's theory of exploitation lacks an explicitly normative meaning, even though the judgment that workers are exploited clearly has normative as well as descriptive power in that theory (Buchanan, 1982, chap. 3). C. B. Macpherson (1973, chap. 3) reconstructs this theory of exploitation in a more explicitly normative form. The injustice of capitalist society consists in the fact that some people exercise their capacities under the control, according to the purposes, and for the benefit of other people. Through private ownership of the means of production, and through markets that allocate labor and the ability to buy goods, capitalism systematically transfers the powers of some persons to others, thereby augmenting the power of the latter. In this process of the transfer of powers, according to Macpherson, the capitalist class acquires and maintains an ability to extract benefits from workers. Not only are powers transferred from workers to capitalists, but also the powers of workers diminish by more than the amount of the transfer, because workers suffer material deprivation and a loss of control, and hence are deprived of important elements of self-respect. Justice, then, requires eliminating the institutional forms that enable and enforce this process of transference and replacing them with institutional forms that enable all to develop and use their capacities in a way that does not inhibit, but rather can enhance, similar development and use in others.

The central insight expressed in the concept of exploitation, then, is that this oppression occurs through a steady process of the transfer of the results of the labor of one social group to benefit another. The injustice of class division does not consist only in the distributive fact that some people have great wealth while most people have little (cf. Buchanan, 1982, pp. 44–49; Holmstrom, 1977). Exploitation enacts a structural relation between social groups. Social rules about what work is, who does what for whom, how work is compensated, and the social process by which the results of work are appropriated operate to enact relations of power and inequality. These relations are produced and reproduced through a systematic process in which the energies of the have-nots are continuously expended to maintain and augment the power, status, and wealth of the haves.

Many writers have cogently argued that the Marxist concept of exploitation is too narrow to encompass all forms of domination and oppression (Giddens, 1981, p. 242; Britain and Maynard, 1984, p. 93; Murphy, 1985; Bowles and Gintis, 1986, pp. 20–240). In particular, the Marxist concept of class leaves important phenomena of

sexual and racial oppression are unexplained. Does this mean that sexual and racial oppression are nonexploitative, and that we should reserve wholly distinct categories for these oppressions? Or can the concept of exploitation be broadened to include other ways in which the labor and energy expenditure of one group benefits another, and reproduces a relation of domination between them?

Feminists have had little difficulty showing that women's oppression consists partly in a systematic and unreciprocated transfer of powers from women to men. Women's oppression consists not merely in an inequality of status, power, and wealth resulting from men's excluding them from privileged activities. The freedom, power, status and self-realization of men is possible precisely because women work for them. Gender exploitation has two aspects, transfer of the fruits of material labor to men and transfer of nurturing and sexual energies to men. Christine Delphy (1984), for example, describes marriage as a class relation in which women's labor benefits men without comparable remuneration. She makes it clear that the exploitation consists not in the sort of work that women do in the home, for this might include various kinds of tasks, but in the fact that they perform tasks for someone on whom they are dependent. Thus, for example, in most systems of agricultural production in the world, men take to market the goods women have produced, and more often than not men receive the status and often the entire income from this labor.

With the concept of sex-affective production, Ann Ferguson (1979; 1984; 1989, chap. 4) identifies another form of the transference of women's energies to men. Women provide men and children with emotional care and provide men with sexual satisfaction, and as a group receive relatively little of either from men (cf. Brittan and Maynard, pp. 142–148). The gender socialization of women makes us tend to be more attentive to interactive dynamics than men, and makes women good at providing empathy and support for people's feelings and at smoothing over interactive tensions. Both men and women look to women as nurturers of their personal lives, and women frequently complain that when they look to men for emotional support they do not receive it (Easton, 1978). The norms of heterosexuality, moreover, are oriented around male pleasure, and consequently many women receive little satisfaction from their sexual interaction with men (Gottlieb, 1984).

Most feminist theories of gender exploitation have concentrated on the institutional structure of the patriarchal family. Recently, however, feminists have begun to explore relations of gender exploitation enacted in the contemporary workplace and through the state. Carol Brown argues that as men have removed themselves from

responsibility for children, many women have become dependent on the state for subsistence as they continue to bear nearly total responsibility for child rearing (Brown, 1981; cf. Boris and Bardaglio, 1983; A. Ferguson, 1984). This creates a new system of the exploitation of women's domestic labor mediated by state institutions, which she calls public patriarchy.

In twentieth-century capitalist economics the workplaces that women have been entering in increasing numbers serve as another important site of gender exploitation. David Alexander (1987) argues that typically feminine jobs involve gender-based tasks requiring sexual labor, nurturing, caring for others' bodies, or smoothing over workplace tensions. In these ways women's energies are expended in jobs that enhance the status of, please, or comfort others, usually men; and these gender-based labors of waitresses, clerical workers, nurses, and other caretakers often go unnoticed and undercompensated.

To summarize, women are exploited in the Marxist sense to the degree that they are wage workers. Some have argued that women's domestic labor also represents a form of capitalist class exploitation insofar as it is labor covered by the wages a family receives. As a group, however, women undergo specific forms of gender exploitation in which their energies and power are expended, often unnoticed and unacknowledged, usually to benefit men by releasing them for more important and creative work, enhancing their status or the environment around them, or providing them with sexual or emotional service.

Race is a structure of oppression at least as basic as class or gender. Are there, then, racially specific forms of exploitation? There is no doubt that racialized groups in the United States, especially Blacks and Latinos, are oppressed through capitalist superexploitation resulting from a segmented labor market that tends to reserve skilled, high-paying, unionized jobs for Whites. There is wide disagreement about whether such superexploitation benefits Whites as a group or only benefits the capitalist class (see Reich, 1981), and I do not intend to enter into that dispute here.

However, one answers the question about capitalist superexploitation of racialized groups, is it possible to conceptualize a form of exploitation that is racially specific on analogy with the gender-specific forms just discussed? I suggest that the category of *menial* labor might supply a means for such conceptualization. In its derivation "menial" designates the labor of servants. Wherever there is racism, there is the assumption, more or less enforced, that members of the oppressed racial groups are or ought to be servants of those, or some



of those, in the privileged group. In most White racist societies this means that many White people have dark or yellow-skinned domestic servants, and in the United States today there remains significant racial structuring of private household service. But in the United States today much service labor has gone public; anyone who goes to a good hotel or a good restaurant can have servants. Servants often attended the daily—and nightly—activities of business executives, government officials, and other high-status professionals. In our society there remains strong cultural pressure to fill servant jobs—bellhop, porter, chambermaid, busboy, and so on—with Black and Latino workers. These jobs entail a transfer of energies whereby the servers enhance the status of the served.

Menial labor usually refers not only to service, however, but also to any servile, unskilled, low-paying work lacking in autonomy, in which a person is subject to taking orders from many people. Menial work tends to be auxiliary work, instrumental to the work of others, where those others receive primary recognition for doing the job. Laborers on a construction site, for example, are at the beck and call of welders, electricians, carpenters, and other skilled workers, who receive recognition for the job done. In the United States, explicit racial discrimination once reserved menial work for Blacks, Chicanos, American Indians, and Chinese, and menial work still tends to be linked to Black and Latino workers (Symanski, 1985). I offer this category of menial labor as a form of racially specific exploitation, as a provisional category in need of exploration.

The injustice of exploitation is most frequently understood on a distributive model. For example, though he does not offer an explicit definition of the concept, by “exploitation” Bruce Ackerman seems to mean a seriously unequal distribution of wealth, income, and other resources that is group based and structurally persistent (Ackerman, 1980, chap. 8). John Roemer’s definition of exploitation is narrower and more rigorous: “An agent is exploited when the amount of labor embodied in any bundle of goods he could receive, in a feasible distribution of society’s net product, is less than the labor he expended” (Roemer, 1982, p. 122). This definition too turns the conceptual focus from institutional relations and processes to distributive outcomes.

Jeffrey Reiman argues that such a distributive understanding of exploitation reduces the injustice of class processes to a function of the inequality of the productive assets classes own. This misses, according to Reiman, the relationship of force between capitalists and workers, the fact that the unequal exchange in question occurs within coercive structures that give workers few options (Reiman, 1987; cf. Buchanan, 1982, p. 49; Holmstrom, 1977). The injustice of

exploitation consists in social processes that bring about a transfer of energies from one group to another to produce unequal distributions, and in the way in which social institutions enable a few to accumulate while they constrain many more. The injustices of exploitation cannot be eliminated by redistribution of goods, for as long as institutionalized practices and structural relations remain unaltered, the process of transfer will re-create an unequal distribution of benefits. Bringing about justice where there is exploitation requires reorganization of institutions and practices of decision making, alteration of the division of labor, and similar measures of institutional, structural, and cultural change.

### *Marginalization*

Increasingly in the United States, racial oppression occurs in the form of marginalization rather than exploitation. Marginals are people the system of labor cannot or will not use. Not only in Third World capitalist countries, but also in most Western capitalist societies, there is a growing underclass of people permanently confined to lives of social marginality, most of whom are racially marked—Blacks or Indians in Latin America, and Blacks, East Indians, Eastern Europeans, or North Africans in Europe.

Marginalization is by no means the fate only of racially marked groups, however. In the United States a shamefully large proportion of the population is marginal; old people and increasingly people who are not very old but get laid off from their jobs and cannot find new work; young people, especially Black or Latino, who cannot find first or second jobs; many single mothers and their children; other people involuntarily unemployed; many mentally and physically disabled people; Americans Indians, especially those on reservations.

Marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression. A whole category of people is expelled from useful participation in social life and thus potentially subjected to severe material deprivation and even extermination. The material deprivation marginalization often causes is certainly unjust, especially in a society where others have plenty. Contemporary advanced capitalist societies have in principle acknowledged the injustices of material deprivation caused by marginalization, and have taken some steps to address it by providing welfare payments and services. The continuance of this welfare state is by no means assured, and in most welfare state societies, especially the United States, welfare redistributions do not eliminate large-scale suffering and deprivation. Material deprivation, which can be addressed by redistributive social policies, is not, how-

ever, the extent of the harm caused by marginalization. Two categories of injustice beyond distribution are associated with marginality in advanced capitalist societies. First, the provision of welfare itself produces new injustice by depriving those dependent on it of rights and freedoms that others have. Second, even when material deprivation is somewhat mitigated by the welfare state, marginalization is unjust because it blocks the opportunity to exercise capacities in socially defined and recognized ways. I shall explicate each of these in turn.

Liberalism has traditionally asserted the right of all rational autonomous agents to equal citizenship. Early bourgeois liberalism explicitly excluded from citizenship all those whose reason was questionable or not fully developed, and all those not independent (Pate-man, 1988, chap. 3; cf. Bowles and Gintis, 1986, chap. 2). Thus, poor people, women, the mad and the feebleminded, and children were explicitly excluded from citizenship, and many of these were housed in institutions modeled on the modern prison: poorhouses, insane asylums, schools.

Today the exclusion of dependent persons from equal citizenship rights is only barely hidden beneath the surface. Because they depend on bureaucratic institutions for support or services, the old, the poor, and the mentally and physically disabled are subject to patronizing, punitive, demeaning, and arbitrary treatment by the policies and people associated with welfare bureaucracies. Being a dependent in our society implies being legitimately subject to the often arbitrary and invasive authority of social service providers and other public and private administrators, who enforce rules with which the marginal must comply, and otherwise exercise power over the conditions of their lives. In meeting needs of the marginalized, often with the aid of social scientific disciplines, welfare agencies also construct the needs themselves. Medical and social service professionals know what is good for those they serve, and the marginals and dependents themselves do not have the right to claim to know what is good for them (Fraser, 1987a; K. Ferguson, 1984, chap. 4). Dependency in our society thus implies, as it has in all liberal societies, a sufficient warrant to suspend basic rights to privacy, respect, and individual choice.

Although dependency produces conditions of injustice in our society, dependency in itself need not be oppressive. One cannot imagine a society in which some people would not need to be dependent on others at least some of the time: children, sick people, women recovering from childbirth, old people who have become frail, depressed or otherwise emotionally needy persons, have the moral right to depend on others for subsistence and support.

An important contribution of feminist moral theory has been to question the deeply held assumption that moral agency and full citizenship require that a person be autonomous and independent. Feminists have exposed this assumption as inappropriately individualistic and derived from a specifically male experience of social relations, which values competition and solitary achievement (see Gilligan, 1982; Friedman, 1985). Female experience of social relations, arising both from women's typical domestic care responsibilities and from the kinds of paid work that many women do, tends to recognize dependence as a basic human condition (cf. Hartsock, 1983, chap. 10). Whereas on the autonomy model a just society would as much as possible give people the opportunity to be independent, the feminist model envisions justice as according respect and participation in decision making to those who are dependent as well as to those who are independent (Held, 1987b). Dependency should not be a reason to be deprived of choice and respect, and much of the oppression many marginals experience would be lessened if a less individualistic model of rights prevailed.

Marginalization does not cease to be oppressive when one has shelter and food. Many old people, for example, have sufficient means to live comfortably but remain oppressed in their marginal status. Even if marginals were provided a comfortable material life within institutions that respected their freedom and dignity, injustices of marginality would remain in the form of uselessness, boredom, and lack of self-respect. Most of our society's productive and recognized activities take place in contexts of organized social cooperation, and social structures and processes that close persons out of participation in such social cooperation are unjust. Thus while marginalization definitely entails serious issues of distributive justice, it also involves the deprivation of cultural, practical, and institutionalized conditions for exercising capacities in a context of recognition and interaction.

The fact of marginalization raises basic structural issues of justice, in particular concerning the appropriateness of a connection between participation in productive activities of social cooperation, on the one hand, and access to the means of consumption, on the other. As marginalization is increasing, with no signs of abatement, some social policy analysts have introduced the idea of a "social wage" as a guaranteed socially provided income not tied to the wage system. Restructuring of productive activity to address a right of participation, however, implies organizing some socially productive activity outside of the wage system (see Offe, 1985, pp. 95–100), through public works or self-employed collectives.

*Powerlessness*

As I have indicated, the Marxist idea of class is important because it helps reveal the structure of exploitation: that some people have their power and wealth because they profit from the labors of others. For this reason I reject the claim some make that a traditional class exploitation model fails to capture the structure of contemporary society. It remains the case that the labor of most people in the society augments the power of relatively few. Despite their differences from nonprofessional workers, most professional workers are still not members of the capitalist class. Professional labor either involves exploitative transfers to capitalists or supplies important conditions for such transfers. Professional workers are in an ambiguous class position, it is true, because they also benefit from the exploitation of nonprofessional workers.

While it is false to claim that a division between capitalist and working classes no longer describes our society, it is also false to say that class relations have remained unaltered since the nineteenth century. An adequate conception of oppression cannot ignore the experience of social division reflected in the colloquial distinction between the “middle class” and the “working class,” a division structured by the social division of labor between professionals and nonprofessionals. Professionals are privileged in relation to nonprofessionals, by virtue of their position in the division of labor and the status it carries. Nonprofessionals suffer a form of oppression in addition to exploitation, which I call powerlessness.

In the United States, as in other advanced capitalist countries, most workplaces are not organized democratically, direct participation in public policy decisions is rare, and policy implementation is, for the most part, hierarchical, imposing rules on bureaucrats and citizens. Thus, most people in these societies do not regularly participate in making decisions that affect the conditions of their lives and actions, and in this sense, most people lack significant power. At the same time, domination in modern society is enacted through the widely dispersed powers of many agents mediating the decisions of others. To that extent many people have some power in relation to others, even though they lack the power to decide policies or results. The powerless are those who lack authority or power even in this mediated sense, those over whom power is exercised without their exercising it; the powerless are situated so that they must take orders and rarely have the right to give them. Powerlessness also designates a position in the division of labor and the concomitant social

position that allows persons little opportunity to develop and exercise skills. The powerless have little or no work autonomy, exercise little creativity or judgment in their work, have no technical expertise or authority, express themselves awkwardly, especially in public or bureaucratic settings, and do not command respect. Powerlessness names the oppressive situations Sennett and Cobb (1972) describe in their famous study of working-class men.

This powerless status is perhaps best described negatively: the powerless lack the authority, status, and sense of self that professionals tend to have. The status privilege of professionals has three aspects, the lack of which produces oppression for nonprofessionals. First, acquiring and practicing a profession has an expansive, progressive character. Being professional usually requires a college education and the acquisition of a specialized knowledge that entails working with symbols and concepts. Professionals experience progress first in acquiring the expertise, and then in the course of professional advancement and rise in status. The life of the nonprofessional by comparison is powerless in the sense that it lacks this orientation toward the progressive development of capacities and avenues for recognition.

Second, while many professionals have supervisors and cannot directly influence many decisions or the action of many people, most nevertheless have considerable day-to-day work autonomy. Professionals usually have some authority over others, moreover either over workers they supervise, or over auxiliaries, or over clients. Nonprofessionals, on the other hand, lack autonomy, and in both their working and their consumer-client lives often stand under the authority of professionals. Though based on a division of labor between “mental” and “manual” work, the distinction between “middle class” and “working class” designates a division not only in working life, but also in nearly all aspects of social life. Professionals and nonprofessionals belong to different cultures in the United States. The two groups tend to live in segregated neighborhoods or even different towns, a process itself mediated by planners, zoning officials, and real estate people. The groups tend to have different tastes in food, decor, clothes, music, and vacations, and often different health and educational needs. Members of each group socialize for the most part with others in the same status group. While there is some intergroup mobility between generations, for the most part the children of professionals become professionals and the children of nonprofessionals do not.

Thus, third, the privileges of the professional extend beyond the workplace to a whole way of life. I call this way of life “respectability.” To treat people with respect is to be prepared to listen to

what they have to say or to do what they request because they have some authority, expertise, or influence. The norms of respectability in our society are associated specifically with professional culture. Professional dress, speech, tastes, and demeanor, all connote respectability. Generally professionals expect and receive respect from others. In restaurants, banks, hotels, real estate offices, and many other such public places, as well as in the media, professionals typically receive more respectful treatment than nonprofessionals. For this reason nonprofessionals seeking a loan or a job, or to buy a house or a car, will often try to look “professional” and “respectable” in those settings.

The privilege of this professional respectability appears starkly in the dynamics of racism and sexism. In daily interchange women and men of color must prove their respectability. At first they are often not treated by strangers with respectful distance or deference. Once people discover that this woman or that Puerto Rican man is a college teacher or a business executive, however, they often behave more respectfully toward her or him. Working-class White men, on the other hand, are often treated with respect until their working-class status is revealed.

I have discussed several injustices associated with powerlessness: inhibition in the development of one’s capacities, lack of decision making power in one’s working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies. These injustices have distributional consequences but are more fundamentally matters of the division of labor. The oppression of powerlessness brings into question the division of labor basic to all industrial societies: the social division between those who plan and those who execute.

### *Cultural Imperialism*

Exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness all refer to relations of power and oppression that occur by virtue of the social division of labor—who works for whom, who does not work, and how the content of work defines one institutional position relative to others. These three categories refer to structural and institutional relations that delimit people’s material lives, including but not restricted to the resources they have access to and the concrete opportunities they have or do not have to develop and exercise their capacities. These kinds of oppression are a matter of concrete power in relation to others—of who benefits from whom, and who is dispensable.

Recent theorists of movements of group liberation, notably feminist and Black liberation theorists, have also given prominence to

a rather different form of oppression, which following Lugones and Spelman (1983) I shall call cultural imperialism. To experience cultural imperialism means to experience how the dominant meanings of a society render the particular perspective of one's own group invisible at the same time as they stereotype one's group and mark it out as the Other.

Cultural imperialism involves the universalization of a dominant group's experience and culture, and its establishment as the norm. Some groups have exclusive or primary access to what Nancy Fraser (1987b) calls the means of interpretation and communication in a society. As a consequence, the dominant cultural products of the society, that is, those most widely disseminated, express the experience, values, goals, and achievements of these groups. Often without noticing they do so, the dominant groups project their own experience as representative of humanity as such. Cultural products also express the dominant group's perspective on and interpretation of events and elements in the society, including other groups in the society, insofar as they attain cultural status at all.

An encounter with other groups, however, can challenge the dominant group's claim to universality. The dominant group reinforces its position by bringing the other groups under the measure of its dominant norms. Consequently, the difference of women from men, American Indians or Africans from Europeans, Jews from Christians, homosexuals from heterosexuals, workers from professionals becomes reconstructed largely as deviance and inferiority. Since only the dominant group's cultural expressions receive wide dissemination, their cultural expressions become the normal, or the universal, and thereby the unremarkable. Given the normality of its own cultural expressions and identity, the dominant group constructs the differences that some groups exhibit as lack and negation. These groups become marked as Other.

The culturally dominated undergo a paradoxical oppression, in that they are both marked out by stereotypes and at the same time, rendered invisible. As remarkable, deviant beings, the culturally imperialized are stamped with an essence. The stereotypes confine them to a nature that is often attached in some way to their bodies, and thus cannot easily be denied. These stereotypes so permeate the society that they are not noticed as contestable. Just as everyone knows that the earth goes around the sun, so everyone knows that gay people are promiscuous, that Indians are alcoholics, and that women are good with children. White males, on the other hand, insofar as they escape group marking, can be individuals.



Those living under cultural imperialism find themselves defined from the outside, positioned, placed, by a network of dominant meanings they experience as arising from elsewhere, from those with whom they do not identify and who do not identify with them. Consequently, the dominant culture's stereotyped and inferiorized images of the group must be internalized by group members at least to the extent that they are forced to react to behavior of others influenced by those images. This creates for the culturally oppressed the experience that W. E. B. Du Bois called "double consciousness"—"this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity" (Du Bois, 1969 [1903], p. 45). Double consciousness arises when the oppressed subject refuses to coincide with these devalued, objectified, stereotyped visions of him- or herself. While the subjects desire recognition as human, capable of activity, full of hope and possibility, they receive from the dominant culture only the judgment that they are different, marked, or inferior.

The group defined by the dominant culture as deviant, as a stereotyped Other, *is* culturally different from the dominant group, because the status of Otherness creates specific experiences not shared by the dominant group, and because culturally oppressed groups also are often socially segregated and occupy specific positions in the social division of labor. Members of such groups express their specific group experiences and interpretations of the world to one another, developing and perpetuating their own culture. Double consciousness, then, occurs because one finds one's being defined by two cultures: a dominant and a subordinate culture. Because they can affirm and recognize one another as sharing similar experiences and perspectives on social life, people in culturally imperialized groups can often maintain a sense of positive subjectivity.

Cultural imperialism involves the paradox of experiencing oneself as invisible at the same time that one is marked out as different. The invisibility comes about when dominant groups fail to recognize the perspective embodied in their cultural expressions as a perspective. These dominant cultural expressions often simply have little place for the experience of other groups, at most only mentioning or referring to them in stereotyped or marginalized ways. This, then, is the injustice of cultural imperialism: that the oppressed group's own experience and interpretation of social life finds little expression that touches the dominant culture, while that same culture imposes on the oppressed group its experience and interpretation of social life.

*Violence*

Finally, many groups suffer the oppression of systematic violence. Members of some groups live with the knowledge that they must fear random, unprovoked attacks on their persons or property that have no motive but to damage, humiliate, or destroy the person. In American society women, Blacks, Asians, Arabs, gay men, and lesbians live under such threats of violence, and in at least some regions Jews, Puerto Ricans, Chicanos, and other Spanish-speaking Americans must fear such violence as well. Physical violence against these groups is shockingly frequent. Rape Crisis Center networks estimate that more than one third of all American women experience an attempted or successful sexual assault in their lifetimes. Manning Marable (1984, pp. 238–241) catalogs a large number of incidents of racist violence and terror against Blacks in the United States between 1980 and 1982. He cites dozens of incidents of the severe beating, killing, or rape of Blacks by police officers on duty, in which the police involved were acquitted of any wrongdoing. In 1981, moreover, there were at least 500 documented cases of random White teenage violence against Blacks. Violence against gay men and lesbians is not only common, but has been increasing in the last five years. While the frequency of physical attacks on members of these and other racially or sexually marked groups is very disturbing, I also include in this category less severe incidents of harassment, intimidation, or ridicule simply for the purpose of degrading, humiliating, or stigmatizing group members.

Given the frequency of such violence in our society, why are theories of justice usually silent about it? I think the reason is that theorists do not typically take such incidents of violence and harassment as matters of social injustice. No moral theorist would deny that such acts are very wrong. But unless all immoralities are injustices, they might wonder, why should such acts be interpreted as symptoms of social injustice? Acts of violence or petty harassment are committed by particular individuals, often extremists, deviants, or the mentally unsound. How then can they be said to involve the sorts of institutional issues I have said are properly the subject of justice?

What makes violence a face of oppression is less the particular acts themselves, though these are often utterly horrible, than the social context surrounding them, which makes them possible and even acceptable. What makes violence a phenomenon of social injustice, and not merely an individual moral wrong, is its systemic character, its existence as a social practice. Violence is systemic because it is directed at members of a group simply because they are members

of that group. Any woman, for example, has a reason to fear rape. Regardless of what a Black man has done to escape the oppressions of marginality or powerlessness, he lives knowing he is subject to attack or harassment. The oppression of violence consists not only in direct victimization, but in the daily knowledge shared by all members of oppressed groups that they are *liable* to violation, solely on account of their group identity. Just living under such a threat of attack on oneself or family or friends deprives the oppressed of freedom and dignity, and needlessly expends their energy.

Violence is a social practice. It is a social given that everyone knows happens and will happen again. It is always at the horizon of social imagination, even for those who do not perpetrate it. According to the prevailing social logic, some circumstances make such violence more “called for” than in others. The idea of rape will occur to many men who pick up a hitchhiking woman; the idea of hounding or teasing a gay man on their dorm floor will occur to many straight male college students. Often several persons inflict the violence together, especially in all-male groupings. Sometimes violators set out looking for people to beat up, rape, or taunt. This rule-bound, social, and often premeditated character makes violence against groups a social practice.

Group violence approaches legitimacy, moreover, in the sense that it is tolerated. Often third parties find it unsurprising because it happens frequently and lies as a constant possibility at the horizon of social imagination. Even when they are caught, those who perpetrate acts of group-directed violence or harassment often receive light or no punishment. To that extent society renders their acts acceptable.

An important aspect of random, systemic violence is its irrationality. Xenophobic violence differs from the violence of states or ruling-class repression. Repressive violence has a rational, albeit evil, motive: rulers use it as a coercive tool to maintain their power. Many accounts of racist, sexist, or homophobic violence attempt to explain its motivation as a desire to maintain group privilege or domination. I do not doubt that fear of violence often functions to keep oppressed groups subordinate, but I do not think xenophobic violence is rationally motivated in the way that, for example, violence against strikers is.

On the contrary, the violation of rape, beating, killing, and harassment of women, people of color, gays, and other marked groups is motivated by fear or hatred of those groups. Sometimes the motive may be a simple will to power, to victimize those marked as vulnerable by the very social fact that they are subject to violence. If so, this motive is secondary in the sense that it depends on a social

practice of group violence. Violence-causing fear or hatred of the other at least partly involves insecurities on the part of the violators: its irrationality suggests that unconscious processes are at work. I think such unconscious fears account at least partly for the oppression I have here called violence. It may also partly account for cultural imperialism

Cultural imperialism, moreover, itself intersects with violence. The culturally imperialized may reject the dominant meanings and attempt to assert their own subjectivity, or the fact of their cultural difference may put the lie to the dominant culture's implicit claim to universality. The dissonance generated by such a challenge to the hegemonic cultural meanings can also be a source of irrational violence. Violence is a form of injustice that a distributive understanding of justice seems ill equipped to capture. This may be why contemporary discussions of justice rarely mention it. I have argued that group-directed violence is institutionalized and systemic. To the degree that institutions and social practices encourage, tolerate, or enable the perpetration of violence against members of specific groups, those institutions and practices are unjust and should be reformed. Such reform may require the redistribution of resources or positions but in large part can come only through a change in cultural images, stereotypes, and the mundane reproduction of relations of dominance and aversion in the gestures of everyday life.

### Applying the Criteria

Social theories that construct oppression as a unified phenomenon usually either leave out groups that even the theorists think are oppressed, or leave out important ways in which groups are oppressed. Black liberation theorists and feminist theorists have argued persuasively, for example, that Marxism's reduction of all oppressions to class oppression leaves out much about the specific oppression of Blacks and women. By pluralizing the category of oppression in the way it was explained in this chapter, social theory can avoid the exclusive and oversimplifying effects of such reductionism.

I have avoided pluralizing the category in the way some others have done, by constructing an account of separate systems of oppression for each oppressed group: racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, and so on. There is a double problem with considering each group's oppression a unified and distinct structure or system. On the one hand, this way of conceiving oppression fails to accommodate the similarities and overlaps in the oppressions of different

groups. On the other hand, it falsely represents the situation of all group members as the same.

I have arrived at the five faces of oppression—exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence—as the best way to avoid such exclusions and reductions. They function as criteria for determining whether individuals and groups are oppressed, rather than as a full theory of oppression. I believe that these criteria are objective. They provide a means of refuting some people's belief that their group is oppressed when it is not, as well as a means of persuading others that a group is oppressed when they doubt it. Each criterion can be operationalized; each can be applied through the assessment of observable behavior, status relationships, distributions, texts, and other cultural artifacts. I have no illusions that such assessments can be value-neutral. But these criteria can nevertheless serve as means of evaluating claims that a group is oppressed, or adjudicating disputes about whether or how a group is oppressed.

The presence of any of these five conditions is sufficient for calling a group oppressed. But different group oppressions exhibit different combinations of these forms, as do different individuals in these groups. Nearly all, if not all, groups said by contemporary social movements to be oppressed suffer cultural imperialism. The other oppressions they experience vary. Working-class people are exploited and powerless, for example, but if employed and White do not experience marginalization and violence. Gay men, on the other hand, are not exploited or powerless, but they experience severe cultural imperialism and violence. Similarly, Jews and Arabs as groups are victims of cultural imperialism and violence, though many members of these groups also suffer exploitation or powerlessness. Old people are oppressed by marginalization and cultural imperialism, and this is true of physically and mentally disabled people. As a group women are subject to gender-based exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Racism in the United States condemns many Blacks and Latinos to marginalization, and puts many more at risk, even though many members of these groups escape that condition: members of these groups often suffer all five forms of oppression.

Applying these five criteria to the situation of groups makes it possible to compare oppressions without reducing them to a common essence or claiming that one is more fundamental than another. One can compare the ways in which a particular form of oppression appears in different groups. For example, while the operations of cultural imperialism are often experienced in similar fashion by different groups, there are also important differences. One can compare

the combinations of oppression groups experience, or the intensity of those oppressions. Thus, with these criteria one can plausibly claim that one group is more oppressed than another without reducing all oppressions to a single scale.

Why are particular groups oppressed in the way they are? Are there any causal connections among the five forms of oppression? Causal or explanatory questions such as these are beyond the scope of this discussion. While I think general social theory has a place, causal explanation must always be particular and historical. Thus, an explanatory account of why a particular group is oppressed in the ways that it is must trace the history and current structure of particular social relations. Such concrete historical and structural explanations will often show causal connections among the different forms of oppression experienced by a group. The cultural imperialism in which White men make stereotypical assumptions about and refuse to recognize the values of Blacks or women, for example, contributes to the marginalization and powerlessness many Blacks and women suffer. But cultural imperialism does not always have these effects.

## Note

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## CHAPTER TWO

# The Vicissitudes of Cultural Competence

### *Dealing With Difficult Classroom Dialogue\**

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As we have entered the twenty-first century, our discussions in higher education seem to have expanded from a focus on cultural sensitivity to cultural competence. How culturally competent is the faculty member who is confronted with a class of culturally diverse students, or a clinician who enters into a psychotherapy relationship with a culturally different client? In this chapter, we shall provide a definition of cultural competence that includes not only individuals, but systems as well. We will then discuss the components of cultural competence and what is necessary to become culturally competent. We will present a discussion of difficult dialogues, a consequence of movement toward cultural competence, and conclude with some recommendations on how to deal with difficult dialogues in the classroom.

Competence denotes the ability to perform; therefore, the definition of cultural competence that seems most congruent with our perspective is one that is inclusive of attitudes, behaviors, and policies (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). This definition specifies that these three must be congruent. On the individual level, the individual must possess a set of congruent attitudes and behaviors that enables him to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. Yet institutions can possess cultural competence, for they can have policies that enable the institution to function effectively in cross-cultural situations.

There are several elements of cultural competence (Cross et al., 1989). One of these is valuing diversity. The individual or institution

has moved beyond the levels of tolerance, acceptance, and respect, to a level of affirmation, solidarity, and critique (Nieto, 1992).

Another element of cultural competence is the capacity of the individual or institution to engage in cultural self-assessment (Cross et al., 1989). In that self-assessment, the individual engages in an examination of her feelings, attitudes, and perceptions toward her own social groups and other racial, ethnic, cultural, gender, and sexual orientation group. At the California School of Professional Psychology (CSPP), this has occurred in the intercultural labs for students, and in faculty and staff retreats for faculty and staff, respectively. On the institutional level, the Multicultural Education, Research, and Training Institute (MERIT Institute) conducts an audit that assesses the institution's commitment to cultural diversity. The audit is inclusive of the institution's policies and practices.

Culturally competent individuals and institutions have a consciousness of the dynamics inherent when cultures interact (Cross et al., 1989). They are not only aware of the "dynamics of difference," but also of the dynamics of misinterpretation and misjudgment. These can lead to difficult dialogues, and as we see later in this chapter, the potential for explosive encounters. Culturally competent individuals and institutions are knowledgeable about different communication styles. They understand that one brings culturally prescribed patterns of communication, etiquette, and problem solving to interpersonal interactions, and are aware of the fact that violation of the norms of one another can have serious consequences.

Individuals and institutions possess institutionalized cultural knowledge and also possess developed adaptations to diversity (Cross et al., 1989). On the institutional level, the latter means moving from rhetoric to establishing policies and practices that convey that diversity is an integral part of the institution. It is a natural part of doing business. On the individual level, it means listening with an open heart, and noticing others' feelings and thoughts, as well as one's own. It means responding without judgment and arrogance. It also means allowing oneself to feel and be present in the jagged racial divide, to feel so intensely the differences that divide and simultaneously the commonalties that bind.

Cultural competence is not a luxury. It is a necessity for faculty and clinicians alike. As faculty working to educate and train students from many different cultural backgrounds, imagine this scenario: your class is discussing the day's reading assignments on how families have viewed children differently over the centuries. A European American White student, drawing from her own experience working in a social service agency with people of color, says, "It seemed like

those people didn't really care about their children." Several African American students in the class take offense and demand, "What do you mean by 'those people'?" The student who made the comment is puzzled and feels put on the spot. The students who are offended by her comment are not going to be put off; they want to deal directly with her for what they perceive as her racism. Everyone else in the room is waiting to see what happens. Welcome to difficult dialogue!

The possibility that a difficult dialogue will occur is heightened whenever course materials reflect a multicultural perspective, when students are racially or culturally diverse or when the instructor's ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation are different from the students. This chapter will consider ways to transform these kinds of emotionally charged classroom encounters into opportunities for meaningful dialogues about race, culture, gender, class, and sexual identity. It will explore the dynamics that can make such discussions difficult and present a model of effective strategies for engaging students in cognitive and emotional inquiry and open-minded discussion about multicultural issues.

### What Is a Difficult Dialogue?

Difficult dialogues, obviously, can occur about any subject, in any situation and between individuals of the same race, culture, gender, and sexual orientation. Many of the dynamics explained in this chapter pertain to the larger scope of difficult dialogues. However, this chapter focuses on the dynamics and patterns that emerge when those difficult dialogues are about and across race, culture, sexual orientation, and gender lines.

Difficult classroom dialogues occur when differences in perspectives are made public, and are challenged or judged to be offensive, often with intense emotions aroused among participants and observers. Such dialogues immediately spotlight the race, gender, culture, and sexual orientation of the participants. The normal classroom conversation stops, and verbal exchanges are no longer student-to-student or faculty-to-student, but White-to-Black, male-to-female, gay-to-heterosexual, and so on. Whether or not a person would normally attach much meaning to these identities, the interaction calls attention to them, and students and faculty alike can find themselves experiencing a strong personal reaction. Confronted with a different cultural perspective, students may experience a variety of responses, from anger at having been "lied to" in the past to disbelief or dismissal of the new information. Instructors may feel threatened by

the sudden awareness that some of their students know more about certain subjects than they do, and that their ignorance or biased perspective may become all too apparent to the class.

Difficult dialogues can take different forms. The normal classroom conversation can explode into an intense exchange, which may be characterized by friendly intellectual debate, or veer toward strongly worded disagreement, angry confrontation, or personal attack. From mild to mean, these exchanges have the potential for serious polarization, during which the educational process comes to a standstill. In the worst-case scenario, all attempts at dialogue fail, and verbal (or even physical) violence occurs; some students storm out of the room and go so far as to withdraw from the course. Students descend on the department chair or dean to file a complaint, and the campus paper covers the “incident” and calls you in for an interview. When the class meets again, tension fills the air like fumes that any spark could ignite.

Difficult dialogues can also brew in silence. Ironically one signal that a difficult dialogue is simmering is the absence of visible emotion. Students are quiet, dutiful, and respectful but apparently uninterested in discussion. Feelings are heating up, but there is a lid of polite and deadening silence over them. In this situation, little or nothing is communicated among the students. They leave the class muttering, “Man, am I glad this class is over, I hate these PC classes,” or “I’m not about to say anything and have everyone jump all over me.” Day after day, the instructor finds the same silent resistance. It’s a long semester, and the teaching evaluations are a disaster.

However, difficult dialogues can also become exciting educational opportunities. In the best-case scenario, a difficult dialogue occurs and the students and instructor move beyond the discomfort, the fear of confrontation, and the tendency to be judgmental. Students demonstrate a willingness to ask questions. The students become energized and curious, taking conversational risks, and inquiring about what others know and feel. The tension in the situation is not only recognized, but it is used as a lightning rod for cognitive inquiry and insight.

An example of this happened in a class of ours, in which the students were discussing stereotypes as learned behavior. A Latino student said, “I don’t like this about myself, but when I see a White man driving a Lexus, I say to myself, ‘There goes a CEO, a lawyer, a successful person.’ But when I see a Black man in a Lexus, I say, ‘There goes a drug dealer.’ I learned all this from the media.”

An African American young woman replied, “I say ‘Go Man,’ and I say to you [the Latino student] ‘You’re wrong and you should

know better.” She then burst into tears and ran out of the room. An older African American woman followed her, signaling to me that she would comfort her. The bell rang, and class was over. A spontaneous difficult dialogue had presented itself.

Before class convened two days later, we prepare a structure for continuing the discussion that included the students engaging in *mindful listening to self* (which we will discuss in greater detail later in the chapter), followed by a period for reflective writing. Then, each student was invited to share one question or feeling they experienced during or after the encounter. The tension and pain that they felt were thus brought out into the open, and the lesson that stereotypes are learned, alive in each of us, and a cause of suffering was more real than any lecture could ever have made it.

### Why Are Dialogues About Gender, Race, and Culture So Difficult?

When in a diverse group, people often avoid discussions of race, class, gender, and sexual identity for fear of creating discomfort, embarrassment, or hostility. The avoidance, in the guise of politeness, can take such forms as making light of the topic, shifting topics, or simply ignoring anything said that happens to relate to the topic. This *code of silence* is a reflection of a societal denial that cultural factors matter, and that things such as sexism, racism, and White privilege exists. In the classroom, it can prevent students from gaining experience in difficult dialogues. Because many faculty lack knowledge and awareness beyond their own cultural experience, they feel awkward and timid about discussing—let alone facilitating—student discussions about race, gender, sexual identity, and class issues. In order to avoid feeling that awkwardness or making others uncomfortable, they perpetuate the code of silence.

### Race Relations in the United States: Intensely Visceral and Cerebral

Too many people refer to interracial interactions as walking on eggshells, or walking through a minefield. The racial divide is wide with sharp and jagged edges. Many European Americans feel guilty for the legacy of oppression or defensive over their position of historical privilege. They do not feel race privileged. Even when they acknowledge their White privilege, they do not know what to do about it.

Most European Americans believe dearly in the sacred principle of equality and to be called a racist means they are being accused of violating that principle. Being called a racist, for most European Americans, packs the same punch as being called a child molester. For both Whites and people of color, race relations trigger the deeper issues of both identity (Who am I?) and worth (Am I good enough?). Many, if not most, people of color must navigate daily the effects of stereotypes. From subtle to obvious, members of other cultural groups question their worth, judge them to be less qualified, tokens, or a commodity. Many people of color believe they must be twice as good to be perceived as half as much. They get tired of the extra burden of having to navigate the daily tides of racial projections. So, it is understandable why it just seems safer to avoid the topic.

Moreover, because of the inextricable emotional dimension of race relations, most faculty view difficult dialogues as violating academic protocol. The Western academic tradition has typically held emotions to be irrational and not appropriate to the intellectual pursuits of academia. Faculty are trained to emphasize cognitive processes in the classroom, and to treat emotions as private and personal.

Finally, for both students and faculty, difficult dialogues heighten an awareness of personal vulnerability. From a psychological perspective, people craft their identity from the stories they have been told (by family, peers, religious leaders, and society) about what it means to be of a certain race, culture, gender, or sexual identity. Usually, they don't question these identities until others challenge them, which can happen when feeling attacked or spotlighted. Yet, in a classroom with diverse students or a multicultural curriculum, these identity factors (race, culture, gender, class, and sexual identity) can become a point of reference for how students perceive and relate to one another and to the instructor. When instructors deny or ignore the importance of these aspects of identity, they communicate a message to students that the students' feelings in these areas don't belong in the classroom and that perhaps their experiences and knowledge about their ethnicity are not worthy of academic attention. These types of interpretations can contribute to students questioning their overall worth and acceptability to the academic world. And, yet, to acknowledge and discuss them may take instructors outside their academic training and leave them feeling vulnerable.

During difficult dialogues, instructors may feel vulnerable because they don't know when to be the expert and when to let go, when to refer to their own identity and when to refer to the cognitive content. The faculty we work with speak of their lack of intercultural competence. They are embarrassed by how little they

really know about the different cultures in the United States. They are often horrified when they realize how few, if any, actual friends they have from a different race or culture, and how few, if any books, movies, plays, and so on, they've read or seen by and about members from a different culture. Faculty report that even when they have friendly intercultural relationships with colleagues, the topic of race or culture rarely arises. As faculty, we are trained to be the experts, to be in charge of a subject matter. Most of us are not experts in race and culture issues. We are out of our element, and when confronted with a lack of knowledge and very different experience we may begin to question our identity and place. No wonder instructors want to defend against this vulnerability by attempting to avoid or contain difficult dialogues. Yet, paradoxically, instructors' awareness and acceptance of their own vulnerability can increase their empathy for their students' vulnerability.

### How Can Difficult Dialogues Have Successful Outcomes?

One indication that a difficult dialogue is successful is when students come to integrate cognitive knowledge with emotional responses. Despite the feelings that may be aroused, they become curious about what they don't know or understand, and curious about the feelings as well. As part of this integration, they come to see themselves and their classmates as both emotional and intellectual beings. As they strive to get to know, communicate with, and understand one another, they gain respect for themselves and for their classmates.

Another indication of success is when students begin talking to each other about issues they would normally find threatening. They demonstrate the courage and willingness to ask questions, listen carefully to the responses, and speak honestly about their own perspective. We regularly do a fishbowl exercise after students read McIntosh's (1988) classic essay on White privilege. When White students discuss the essay among themselves, there are two dominant themes: (1) they are truly surprised that not everyone shares the same privileges (for example, not being followed in a store, being able to assume you can buy a house, rent an apartment anywhere you can afford, and so on); and (2) they get defensive and try to pick the essay apart. When the students of color discuss the essay, there are three dominant themes: (1) genuine disbelief and mistrust that Whites don't know they have White privilege; (2) anger about White privilege; and (3) appreciation for McIntosh laying it out so clearly.

In the end, we put the students together and ask them to re-enact the fishbowl conversations using role-play. After the role-play, the difficult dialogue begins. This difficult dialogue is successful when students begin asking questions that reveal their own vulnerability and true curiosity. Examples of questions and statements that may contribute to a genuine dialogue include: What do you see when you look in the mirror, a woman or a White woman? How do you instruct your children on how to handle racial name-calling? Help us understand what it feels like to be White. How is your life at school different from your life at home? How do you handle always wondering if someone is being friendly to you in a store so they can help you or guard you? Taking a risk might also take the form of self-disclosure, such as a story about how the person was oblivious to White privilege or wrongly assumed they were being stereotyped.

A further indication of successful dialogue is when students and instructors begin seeing their vulnerability as a strength. They become aware of the desire to be understood and to understand other human beings across race, culture, and gender lines: this urge to speak genuinely and to understand others becomes stronger than the urge to protect their own perspectives. Paradoxically, successful difficult dialogues often occur when individuals become aware of their defensiveness and have the courage to acknowledge it in the dialogue (for example, “Wow, I’m feeling so defensive right now. I wonder why?”). Instructors can encourage this practice by giving examples from their own experiences that disclose their own defensiveness and stereotyping.

### Dealing With Difficult Dialogue: A Model for Multicultural Inquiry

The following model for facilitating difficult dialogues is grounded in our over 20 years of teaching race-related courses at a racially diverse campus, incorporating ideas from ongoing discussions with many colleagues. It contains four elements:

1. Creating a climate for inquiry
2. Focusing on cognitive inquiry
3. Focusing on emotional inquiry
4. Developing skills for mindful listening



### *Creating a Climate for Inquiry*

In order to prepare students for a difficult dialogue, it is important to create a climate for inquiry within the classroom. This means encouraging students to develop an enthusiasm for seeking, exploring, and loving the questions more than the answers. The following questions can help introduce them to this idea of inquiry:

- What is the goal of inquiry—to find answers or questions or both?
- How are self-reflection and speculation involved?
- What kind of questions do you ask when you are truly interested in inquiry?
- What is involved in an attitude of inquiry?

We offer a perspective from Chodron (1991), who regards the willingness to inquire as “not caring whether the object of our inquisitiveness is bitter or sweet” (p. 3). Rather, genuine inquiry involves the courage to question what we think we already know to be true. Or, put another way, inquiry is finding the questions to our answers. We ask students to consider what it might mean *to not* have a vested interest in whether they liked or didn’t like the answer. Would that be possible? What might be the benefits and drawbacks of this attitude?

One way to demonstrate how to transform *answer-driven* statements into *inquiry-driven* questions is for the instructor to put a topic on the board, such as “Therapy and the Single Mother,” and then ask the students to generate statements that reflect what they think they know to be true. Students will generally say things like most single mothers are African Americans, or, most are on welfare. After several statements are on the board, the instructor then can ask the students for their sources. Students rarely quote a source; rather, they just assume it’s true from the media or have heard it someplace. Even when a more accurate answer is given (for example, most single mothers are White), the instructor does not give away the “right answer.” At this point, she continues to encourage the students to inquire more specifically into what they truly know and don’t know about the topic and particular clients. They can also be asked to consider what they know about different perspectives on the topic. Are there different sources of knowledge that reflect different views on how, for example, men and women, various cultural groups, gays and heterosexuals, and different socioeconomic classes

understand this issue? Finally, the instructor can ask students, if they didn't have to worry about "being right, or smart," what questions would they have about the topic?

### *Focusing on Cognitive Inquiry*

Cognitive inquiry in this model means going beyond learning about the theories and research findings that make up a discipline, to investigate the underlying contexts and assumptions that shape its knowledge base. As all of the chapters in this book have pointed out, psychology has not generally taken sociocultural factors into account, in that its theories and research applications have been developed mainly by and about Euro-American males. It is useful to invite students to consider such things as the origin of the concept of Whiteness and color that continues to be maintained as a social construct within the United States, and the development and significance of ethnic identity within a color-conscious society. Depending on the course, instructors can guide students toward an understanding of differences in values, attitudes, beliefs, and communication norms among ethnic, national, racial, and gender groups, and an understanding of the effects of economic scarcity or abundance on human development and behavior.

Although most instructors are not experts in the cultural, historical, socioeconomic, and social identity dimensions for each controversial issue, they can model and stimulate inquiry by telling students what they themselves don't know and the questions they want to explore. The goal is to cultivate students' curiosity for discovering knowledge. It would be useful, for example, if during a difficult dialogue on "Therapy and the Single Mother," students would want to explore such questions as: What is the ethnic breakdown of single mothers? Where do single mothers live? What is the breakdown by states and cities? What is the educational achievement level for mothers, fathers, and the children? What support (financial, housing, child care, and so on) do grandparents and other extended family play in the life of single parents? What community support is available to single mothers and their children? How does a mother's race, culture, and socioeconomic background influence the responses to the above questions? How do society's values on marriage affect its policies on single mothers? How does the stress of being a single mother affect her mental health?

Asking such questions involves courage, the courage to reveal what one doesn't know. It takes courage and self-awareness to resist getting caught up in an opinion war or a code of silence. This means noticing feelings—of inadequacy, fear, anger, or guilt—that may come

up, and knowing how to consider them in ways that enhance rather than undermine cognitive inquiry.

### *Focusing Emotional Inquiry*

Many people believe that knowledge automatically translates into competent and appropriate attitudes and behavior. Yet, information about other cultural and racial groups can actually increase hostility. Racist and culturally based prejudices can exist along with substantive knowledge to the contrary. The issues of race, culture, and gender are decidedly personal and emotional, and if instructors don't take the emotional dimension into account in the classroom, they may not achieve their cognitive goals. Goleman (1995) has made a very persuasive case that emotional intelligence is in fact interdependent with and as important as cognitive intelligence. If emotional inquiry is going to be part of the class, then the topic of feelings should be discussed at the outset. What follows are some basic points we've found helpful when we teach emotional inquiry and some methods for facilitating students' inquiry into their own and other's emotional responses. The foundations for our thinking rely heavily on many of the writings of Welwood, most recently *Toward a Psychology of Awakening* (2000) and Gendlin's *Focusing* (1978).

**Feelings are temporal.** Feelings come and then they go. We can talk about our feelings in the past or imagine them in the future, but they occur only in the present moment. In that present moment we may feel many emotions simultaneously or in rapid succession: emotions that may be conflicting, intense, and confusing, or gentle and easily understood. If a feeling is particularly strong, it may feel like a permanent state, leading to the conviction that something must be done to attend to or alleviate it.

**Feelings are not inferences.** It is important to help students learn to distinguish between a feeling, such as discomfort, and inferences about the feeling (such as, you are making me uncomfortable, or I don't want to feel this anymore, so I will do something to stop the feeling). White students who feel remorse or anger about the history and state of racism may begin spinning inferences (for example, that this is a terrible country, that racism is not their fault, that people of color must hate them). What happens is that the feeling becomes translated into a particular inference, which allows them to bypass the actual experience of remorse and anger. If unexamined, this kind of inference can solidify and numb other emotions in the process. Students often need assistance discerning the feeling from the inference.

**Feelings are often reactive.** Feelings are often responses to past experiences, as well as to current stimuli. An emotional reaction to an outspoken classmate may be shaped more by one's cultural background, earlier family dynamics, or previous life experiences than by the actual content of the classmate's utterance. Students need to learn that because feelings are so affected by one's own personal histories, they cannot be trusted as guides for taking rational action in the present.

**Emotions and reactions in response to multicultural material.** Sue and Sue (1990) have identified the six most common reactions students experience when working with multicultural curricula. They include:

1. Anger, which is often expressed as, *Why Blame Me? How dare you? It's your fault.*
2. Sadness and remorse, which often translates into, *I am bad. I feel so guilty. I don't know what else to do—I feel so sad.*
3. Despair often gets communicated as, *I can't do anything to change this, and I feel ashamed of being White. I feel like racism will never end.*
4. Fear often comes out as, *You can't expect me to give up what I've earned, I am scared. They control everything. Why shouldn't they hate me, I'm White, they will just assume I'm like other whites and therefore they will try to hurt me.*
5. Intellectualization is a reaction to not wanting to deal with the feelings and comes out in the form of denying the relevancy of feelings and claiming the primacy of the content issues.
6. Withdrawal is another form of not being ready to discuss the feelings and is most often expressed by lowered eyes, silence, and leaving the room.

**Noticing and Acknowledging Feelings.** Instructors may find it helpful to provide class time to explain the common reactions and feelings and to ask students to add to the list. But, if the instructor stopped here, the discussion about emotional reactions would remain an intellectual issue, so it is important for faculty to give students an

opportunity to practice acknowledging their feelings in the moment before they engage in inquiry. They need practice in learning to listen to feelings. To *notice* one's own or another's feelings is to take that moment and check in: What is going on with me right now? What am I sensing is going on with this person right now? Usually what happens here is a jumble of unidentified physical sensations or confused observations, but when given a few moments, the stimuli will settle into a discernible pattern that can be acknowledged, such as, I feel nervous, scattered, hungry, tired, and so on. It is important to tell students that the feelings will change.

Once students have noticed and labeled their feelings, they can then begin to notice the difference between the feelings themselves and the inferences identified with them. For example, a student reported on this process by saying:

At first, I noticed feelings of hunger and wariness, and then resentment and guilt set in. I first began to think about what I wanted to eat and when I might be able to get a rest. Then the resentment came in that you were making me think about race when I was working so hard and didn't even have time to eat. Then I felt guilty for being so self-centered and for all the racial injustices in the world and that I really had it easy.

When the student reported on this experience in class, we were able to assist the class in discerning the differences between her feelings (hunger, wariness, anger, and guilt) and her inferences (I will eat, rest, blame the instructor for making me think about these things, blame myself for thinking my hunger is more important than racial injustice, and so on).

As the feelings and inferences are identified, the instructor can ask students to explore the emotional content further. Some questions might be: What more is going on underneath this feeling—for example, anger? What am I angry about, really? Why do I want to blame the instructor? What am I afraid of? Why do I get angry when this issue comes up? Unlike cognitive inquiry, where questions get asked and strategies generated for finding out answers, emotional inquiry encourages the asking and holding of the questions. It involves waiting and listening to the responses.

It is helpful to remind students that they don't need to judge, change, deny, or indulge their feelings. Rather they can continue to acknowledge and inquire, and just notice what emerges. It is

essential to provide enough time for students to process the feelings they have acknowledged, as well as to invite students to inquire into the relationship between the cognitive content and their emotions.

### *Developing Skills for Mindful Listening*

Listening, once defined by a radio disc jockey as waiting for your turn to interrupt, is better practiced as the full and mindful attention to understanding one's own or another's message. Listening, when engaged mindfully, is the key to establishing an open and inquisitive environment, and is a prerequisite for all the other teaching and learning methods discussed here. Mindfulness, in the Western tradition (Gudykunst & Kim, 1992; Langer, 1989), is the ability to see and transcend the stereotypes, scripts, categories, and automatic reactions that prevent us from responding effectively and appropriately; the assumption is that an act of will is all that's needed to access this ability. In the Eastern tradition, however, mindfulness is a 2,500-year-old practice for cultivating this ability, which allows us to become more open to information and people we might have perceived as different or threatening (Trungpa, 1988).

Mindful listening is a method that is best applied to both listening to self and listening for other. The assumption is that we can best listen to others when we regularly listen to ourselves. Mindful listening to other involves placing the attention on the other and his or her message. The goal is to understand the message from the other person's perspective, not to agree or disagree, win, lose, or make a judgment. The basic instructions for this method include:

**Focusing on the Other Person.** By holding attention on what the other person is saying and feeling, the listener tries to understand the other's message from the other's perspective.

**Trying to Be Nonjudgmental.** The listener attempts to communicate the desire to understand, which is markedly different than expressing agreement or disagreement.

**Paraphrasing.** The listener tries to clarify his or her level of understanding, by repeating back in his own words what the other person has said.

**Engaging in Gentle Inquiry.** The listener asks questions that will allow him to put himself in the other person's shoes. Gentle inquiry isn't interrogation.

**Noticing.** The listener seeks conscious awareness of his own internal dialogue and external behavior, which brings him back to focusing on the other person. In this sense it is a self-correcting step.

Because even the most skilled listeners forget these principles, interrupt, and offer agreement or disagreement, it is useful to remind students of the guidelines, and to allow them practice time during each difficult dialogue. It is also important for students to engage in mindful listening on their own. Once learned, it can become a useful habit.

### *Putting the Model into Practice*

When a difficult dialogue arises—or when the instructor anticipates that it might—the following systematic approach of combining mindful listening to self with mindful listening to other can be very useful:

**Sit Comfortably.** Ask students to sit respectfully (whatever that means to them) but comfortably, to put down pens, pencils, drinks, and so on. They can close their eyes or look diffusely at the floor.

**Noticing.** Ask students to notice their feelings—both physical and emotional—and their thoughts. Invite them to be gentle with themselves and notice the feelings and thoughts they are experiencing. They are likely to become lost in their thoughts, so encourage them to focus on the feeling as well. If they notice that they are lost in thoughts, they should return to breathing (allow two to five minutes).

**Breathing.** Ask students to notice their breathing, which may allow them to become aware of their thoughts and feelings (allow two to five minutes).

**Focusing.** Ask students to focus their attention on a potentially difficult question that is derived from an idea presented in a reading, lecture, or class discussion. Ask them to focus on the question. A helpful metaphor is to have the students ask themselves the question (posed by the instructor), and then as if their mind were a movie screen, to watch what shows up without getting caught up in it (allow two to five minutes).

**Waiting.** Remind students to wait and hold the question and to try not to analyze or search their minds. Rather, the purpose of waiting is to clear a space so that many thoughts and feelings can make themselves known to the individual. You can remind the students that if they are making inferences by judging or arguing with themselves or others, or if they have drifted off into a daydream, once they notice that, they should acknowledge what they were thinking and return to their breathing and to the question at stake. If they feel sleepy and distracted, or if intense feelings come up, they are instructed to try to just acknowledge that it is happening and then

return to their breathing and the question. Remind them that there is no right answer, no need to fix or change anything. Their only assignment right now is to notice and acknowledge that they are responding to this particular topic (allow two to five minutes).

**Emotional Inquiry.** At this point, encourage students to engage in gentle inquiry in the same way they would if they were listening to another person. The questions might be: What is going on here? Why am I so angry? Why did I wander off and not want to think about the material? Why did I feel so nervous, tired, and so on? (Allow two to five minutes.)

**Cognitive Inquiry.** Here again, encourage students to focus their inquiry toward the cognitive knowledge. The questions might be: What do I know? What troubles me about this concept? What more do I need to know in order to understand this idea? (Allow two to five minutes.)

**Writing.** Ask students to write down what they noticed and to describe their experiences with this mode of inquiry. (Allow two to five minutes.)

**Discussion.** At this point, the instructor can engage in any number of teaching and learning strategies. For example, students can be placed in pairs or groups to discuss the question posed by the instructor, or the instructor can ask for a word, a sentence, or a question from each person that relates to the students' experience with the question. It is helpful to remind students about the principles to practice mindful listening to other. (Allow ten to thirty minutes.)

### *Taking the Plunge: An Example*

Imagine this scenario: It is early in the course, and you have just barely begun to address the concept of mindful listening. After a brief presentation that touches on a multicultural topic, you ask for questions and comments on the lecture and readings. An African American man who is older than most of the other students consistently responds to your questions; he doesn't really answer them, but instead, uses them to espouse his beliefs and views. His statements invariably begin or end with "the White Man." He says the "White Man" did this, "the White Man" did that, and "the White Man" is responsible for whatever. None of the other students, regardless of ethnicity, want to respond to him or draw his attention for fear of being accused of being "the White Man" or "the White Man's lackey."

What do you do? How might you evoke the spirit of inquiry into this situation? Addressing possible cognitive issues and questions, you might begin by:



- Discussing that “the White Man” is a shorthand way of saying institutional racism.
- Establishing a definition for institutional racism.
- Asking all the students: What does “the White Man” mean to them?
- Asking the students: What questions do they have about the phrase “the White Man”?
- Asking students to identify the kind of information they need to know in order to more fully understand what “the White Man” means.
- Inviting emotional inquiry, you might begin by
- Asking the students to take a moment, and notice and acknowledge what goes on inside of them when they hear “the White Man.”
- Asking them to inquire into their feelings, in the manner discussed earlier.

After students have had a chance to notice and inquire into their emotions, you can then make fruitful use of one of the writing, discussing, or sharing options described above. The second author of this chapter closes on a personal note. A while ago, in the Academic Senate, a contentious colleague spoke out about the uselessness of establishing a standing committee for Equity and Diversity. Identifying with my judgments, I immediately quit listening and began my plan of attack. I spoke not in response to him but in response to all the other people I knew who had similar opinions. In an “academically civil” way I matched his arrogance with my own and lost touch with my own feelings. What would have happened if I had just listened with an open heart, noticed his feelings and thoughts, and my own? How might I have responded? I don’t know, but it would have been different and less arrogant. In those rare moments when I allow myself to feel and be present in the jagged racial divide, I feel so intensely the differences that divide, and, simultaneously, the commonalties that bind.

Increasingly, I find that in those moments when I befriend my own prejudice, ignorance, and emotional tides, I am awed, humbled, and often quite sad and sometimes full of wrath, but also I am more honest and compassionate with my students and colleagues, no matter what their attitudes or messages. Situations hurt, anger, and

disturb more. Sometimes the feelings scare me but they no longer scare me off, or not for long. My students' feelings are no longer unwanted, ignored, or intellectualized away. Their feelings are a welcome addition to the classroom. Education—to be relevant, as W. E. B. Du Bois (1973) reminds us—must grow out of the life experiences of those being educated. So the more we can practice listening to our own experiences and each other's we will see, hear, feel, and understand how different and how similar we are. By bringing the confusions and muddy emotions of race relations into the center of the class, we acknowledge and feel the truth of the racial divide and paradoxically by doing so, we begin to feel more connected to ourselves and to each other.

### Note

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