

Oppression: The Focus of Structural Social Work

The oppressed are allowed once every few years to decide which particular representatives of the oppressing class are to represent and repress them.

—Karl Marx

INTRODUCTION

Much mention was made in the previous chapter of oppression and subordinated populations. Indeed, the primary focus of structural social work is oppression. Its socialist ideology, its social change perspective, its critical theory base, its dialectical analysis, and its inclusion of multiple forms of oppression all point to oppression as the major source of social problems and not to individual deficiency or to social disorganization. Most structural social work practice is carried out with, or on behalf of, oppressed people. Therefore, it is crucial to have an understanding of the nature of oppression, its causes and sources, its production and reproduction, its dynamics, its effects on the oppressed, including its internalization, and the social functions it carries out in the interests of the dominant groups (i.e., the oppressors) in society. These are some of the topics discussed in this chapter. As with the preceding and following chapters this chapter is informed by critical social theory, particularly that of Marx, the Frankfurt School, Habermas, critical postmodernism, feminism, and critical race theory.¹

THE NATURE OF OPPRESSION

To understand what oppression is, it is necessary to know what oppression is not. Since people are social beings and live in societies, no one is free from social structures. Such structures consist of boundaries, barriers, expectations, regulations, and so on. One could make a loose argument that everyone in society is oppressed because one's choices or freedoms are restricted by the simple existence of social structures. For example, when a person drives an automobile she/he is obliged to buckle up the seat belt, to drive (in North America) on the right-hand side of the road, and to obey all traffic laws and regulations.

These restrictions on our freedom cannot be regarded as oppressive. Not everything that frustrates or limits or hurts a person is oppressive. So, if one wishes to distinguish between what oppression is and is not, one has to look at the social context of a particular restriction, limit, or injury (Frye, 1983).

Everyone suffers frustrations, restrictions, and hurt. What determines oppression is when these happen to a person not because of individual talent, merit, or failure, but because of his or her membership in a particular group or category of people, for example, black people, women, poor people, and gay and lesbian persons. 'If an individual is oppressed, it is by virtue of being a member of a group or category of people that is systematically reduced, molded, immobilized. Thus, to recognize a person as oppressed, one has to see that individual as belonging to a group of a certain sort' (Frye, 1983: 8). Of course, not all groups in society are oppressed. Nor are all oppressed groups equally oppressed. Those in the dominant mainstream of our society are less likely to be oppressed and more likely to be among the oppressors. Women are oppressed (by men) as women. Men are not oppressed as men. Non-whites are oppressed (by whites) as non-whites. Whites are not oppressed as whites. Gay and lesbian persons are oppressed (by heterosexuals) as gay and lesbian persons. Heterosexuals are not oppressed as heterosexuals. This is not to say that oppression is a simple matter of dividing society into two groups: bad people (i.e., the oppressors) and victimized people (i.e., the oppressed). It is much more complex, as most people are oppressed in some aspects of their lives and oppress others in other aspects of their lives.

In addition to being group-based, oppression is described by almost all writers on the subject to be relational. There must be a dominant group who oppresses and a subordinate group who is oppressed. The former occupies positions of power, influence, and privilege that are used to maintain their position, often at the expense of the subordinate group(s). Gil (1998: 11), for example, argues that once oppression is 'integrated into a society's institutional order and culture, and into the individual consciousness of its people through socialization, oppressive tendencies come to permeate almost all relations.' Gil points out, however, that the intensity of oppression is not constant, but will vary over time. In other words, oppression occurs among (groups of) people in their everyday relations with each other.

BOX 10.1 MISUSE OF THE CONCEPT OF OPPRESSION

Unfortunately, some writers will feel pressure to seek the approval of their peers and will attempt to 'jump on the bandwagon' of certain frameworks that may be popular at certain times and in certain places (Naiman, 1997). Because 'anti-oppressive social work' currently enjoys theoretical popularity, as evidenced by its inclusion in the Standards of Accreditation of social work programs in Canada by the Canadian Association of Schools of Social Work (CASSW), some writers have

made claims about oppression that violate its relational nature. For example, a 2003 Canadian social work textbook on working with people experiencing addictions was entitled by its authors (Rick Cslermik and William Rowe), *Responding to the Oppression of Addiction: Canadian Social Work Perspectives*. My question is, who is the dominant group that is oppressing another group and who is the subordinate group that is being oppressed by a dominant group? Which groups are involved in an oppressive relationship? People experiencing problems with addictions may be oppressed along lines of class, race, gender, and so on, but they cannot be oppressed by addictions. No group is enjoying a position of power, privilege, influence, and opportunity because it is oppressing those people who are addicted. Although addiction to alcohol or drugs or gambling involves hardship and misfortune, it does not determine oppression. Oppressed groups will disproportionately experience certain problems because of their second-class or inferior position in society, but the problem itself is not oppressive. Subordinate group members may be more susceptible to health and social problems than members of the dominant group, but the health or social problem is not the cause of oppression. Health and social problems may be symptoms or outcomes of oppression, but they are not causes of oppression. Only people oppress people.

Besides being group-based and relational, another feature of oppression is that it is not accidental (nor is it usually intentional).

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. (Albert et al., 1986: 19)

Since oppression is perpetrated and perpetuated by dominant groups and is systematic and continuous in its application, a logical question is: why does it occur? The simple and correct answer is that oppression occurs because it benefits the dominant group. Oppression protects a kind of citizenship that is superior to that of the oppressed. It protects the oppressors' access to a wider range of better-paying and higher-status work. It protects the oppressors' preferential access to and preferential treatment from our social institutions. The oppressed serve as a ready supply of labour to carry out the menial and dangerous jobs in society, and they also serve as scapegoats during difficult times for the dominant group, often being blamed for inflation, government deficits, recessions, social disruptions, and the like. In short, oppression carries out certain social functions for the dominant group by ensuring that society reproduces itself and maintains the same dominant-subordinate relationships.

The dominant group in society may not really subscribe to oppressive behaviour as a means of protecting its favourable position. Most people do not consider themselves to be oppressors. In fact, most people probably believe that oppressive behaviour should not be a part of a democratic society. Why, then, do they engage in oppressive practices? Paulo Freire (1970: 45) eloquently answers this question:

The oppressors do not perceive their monopoly on having more as a privilege which dehumanizes others and themselves. . . . For them, having more is an inalienable right, a right they acquired through their own 'effort', with their 'courage to take risks'. If others do not have more, it is because they are incompetent and lazy, and worst of all is their unjustifiable ingratitude towards the 'generous gestures' of the dominant class. Precisely because they are 'ungrateful' and 'envious', the oppressed are regarded as potential enemies who must be watched.

Thus, the view the oppressors hold of the oppressed is that they constitute a dangerous class that must be controlled for the good of the whole society. The ways this social control is carried out are discussed below.

BOX 10.2 MYTHS THAT PERPETRATE AND PERPETUATE OPPRESSION

- *Myth of scarcity.* There is not enough to go around, which deflects attention away from the fact that a small minority owns most of the world's resources.
- *Myth of might makes right.* The majority rules even if it means tyranny of the minority.
- *Myth of objective information.* It is possible for one group (mainly white, bourgeois males) objectively to observe humanity, thus becoming the authoritative knowers.
- *Stereotyping.* All members of a group are the same.
- *Blaming the victim.* People are the architects of their own misfortune and oppression.
- *Competition and hierarchy.* Human beings are competitive by nature and aspire to be ahead/above others (from Anne Bishop, 2002).
- *Myth of supremacy.* The dominant educational system, with its emphasis on Western civilization, leads to a belief in the supremacy of a white, Western, male culture.
- *Myth of class.* Most people believe they belong to the middle class, which lives in harmony with a 'higher' (superior) class. This belief mandates and then sanctions a dominant and a subordinate class (from Haney, 1989).

OPPRESSION AS A SOCIAL JUSTICE ISSUE

In defining social justice as 'the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression', Young (1990: 15) contends that contemporary philosophical theories of justice do not conceive justice so broadly. Instead, they restrict themselves to an interpretation of social justice as the morally proper distribution of benefits and burdens among all society's members. The benefits to be distributed would include both material resources, such as wealth and income, and non-material social goods, such as rights, opportunities, and power. Issues of distributive justice are analogous to persons dividing a stock of goods and comparing the amount or size of the portions. Injustice, according to this distributive notion of social justice, would be defined as a situation where one group has a monopoly over a particular good. Even explicitly socialist discussions of social justice fall within the distributional theory, as the principles of distribution (need vs market) are paramount to social justice. What distinguishes the distributive perspective of social justice, then, is the tendency to see social justice and distribution as co-extensive concepts (Young, 1990).

Welfare capitalism and conventional social work have also adopted the distributional concept of social justice in that their focus has been on the distribution and redistribution of income and other resources (often defined in terms of some kind of social minimum). Discussion has tended to centre on inequalities of wealth and income and the extent to which the state can or should alleviate the suffering of the poor and disadvantaged. Indeed, the immediate provision of basic goods and services for people suffering severe deprivation must be a first priority for any group or program seeking social justice. Any conception of justice must take into account the vast differences in the amount of material goods that exist in our society, where thousands starve and live on the streets while others can have anything they want (Young, 1990).

From a structural perspective a major limitation of the distributional theory of social justice is identified by Iris Marion Young in *Justice and the Politics of Difference* (1990). Equating the scope of social justice only with distribution is misleading in two ways: (1) the social processes and practices that caused the maldistribution in the first place are ignored; and (2) the limits of the logic of extending the notion of distribution to such non-material goods and resources as rights and opportunities are not recognized.

Ignoring Social Processes and Practices

Young notes that the distributional view of justice assumes a social atomist or individualist perspective of people in that they are externally related to the goods they possess and only related to one another in terms of a comparison of the amounts of goods they possess. The institutional contexts within which distribution occurs are ignored. These institutional contexts go beyond a narrow Marxist account of the mode of production and include all social structures and practices, the rules and norms that guide them, and the language and symbols that mediate social interactions within them. This context affects distribution—what is distributed, how it is distributed, who distributes it, who receives

it, and what the outcome is. An example presented by Young (1990: 23) is economic inequality. Discussions of distribution often omit the decision-making structures that determine economic relations in society.

Economic domination in our society occurs not simply because persons have more wealth and income than others, as important as this is. Economic domination derives at least as much from the corporate and legal structures and procedures that give some persons the power to make decisions about investment, production, marketing, employment, interest rates, and wages that affect millions of other people. Not all who make these decisions are wealthy or even privileged, but the decision-making structure operates to reproduce distributive inequality and the unjust constraints on people's lives.

Limits of Extending Distribution to the Non-material

Advocates of the distributive theory of justice claim that any issue of justice, including such non-material things as rights and opportunities, may be treated as 'goods' or some aggregate of things to be possessed and/or distributed and redistributed. Young argues that such treatment produces a misleading conception of the issues of justice involved, as it reifies aspects of social life that are better understood as functions of rules, relations, and processes than as things.

Distributing or redistributing rights and opportunities is not the same as distributing or redistributing income, as rights and opportunities are not possessions. Some groups may have rights and opportunities that other groups do not have, but extending them to the groups that do not have them does not entail that the formerly privileged group must surrender some of its rights and/or opportunities as it does in the case of a redistribution of income. Rights are not things but relationships; rights are institutionally defined rules specifying what people can do in relation to others. 'Rights refer to doing more than having, to social relationships that enable or constrain action' (Young, 1990: 25). In other words, people may have certain rights but be unable to exercise them because of particular constraints based on class, gender, race, and so on. For example, a poor person may have a right to a fair trial but be unable financially to hire proper legal counsel.

Similarly, opportunity refers to doing rather than to having. It is a condition of enablement rather than of possession and usually involves a system of social rules and social relations, as well as an individual's skills and abilities. Having opportunities may lead to securing material goods such as food, shelter, and a job, but it is no guarantee that these goods and services will be secured. Just as people may have certain rights but are unable to exercise them, so, too, might people have certain opportunities but be constrained from using them because of particular social relations and practices. For example, in Canada we may say that Aboriginal persons have the opportunity to obtain an education, but education occurs in a complex context of social relations. Aboriginal people tend to have inferior schools, fewer material resources, and less access to tutors and computers, as

well as the experience of culture shock in off-reserve schools. This is not to say that distribution is irrelevant to educational opportunities, but that opportunity has a wider scope than distribution (Young, 1990).

Certainly, then, the distributive theory of social justice contains a major limitation. By focusing on something that must be identifiable and assignable it reifies social relations and processes and institutional rules. It gives primacy to substance over relations, rules, and processes by conceiving of people as social atoms, thus failing to appreciate that individual identity and capacities are themselves the products of social relations and processes (Taylor, 1985, cited in Young, 1990). Such an atomistic social ontology ignores or obscures the importance of institutional contexts and rules and social relations and processes for understanding issues of social justice. An adequate conception of social justice must understand and evaluate these social phenomena as well as the substance of distribution (Young, 1990).

Heller (1987) suggests a conception of justice that includes social phenomena. She views justice as primarily the virtue of citizenship wherein persons collectively consider problems and issues facing them within their institutions and actions, under conditions free from oppression and domination, with reciprocity and mutual tolerance of differences. Young argues that this conception of justice shifts the focus from distribution issues to procedural issues of participation in deliberation and decision-making. A norm would be just only if people who follow it have an effective voice in its consideration and acceptance. A social condition would be just only if it enabled all people to meet their needs and exercise their freedoms. A social process would be just only if it were an inclusive process with respect to different social groupings. A social practice would be just only if it is in accordance with how people carrying it out would like to be treated themselves. Social injustice from this perspective entails not only an unfair distribution of goods and resources, but includes any norm, social condition, social process, or social practice that interferes with or constrains one from fully participating in society, that is, from becoming a full citizen.

This concept of social justice is empowering because it goes beyond a concern with distribution to include the institutional conditions necessary for the development and exercise of individual capacities and collective communication and co-operation (Young, 1990). Oppression consists of institutional conditions that inhibit or prevent one from becoming a full participant in society. A society may be evaluated as just to the degree that it contains and supports the institutional conditions necessary for the promotion of the universal value that everyone is of equal intrinsic worth. For all those concerned with developing an adequate conception of social justice and for those committed to social justice in practice, oppression must be a central concern.

THE ORIGINS OF MODERN-DAY OPPRESSION AND THE POLITICS OF IDENTITY

Modern-day classism, sexism, racism, homophobia, ageism, and other forms of oppression are not superstitious carry-overs from the Dark Ages. On the contrary, Young (1990)

states that nineteenth- and early twentieth-century scientific and philosophical discourse explicitly proposed and legitimated formal theories of race, sex, age, and national superiority. Also, she contends that the methods of science and the attributes of the scientist have, in part, contributed to the formulation of these theories of superiority/inferiority. The social construction of these theories that present a white, bourgeois male as the perfection of human form and equate the virtues of manliness with the virtues of respectability is discussed below.

There has been much criticism of modern scientific reason by critical theorists, feminists, and postmodernists. These criticisms, which were summarized in the previous chapter, have, in part, punctured the authority of modern scientific reason. A major part of this criticism has been directed at the construction of the scientist and philosopher as knowers or subjects standing outside the objects of knowledge—autonomous, objective, and neutral. The subject is a socially detached observer, standing in the immediate presence of reality but without any involvement in it. Moreover, as Foucault (1977) notes, these observations are not mere passing looks but normalizing gazes that assess their object according to some hierarchical standard. Some of the particulars or attributes of the object are then defined as deviant or are devalued in comparison to the norm.

Young (1990) cites recent scholarship that has revealed the white, bourgeois, male, European biases attached to the notion of a rational subject or knower. That is, the virtues of the scientist have also become the virtues of masculinity—detachment, careful measurement and the manipulation of instruments, comprehensive generalizing and reasoning, and authoritative speech supported by evidence (Keller, 1985; Merchant, 1978, cited in Young, 1990). Those articulating and carrying out the code of modern scientific reason were white, bourgeois males speaking for themselves and unmindful that there might be other positions. In other words, they became not only the knowers or truth-seeking subjects, they also created or embodied the standards against which all other groups (objects) were measured. This already privileged group assumed the privilege of the authoritative subject of knowledge, and groups that they defined as differing became the objects of their distancing and mastering observations.

The imposition of scientific reason's dichotomy between subject and object on hierarchical relations of race, gender, class, and nationality . . . has deep and abiding consequences for the structuring of privilege and oppression. The privileged groups lose their particularity; in assuming the position of the scientific subject they become . . . agents of a universal view from nowhere. The oppressed groups, on the other hand, are locked in their objectified bodies, blind, dumb, and passive. The normalizing gaze of science focused on the objectified bodies of women, Blacks, Jews, homosexuals, old people, the mad and feeble-minded. From its observations emerged theories of sexual, racial, age, and mental or moral superiority. (Young, 1990: 127)

Nineteenth-century theories of race that explicitly assumed white, male, bourgeois, European body types and facial features as the norm were given legitimation and

THE

forms of oppression, Young (1990)

naturalized by scientific discourse (Young, 1990). Using this norm as the measuring stick, these theories posited that all other bodies were considered either degenerate or less developed. This superior body type by nature also determined directly the intellectual, aesthetic, and moral superiority of persons in this group over all other types (West, 1982).

In addition to a superior body type, the nineteenth-century ideal of beauty was primarily an ideal of manly virtue—a strong, self-controlled, rational man distanced from sexuality, emotion, and everything disorderly or disturbing (Mosse, 1985; Young, 1990). 'In much nineteenth-century scientific discourse . . . whole groups of people are essentially and irrevocably degenerate: Blacks, Jews, homosexuals, poor and working people, and women' (Young, 1990: 128–9). Women were considered to be physically delicate and weak, childlike mentally, and prone to irrationality and madness. The notion of whiteness was identified with reason, while blackness was associated with body (Kovel, 1970). This allowed people who were white to identify themselves as possessing reason and, therefore, to be the subject of knowledge, and to identify people of colour as the objects of knowledge (Said, 1978). Nineteenth-century discourse often extended the concept of 'black' to depict Jews and gays and lesbians. A new discourse on old age occurred in this time period, too, shifting it from an association with wisdom and endurance to an identification with frailty, incontinence, and senility (Cole, 1986, cited in Young, 1990). All groups that did not meet the norm of the young, white, bourgeois man were objectified in varying degrees as degenerate others.

This normal/abnormal or good/bad distinction did not guarantee respectability and superiority for all white bourgeois men, however, as even they were subject to disease and deviance, especially if they succumbed to sexual impulse. The nineteenth-century medical and moral literature is replete with male fears of becoming effeminate. Therefore, manly men must protect their health and beauty by exercising control over sexual urges. Bishop (1994) contends that during this period every oppressed group was assigned at least one negative sexual myth, usually that the oppressed group is sexually out of control, immoral, or perverted. Thus all women secretly want to be raped; gays and lesbians are perverts who engage in unnatural sex acts and want to seduce children; poor people breed like rabbits; black men want to rape white women; black women are more highly sexed than white women; Aboriginal women cannot say 'no'; disabled and old persons have no sexuality. These stereotypic attributes reinforced the socially constructed and 'scientifically' legitimated belief that groups other than young, white, bourgeois males were inferior and degenerate.

THE DYNAMICS OF OPPRESSION

It could be argued that the racial, gender, class, mental, and other theories of superiority generated by nineteenth-century scientific reason have been discredited by twentieth-century research and social movements. Numerous pieces of social legislation and social rules in the form of proclaimed civil, political, and human rights are now available to

the oppressed, as are affirmative action and employment equity programs that express a commitment to equality among social groups. Ideologies of natural superiority and group domination no longer seem to hold the influence they once did in our society. However, the position taken here is that various forms of oppression still are rooted in contemporary society, but they appear in different manifestations having both continuities and discontinuities with past structures.

Oppression does not occur today through some coercive rule of law or because of the evil intentions of a dominant group. It occurs through the systemic constraints on subordinate groups that take the form of unquestioned norms, behaviours, and symbols and in the underlying assumptions of institutional rules. In other words, modern-day oppression is structural.

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 new laws, because oppressions are systematically reproduced in major economic, political, and cultural institutions. (Young, 1990: 41)

To understand the meaning and practice of oppression Foucault (1977) suggests that we go beyond viewing oppression as the conscious and intentional acts of one group against another. Instead, oppression is often found in such areas as education, the production and distribution of goods and services, public administration, the delivery of health and social services, and the like. In other words, many people contribute to maintaining and reproducing oppression in carrying out many of their day-to-day activities, yet they do not understand themselves to be agents of oppression (Young, 1990). This is not to say that members of oppressed groups are never intentionally harmed, as evidenced by rapes of women, physical attacks on gay men, lockouts of workers, and harassment of people of colour. Nor does it mean that members of oppressed groups never oppress others, as evidenced by verbal attacks of the working poor on the non-working poor, physical attacks by youth gang members belonging to one oppressed group against youth belonging to another oppressed group, racial biases held by people in some ethnic or religious communities, or attacks by members on others belonging to the same oppressed group. In spite of these acts of intentional oppression, the contention here is that most oppression today is systemic and unintentional, built into our social institutions, and carried out unconsciously in our day-to-day activities.

LEVELS OF OPPRESSION

Oppression occurs at three levels: the personal or individual level, the cultural level, and the structural or institutional level (Dóminelli, 1997; Mullaly, 2002; Thompson, 1997). Each

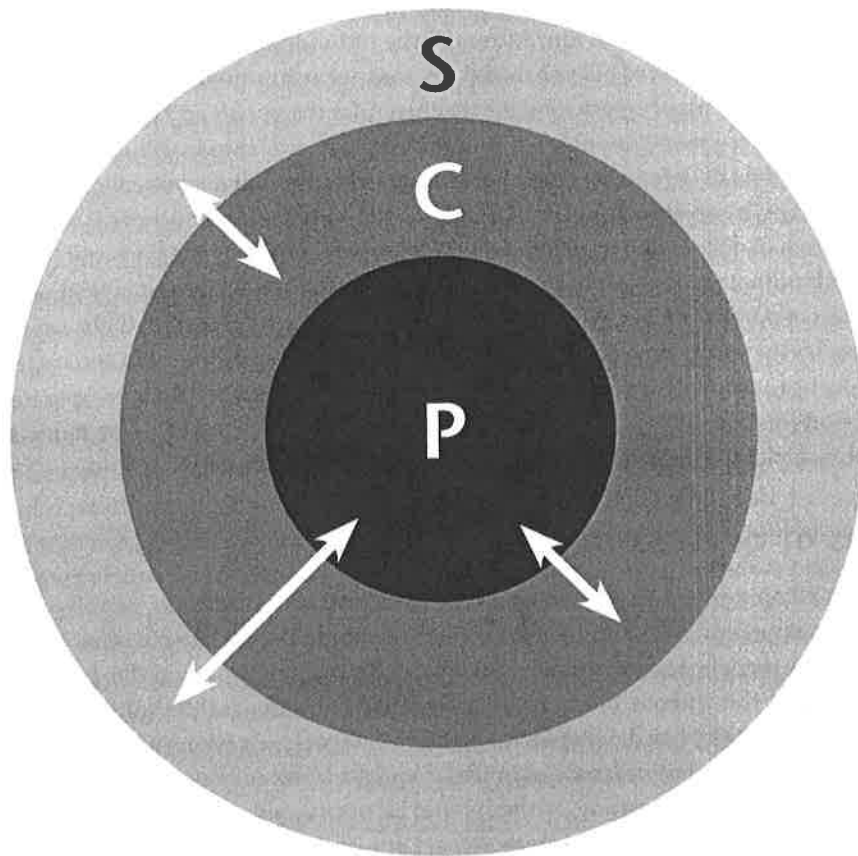
of these three levels or locations is interdependent, interactive, and mutually reinforcing with respect to the other levels, and, in turn, is supported, reinforced, and influenced by the other two levels. In other words, each level of oppression influences and reinforces oppression on the other two levels. Thompson (1997) has named this multi-dimensional perspective the 'PCS' (personal, cultural, structural) model of analysis.

The personal or individual level is located within the cultural and structural contexts of society, and the cultural level is located within the structural context (see Figure 10.1). Although we may examine oppression at only the personal level or at one of the other two levels, it will be an incomplete examination because one's thoughts, attitudes, and actions can only be understood in the larger context(s) with an awareness that the three levels continuously interact with one another. In some respects, the PCS model of analysis is an elaboration of the 'personal is political' analysis of feminists, social activists, and progressive social workers (Mullaly, 2002). It retains the 'personal' and the 'political' by recognizing that social problems are political or structural by nature and that they cause personal difficulties for many people. Furthermore, just as structural forces affect people, so, too, do people affect structures. This insight has been behind all social change movements, from small acts of individual resistance to large social movements. The PCS model adds to this perspective an intermediate level, which is the cultural level. Culture (values, norms, and shared patterns of thinking) tended to be lumped in as part of the structural level in the 'personal is political' model. However, today, thanks to the development of contemporary cultural studies, we have a greater understanding of how the dominant culture of a society reflects and reinforces the oppression of subordinate cultures on the other two levels. Culture, as a level or location of oppression, helps to address the concern expressed in Chapter 7 (see Box 7.2) about the utility of 'the personal is political' as a useful tool in everyday social work practice.

Oppression at the personal level comprises those thoughts, attitudes, and behaviours that depict a negative pre-judgement of a particular subordinate group. It is usually based on stereotypes and may be overt or covert. Oppression at the cultural level consists of those values, norms, and shared patterns of thinking and acting, along with an assumed consensus about what is right and normal, that, taken together, endorse the belief in a superior culture. It acts as a vehicle for transmitting and presenting the dominant culture (i.e., the culture of the dominant group) as the norm, the message being that everyone should conform to it. Oppression at the structural level refers to the means by which oppression is institutionalized in society. It consists of the ways that social institutions, laws, policies, and social processes and practices all work together primarily in favour of the dominant group at the expense of subordinate groups. At this level oppression is given its formal legitimation.

THE MULTIPLICITY AND PERSISTENCE OF OPPRESSION

A person's identity is associated with physical, psychological, social, and cultural variables such as appearance, personality, social status or class, social roles, and race

FIGURE 10.1 PCS MODEL OF OPPRESSION

or ethnicity (Mullaly, 2002). One's identity is seldom, if ever, determined solely by one characteristic although one characteristic may be a major marker in most situations (e.g., one's gender or skin colour). The individual does not possess a single social identity, but multiple identities that shift and change over time or in different contexts. Persons may be identified in various ways as they tend to be members of many affinity groups. Black persons, for example, may be rich, poor, old, or gay. These differences produce different identities as well as potential conflicts with other black people and affinities with some white people. Oppressed people are seldom oppressed along one dimension only, but tend to be multiply oppressed.

Given the fact of multiple identities and the wide array of forms and sources of oppression, most oppressed people belong to more than one category of oppression. Anne Bishop (1994: 61) states, 'we are oppressors in some parts of our identity, and oppressed in others.' She suggests that it would be easier to fight oppression if a line could be drawn

between oppressors and oppressed. This means that most oppressed people also have access to some form of superiority and domination. Because many disadvantaged people have at least one form of domination as part of their identity, it is very difficult to wage a campaign to eliminate oppression. Although the individual may want to see the end of oppression in those parts of his or her identity that are subordinate (e.g., poverty, homosexuality), he or she may be very reluctant to surrender the power and privilege that come with that part of personal identity that is dominant (e.g., maleness, affluence).

The net effect of defending those parts of our identity that give us relatively favourable treatment in society while contributing to the oppression of others is to keep the whole system of oppression in place. As long as separation, competition, and hierarchy among subordinate groups exist, there is no potential for solidarity and collective action on the part of oppressed groups, which leaves the status quo protected. Only a complete and complex understanding of our own contradictory roles as oppressors and oppressed will allow us to recognize our shared interests and to resist rather than co-operate with oppression (Bishop, 1994). Mullaly (2002) presents an overview of a few models that attempt to depict the intersecting and multiple nature of oppression.

FORMS OF OPPRESSION

Although all oppressed groups, such as the poor and working-class people, women, people of colour, gay men and lesbians, disabled persons, elderly citizens, Jews, and Aboriginals, experience some obstacles to developing their capacities and to participating fully in society, it is impossible to give one essential or universal definition of oppression. Iris Young (1990) has developed a set of five categories or forms of oppression that encompass both distributive issues of injustice and social structures, relations, and practices that go beyond distribution. Although not all oppressed groups experience all five forms of oppression they do experience at least one of them and usually more than one. A summary of each is presented below.

Exploitation

Exploitation refers to those social processes whereby the dominant group is able to accumulate and maintain status, power, and assets from the energy and labour expended by subordinate groups. Exploitation is primarily experienced by working-class persons, women, and people of colour.

With respect to workers, capitalism systematically transfers powers from workers through the private ownership of the means of production and through markets that allocate labour and the ability to buy goods. As well, the powers of workers are diminished by more than the amount transferred, because workers also suffer material deprivation and a loss of control over their work, which results in a loss of self-respect.

The injustice of class division goes beyond the fact that a few people have enormous wealth while many people have little. Exploitation is realized through a structural

relationship between the have and have-not groups. Social rules about what work is, who works for whom, how work is to be compensated, and how the results of work are to be distributed and used all operate through a systematic process to produce and reproduce relations of power and inequality.

Women are exploited not only in the Marxist sense that they are wage workers or that their domestic labour is simply subsumed in the wages a family receives, but also in terms of their nurturing, caring, and smoothing over of workplace tensions (Alexander, 1987; Young, 1990). Women expend energy and expertise that are most often unnoticed and unacknowledged (while they simultaneously perform their work in their paying jobs) in ways that enhance the wealth, status, or comfort of others, usually of men who thereby are released to carry out work considered more important and creative, both aspects of which are more highly rewarded than the work of the subordinate women. In other words, the power, freedom, and status enjoyed by men are attributable significantly to women who work for them and in a way that constitutes a systematic and unreciprocated transfer of power and energy from women to men (Young, 1990).

Along with class and gender, Young (1990) argues that there is also a race-specific form of exploitation. It is carried out by members of non-white groups performing menial tasks for white people. Wherever racism exists in a predominantly white society there is an expectation that members of non-white groups will carry out servant roles for the dominant white group—domestics, bellhops, maids, non-professional nannies, porters, busboys, janitors, dishwashers, and the like. In addition to servile, unskilled, minimum wage, and low-status work with little autonomy, these jobs involve a transfer of energy whereby the servers enhance the status of the served.

To Young's contention that menial labour constitutes a form of exploitation, another form of work—dangerous work—can also be considered exploitative. During times of war, poor working men, both white and black, are usually on the front lines of the battlefield while white bourgeois males—high-ranking officers and officials in departments of defence—direct operations far from the front lines and take credit for victory. The coal-mining industry and the fisheries have historically employed (in the former case) or relied on (in the latter case) resource-poor people to go into the mines to dig and extract the coal or to go on the waters to catch the fish, while the owners of the mines or the fish-processing plants, who determine wages or the price of the fish catch, seldom leave their safe and comfortable corporate headquarters. Female workers are subject to sexual harassment on the job, a type of corporate violence to which men typically are not exposed. Many female workers who make their living by making repetitive wrist, arm, and back movements, such as secretaries and other keyboard operators, are subject to repetitive strain injuries such as tendonitis and carpal tunnel syndrome (DeKeseredy and Hinch, 1991).

The above forms of exploitation cannot be eliminated by a redistribution of material resources. As long as current structural relations and institutionalized practices remain unaltered, the process of transferring energy and labour from the exploited to the dominant group will reproduce an unequal distribution of goods and 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' (Young, 1990: 53).

Marginalization

Marginalization affects primarily people of colour, old and young persons, many single mothers and their children, physically and mentally disabled people, unskilled workers, and North American Aborigines. These groups constitute a growing underclass permanently confined to the margins of society because the labour market cannot or will not accommodate them.

Young (1990) suggests that marginalization is perhaps the most dangerous form of oppression because it excludes whole groups of people from useful and meaningful participation in society, which, in turn, may lead to severe material deprivation. Even though advanced capitalist societies have put in place modern welfare systems to deal with material deprivation, in North America, at least, welfare redistribution has not eliminated large-scale suffering, and in the present political climate there is no assurance that the welfare state will continue. As well, the welfare state in liberal democracies has been criticized for denying those who become dependent on it of certain rights and freedoms that others take for granted (Galper, 1975, 1980). Welfare bureaucracies have often treated poor people, old persons, and disabled individuals who rely on them for support and services with punitive, demeaning, patronizing, and arbitrary policies and regulations that interfere with their basic rights to privacy, respect, and autonomy.

Even when material deprivation is not present, marginalization may still occur. Many old people, for example, have the material means to live comfortable lives, but they are excluded from meaningful social participation and cannot exercise their capacities in socially defined and recognized ways. Most of society's productive and recognized activities are related to age and work. Thus, in their marginality, older people are often subject to feelings of uselessness, boredom, and a lack of self-respect.

Marginalization constitutes a basic feature of injustice and oppression. To overcome it requires both a restructuring of productive activity to address a right of participation within the wage system and establishing some socially productive activity outside the wage system.

Powerlessness

Powerlessness consists of inhibitions in the development of one's capacities, a lack of decision-making power in one's working life, and exposure to disrespectful treatment because of the status one occupies. It affects primarily non-professional workers, but also people of colour and women to a lesser extent. It is based on the social division of labour but is more complex than the traditional Marxist model of class exploitation in that it

recognizes the distinction between the 'middle class' and the 'working class' to be a social division of labour between professionals and non-professionals.

Most workplaces in advanced capitalist societies are organized hierarchically, with direct participation of workers being rare and decisions (in both the private and public sectors) being imposed on workers and citizens. However, this decision-making power is often mediated by agents who may have no say in the decision, but do exercise power and authority over others in carrying out decisions and policies. The powerless are those who do not have power or authority even in this mediated sense; they 'exercise little creativity or judgement in their work, have no technical expertise or authority, . . . and do not command respect' (Young, 1990: 58-9). Non-professionals suffer this type of oppression; professionals (white males at least) do not.

The status privilege of professionals has three aspects (Sennett and Cobb, 1972, cited in Young, 1990). First, a professional develops her or his capacities and gains recognition by obtaining a university education and through subsequent professional advancement with an accompanying rise in status. Second, professionals have considerable work autonomy relative to non-professionals and usually have some authority over others, whether subordinate workers or clients. Third, the privileges of the professional extend beyond the workplace to a whole way of life or culture that has respectability associated with it. The norms of respectability in our society—in terms of dress, speech, tastes, and demeanour—are those of a professional culture. If one wishes to make a good impression, whether in seeking a bank loan or applying for a job, one likely will try to look 'professional' or 'respectable' as part of his or her efforts. Typically, professionals receive more respectful treatment in our society than non-professionals.

The power and respectability that accompany the privileged status of being a professional also involve racist and sexist dynamics. People of colour and women who are professionals must prove their respectability again and again. When it is not known that they are professional persons they are often not treated with respect or deference, but when others become aware that the individual is, for example, a university teacher or a business executive, the person will often receive respect. Conversely, working-class white men are often accorded respect until their working-class status is discovered.

Although the injustices of powerlessness have distributional consequences they are more fundamentally issues of the division of labour and bring into question the social division of those who make decisions and those who carry out these decisions. This social division of labour provides a plausible explanation for so many social workers being co-opted by our present social system that oppresses so many people. As professionals, social workers are able to exercise their capacities through their university training and through the professional development that occurs throughout their careers. In addition, they are able to exercise considerable power over others and receive the respect that goes with the privilege of professionalism. It requires considerable commitment as well as energy to work at transforming the society that has given the social worker some degree of power and privilege.

Cultural Imperialism

Exploitation, marginalization, and powerlessness all refer to relations of oppression that occur through the social division of work. Feminists and black liberation theorists, among others, have identified a further form of oppression—cultural imperialism. This form of oppression comes about when the dominant group universalizes its experience and culture and uses them as the norm. Through a process of ethnocentrism the dominant group, most often without realizing it, projects its experience and culture as representative of all humanity. Our social institutions are based on the culture and experiences of the dominant group, and our educational system, the media, the entertainment industry, literature, and the marketing of products reinforce this notion of a universal culture. We are socialized into this ethnocentric view of the world. Cultural imperialism is experienced in varying degrees by all oppressed groups.

The dominant group reinforces its position by measuring other groups according to the dominant norms. Thus, the differences of women from men, black people or Aboriginal people from white people, Jews from Christians, gay men and lesbians from heterosexuals, and workers from professionals become largely constructed as deviance and inferiority. These 'other' groups experience a double and paradoxical oppression. Stereotypes are used to mark them at the same time their own experiences and perspectives are rendered invisible.

The stereotypes applied to the culturally imperialized brand them as deviant and inferior, and are so pervasive in society that they are seldom questioned. Examples are that Aboriginal persons are alcoholic and lazy, gay men are promiscuous and perverted, women are good with children, black people are drug addicts and criminals. The fact that culturally dominated groups tend to be defined from the outside not only renders their own experiences and perspectives invisible to the dominant group, but forces oppressed groups to look at themselves through the eyes of a dominant group that views them with contempt or amusement (Du Bois, 1969, cited in Young, 1990). '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 the same culture imposes on the oppressed group its experience and interpretation of social life' (Young, 1990: 60). To overcome cultural imperialism it would seem that a necessary step would be for culturally oppressed groups to take over the definition of themselves and assert a positive sense of group difference.

Violence

Almost all oppressed groups suffer systematic violence simply because they are members of a subordinate group. Violence includes not only physical attack, but harassment, ridicule, or intimidation, which serves the purpose of stigmatizing group members. The oppression of violence lies not only in direct victimization, but in the constant fear that violence may occur, solely on the basis of one's group identity.

Women have reason to fear rape; people of colour have reason to fear harassment; gay men and lesbians have reason to fear unprovoked assaults; striking workers have reason to fear attacks by police or strikebreakers. Violence is structural when it is tolerated, accepted, or found unsurprising by the dominant group, or when perpetrators receive light or no punishment. Violence is a social practice when people from the dominant group seek out people from oppressed groups to beat up, rape, or harass. To reform institutions and social practices that encourage, tolerate, or enable violence against members of specific groups will require a change in cultural images, stereotypes, and the day-to-day reproduction of dominance and aversion.

The above summary of Young's (1990) five faces of oppression avoids the problems associated with both the unified and the pluralistic accounts of oppression. The former tends either to leave out groups that even the theorist thinks oppressed or to ignore important ways in which groups are oppressed. The latter fails to accommodate the similarities and overlaps in the oppression of different groups, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, falsely represents the situation of all group members as the same.

Young's framework avoids the above reductions and exclusions. Rather than a full theory of oppression, the five forms of oppression function as objective criteria for determining whether or not individuals and groups are oppressed. Each criterion can be operationalized and applied through the assessment of observable behaviour, status relationships, distributions, texts, and culture. Although the presence of any one of these five conditions is sufficient for calling a group oppressed, different oppressed groups exhibit different combinations of them, as do different individuals within these groups. Comparisons can be made of the ways a particular form of oppression occurs in different groups, or of the combinations of oppression that groups experience. Obviously, this framework has significant potential for helping social workers understand better the oppression of people with whom they work in their professional practice.

OPPRESSION AS STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

The term 'social or structural inequality' is part of an academic and professional discourse that reduces its political charge and impact by 'covering over' the structural violence experienced by members of subordinate groups all over the world. Furthermore, by not including the violent consequences and correlates of social inequality in its discourse and practice, the profession of social work is, in effect, an agent (perhaps unwitting) in limiting healthy and productive living and in contributing to premature rates of death. Structural social workers and anti-oppressive social workers view social inequality as more than notions of deprivation, disadvantage, and redistribution. It is part of a socially sanctioned process whereby people are hurt, maimed, and killed in ways that are unseen and unpunished.

As mentioned above, the recent literature on anti-oppressive social work presents oppression as occurring at three levels—personal, cultural, and institutional or structural (Mullaly, 2002; Thompson, 1998, 2001). Oppression at the structural level refers to the

means by which oppression is institutionalized in society. It consists of the ways that our social structures (i.e., social institutions, laws, public policies, social processes and practices) all work together primarily in favour of the dominant group at the expense of subordinate groups. Structural oppression may be overt and visible, such as when the state does not recognize gay and lesbian marriages or does not allow these persons to have other family rights (e.g., inheritance, pension benefits, right to visit a partner in a hospital when only family members are allowed). However, most oppression at the structural level today is covert or hidden. Covert structural oppression occurs when our social institutions, laws, policies, and practices disproportionately allocate goods, services, and opportunities with a positive social value (e.g., good health care, decent housing, a good job) to dominant group members and disproportionately allocate goods, services, and limited opportunities with negative social value (e.g., inadequate housing, incarceration, poor health care) to members of subordinate groups. Some of the ways that this inequitable distribution occurs will be looked at below.

Covert oppression at the structural level is a powerful force in maintaining group-based hierarchies. First, it appears to contradict the spirit and intention of the civil and human rights legislation and the principles of liberty and equality that have been developed over the past hundred years to prohibit institutional discrimination and to extend citizenship status to previously excluded groups. Second, its hidden nature results in many dominant and subordinate group members not recognizing it, which may result in subordinate group members blaming themselves for their own oppression (i.e., internalizing their oppression). Even if recognized, its hidden and subtle nature makes it very difficult for subordinate groups to employ collective action to bring it to an end. The belief that modern Western democracies are largely free from discrimination and oppression at the structural level is not only held by the lay public, but is widespread among political commentators, public intellectuals, and a number of scholars (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). However, the evidence overwhelmingly contradicts this belief. Rather than social equality and equal opportunity, widespread institutional or structural oppression affects all the major areas of an individual's life—employment, housing, health, education, financial opportunities, and treatment by the criminal justice system. Structural oppression constitutes a total environment or what Sidanius and Pratto (1999: 129) call a 'circle of oppression'.

The term 'social inequality' is widely used by social work and social policy personnel to refer to a differential or inequitable distribution of goods, services, and opportunities whereby members of dominant groups enjoy satisfactory levels of living while members of subordinate groups live in states of deprivation. As mentioned above, one of the traditional tasks of the social welfare state and social work has been to attempt to reallocate or redistribute goods and services to members of subordinate groups so as to reduce deprivation and disadvantage. This activity, sometimes referred to as distributive or redistributive justice, does nothing about the social, economic, and political processes and practices that disproportionately allocate goods, services, and opportunities in the first place. Furthermore, by focusing on the reduction of deprivation and disadvantage as the goal, we tend to overlook or not even recognize the fact that the deprivation and disadvantage,

which
premat

Th
beyond
trist an
is a for
interfer
living; a
it with
an indi
another

Vic
involve
The per
violenc
more co
instituti
ties ofte
living. 'S
leads to
or influ

Thu
structur
or no ho
ished, a
country,
resource
along wi

Discrim

- A
- b
- n
- H
- ir
- a
- P
- si
- P
- h
- a

which are associated with social inequality, lead to higher rates of morbidity and to premature death for countless numbers of subordinated people all over the world.

The social inequalities that occur because of oppression at the structural level go beyond an inequitable distribution of society's resources. The African-American psychiatrist and scholar, Hussein Bulhan (1985), argues, for example, that structural oppression is a form of violence because it negatively affects human growth and development; it interferes with the inherent potential of individuals; it limits productive and healthy living; and it brings about premature death. Bulhan's (p. 135) definition of violence links it with structural oppression: 'Violence is any relation, process, or condition by which an individual or a group violates the physical, social, and/or psychological integrity of another person or group.'

Violence at the personal level is relatively easy to detect and control as it usually involves direct action in which the act of violence and its consequences are observable. The perpetrator and the victim are normally distinguishable, and the purpose of the violence can be verified and its effects can be assessed. Structural violence is a much more complex and higher-order phenomenon. It is a feature of social structures and social institutions. The social processes, relations, and practices associated with social inequities often span generations. They are deeply ingrained in people and dominate everyday living. 'Structural violence involves more than the violation of fairness and justice. . . . [it] leads to hidden but lethal inequities, which can lead to the death of those who lack power or influence in the society' (Bulhan, 1985: 136).

Thus, rather than a quick death by state execution or a personal act of lethal violence, structural oppression in the form of such inequities as inadequate income, substandard or no housing, unemployment, and lack of health care leads to a slow, agonizing, unpunished, and premature death for countless numbers of subordinated people all over the country, not to say world, on a daily basis. To understand this better we can look at how resources and opportunities are distributed inequitably in six areas of everyday living, along with the resultant violent consequences of these social inequities.²

Discrimination in the Housing Market

- Although most Western nations have housing legislation and programs, broad-based covert and systematic discrimination still relegates many subordinate group members to areas that are impoverished, under-serviced, and dangerous.
- Housing discrimination is found at each stage of the housing search, from initial information concerning availability, to efforts made to conclude transactions, to the availability of financing, and to the final location of housing.
- People of colour were given much less information from agents on available units for sale.
- People of colour did not receive the same level of positive comments on prospective homes from agents or were not offered the same special incentives to take a rented apartment as were given to white persons.

- People of colour were more likely to be asked to call the agent back than have the transaction pursued immediately.
- People of colour were more likely to be directed to an area (low income, greater minority populations, substandard schools, higher crime rates) other than the one originally requested.
- The same treatment as above has been experienced by single mothers and young people looking for housing.

Discrimination in the Retail Market

- Retail outlets located in neighbourhoods occupied by subordinate groups charged higher prices for the same goods as stores located in neighbourhoods occupied by dominant groups.
- For goods that have negotiations attached to them in terms of prices (e.g., cars), people of colour pay more than white people and women pay more than men for the same goods even when the location of the retail outlet is controlled.
- People of colour regularly experience targeted surveillance in retail outlets (e.g., being followed by security persons).
- Subordinate group members receive more instances of rude and disrespectful treatment from retail outlet personnel.

Discrimination in the Labour Market

- Work is a major determinant of one's perceived worth, social position, and general well-being. By allocating various kinds of jobs to different social groups, societies produce and maintain group-based social dominance and privilege.
- There is widespread discrimination against women, people of colour, non-European ethnicities, non-Christian religions, poor persons, and other subordinate groups in all Western countries.
- Subordinate group members are last hired and first fired, receive less pay, have fewer opportunities for on-the-job training, and have less chance for promotion.
- The level of market discrimination is greater:
 - for jobs requiring more rather than less contact with people;
 - in the private sector over the public sector;
 - for jobs requiring fewer qualifications;
 - when for-profit employment agencies are used;
 - in jobs that are narrowly rather than widely advertised;
 - during times of economic recessions.
- Although most job discrimination is covert, a significant number of businesses discriminate overtly.
- Social policies that address problems of discrimination in the labour market, such as affirmative action and employment equity, are the very policies that are most

Disfiguring medical procedures (castrations, amputations) were higher among black people than white people.

2. *Differential dissemination of health-care information.* Controlling for all other factors, it was found that black women were given less prenatal information than white women on smoking cessation and alcohol use.
3. *Discriminatory physiological effects.* Studies show that the psychological experiences of racial discrimination contribute to the negative health status of subordinate groups (i.e., high blood pressure and other stress-related illnesses).

Interestingly, one study (Krieger and Sidney, 1996) reported lower blood pressure among black persons who would challenge racial discrimination than among those who accepted what they regarded as unfair discrimination. This finding supports Frantz Fanon's (1963) thesis that resistance to oppression has positive physical and psychological effects on oppressed persons. This is an important piece of information for developing an anti-oppressive social work practice.

Discrimination in the Criminal Justice System

- There is a substantial over-representation of subordinate group members within the criminal justice system (e.g., indigenous Australians are imprisoned at a rate of more than 15 times that of non-indigenous Australians, African Americans are incarcerated at a rate of 6.8 times that of white Americans, and Aboriginal people in Canada experience an incarceration rate three times higher than that for non-Aboriginal Canadians, though these rates are considerably higher in the western provinces) (Dickason, 2006: 271).
- Controlling for all legally relevant variables (e.g., type and seriousness of crime, criminal record), subordinate groups have a higher likelihood of: being arrested, having more serious charges laid against them, having higher amounts of bail, being more likely to be convicted, having a more severe sentence imposed, and having less likelihood of probation or early parole.
- A Canadian study found that prison guards are more likely to subject black prisoners to harsh treatment, especially when a considerable degree of interpretational discretion is allowed (Cole and Gittens, 1995).
- One American study looked at police violence across the Americas and found that police brutality against subordinate group members often results in institutional rewards rather than in punishment (Chevigny, 1995, cited in Sidanius and Pratto, 1999).
- Crimes committed by subordinate group members against dominant group members were more severely punished than those committed by the latter against the former.

In Canada, as with all countries with an Aboriginal population, Aboriginal people, by all indicators, experience the highest levels of social inequality and, therefore, suffer

most from structural violence, as shown below:

- Nearly half (47.2 per cent) of First Nations families live below the poverty line (Oberle, 1993).
- The average life expectancy of Aboriginal people is 10 years less than that for Euro-Canadians (Health and Welfare Canada, 1991a).
- Twenty per cent of First Nations children are removed from their families by child welfare authorities (Clarke, 1991).
- The infant mortality rate is double the national average (Health Canada, 1994).
- Suicide rates for adolescent girls is seven times the national rate and four times higher for male adolescents (*ibid.*).
- Incarceration rates and alcohol and drug abuse are much higher than in the general population (Health and Welfare Canada, 1992).
- Family violence is disproportionately high among Aboriginal families (Chappell, 1997).

Among other subordinate groups experiencing oppression and structural violence are older Canadians. For these people, poverty, loneliness, and a sense of uselessness contribute to Alzheimer's and related dementias (Health and Welfare Canada, 1991b), very high suicide rates (Health Canada, 1994), and abuse of prescription drugs (Health Canada, 1989). Canadian women experience violence (Statistics Canada, 1993), poverty (National Council of Welfare, 1996), and workplace discrimination with respect to wages, occupational segregation, training, and pensions (Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women, 1990).

An examination of the living situation of almost any subordinate group anywhere in the world is likely to show it experiencing oppression in all or most of the above areas. That is, subordinate groups will, for the most part, suffer directly from lack of adequate employment, low income and poverty, inadequate housing, discrimination in the retail market, lack of educational opportunities, inferior health care, and over-representation within the criminal justice system. These inequities constitute structural violence in that people who experience them consequently suffer from disproportionate levels and incidences of stress, anguish, frustration, alienation, and exclusion, and these factors result in differential rates of mortality (i.e., lowered life expectancies), morbidity, incarceration, homicide, suicide, and infant mortality. There can be no doubt, as Bulhan (1985) argues, and as did Fanon (1968) before him, that oppression at the structural level leads to violence at the intrapersonal level (e.g., suicide and self-mutilation), at the interpersonal level (e.g., homicide and domestic violence), and at the institutional level (premature death because of social inequalities). What makes this type of violence so insidious is the fact that no recognized perpetrator or intention is normally identified as responsible for the violence. Commenting on structural violence elsewhere (Mullaly, 2002: 121), I concluded that:

structural inequalities often have violent effects or outcomes. Terms such as 'social inequality' and 'structural inequality' tend to cover up the violent outcomes that many

people from subordinate groups experience. Structural inequalities are much more than one person or one group having a greater quantity of or more access to social goods, rights, and opportunities. They are more than violations of philosophical notions of fairness, equity, and justice. Structural inequalities are socially sanctioned forms of physical and psychological violence, which over time will lead to hurtful discrimination and slow, agonizing, premature, and unpunished death. The term 'structural violence', I contend, more accurately reflects the realities of oppressed persons. 'Structural inequality' is a somewhat abstract, technical, bourgeois, and polite term that covers up its violent outcomes. We should call it what it is—*socially sanctioned structural violence*.

RESPONSES OF OPPRESSED PEOPLE TO THEIR OPPRESSION

There are two major sets of responses that oppressed people may make with respect to the oppression they experience: (1) accommodation and compliance through a process of inferiorization; or (2) rejection through a process of collective resistance and a politics of difference (Adam, 1978; Young, 1990). Both sets of responses are discussed below.

Inferiorization

Members of oppressed groups are defined in ways by the dominant group that often devalue, objectify, and stereotype them as different, deviant, or inferior. Their own experiences and interpretation of social life find little expression that touches the dominant culture (Young, 1990). Because they find themselves reflected in literature, the media, formalized education, and so forth either not at all or in a highly distorted fashion, they suffer an impoverished identity (Adam, 1978). The paradox of this situation for oppressed populations is that at the same time they are rendered invisible by the dominant group they are also marked as different.

This lack of a strong self-identity will, in many cases, lead to an internalization of the dominant group's stereotyped and inferiorized images of subordinate populations (Young, 1990). This internalized oppression, in turn, will cause some oppressed people to act in ways that affirm the dominant group's view of them as inferior and, consequently, will lead to a process of inferiorized persons reproducing their own oppression. Through a process of cultural and ideological hegemony many oppressed people believe that if they cannot make it in our society, if they are experiencing problems, then it is their own fault because they are unable to take advantage of the opportunities the dominant group says are available to everyone. It is, as Paulo Freire (1970) said, as if the oppressor gets into the head of the oppressed. People understand their own interests in ways that reflect the interests of the dominant group.

When people internalize their oppression, blaming themselves for their troubled circumstances, they will often contribute to their own oppression by considering it as unique, unchangeable, deserved, or temporary (Adam, 1978), or else blame other

significant people in their lives such as parents or family. Oppressed persons often contribute to their own oppression, also, by psychologically or socially withdrawing or engaging in other self-destructive behaviours, which causes them to be rejected by others. This, in turn, confirms the low image they may have of themselves (Moreau and Leonard, 1989). The radical psychiatric movement considers all alienation to be the result of oppression about which the oppressed have been mystified or deceived. That is, the oppressed person is led to believe that he or she is not oppressed or that there are good reasons for his or her oppression (Agel, 1971).

Paulo Freire (1970) discusses several stances oppressed people may adopt that either reinforce or contribute to their own oppression. Fatalism may be expressed by the oppressed about their situation—'There is nothing I can do about it' or 'It is God's will' are common expressions of fatalism. However, this fatalistic attitude is often interpreted as docility or apathy by the oppressor, which reinforces the view of the oppressed as lazy, inferior, and getting all that they deserve. Horizontal violence often occurs among oppressed people whereby an Aboriginal, for example, may strike out at another Native person for petty reasons (which again reinforces the negative images held by the dominant class of subordinate groups). Self-deprecation also occurs when a group hears so often that they are good for nothing that in the end they become convinced of their own unfitness. Moreau and Leonard (1989) and Adam (1978) call this process inferiorization. Another characteristic of some oppressed persons is that they feel an irresistible attraction towards the oppressor and his or her way of life. This affirms, of course, the belief that oppression is legitimate and that it is more desirable to oppress than to be oppressed.

It must be noted that such responses are not irrational on the part of those oppressed persons who use them. Although they may appear to be peculiar, unnatural, or neurotic, they are actually rational coping mechanisms employed in everyday life to lessen the suffering of oppression—despite the fact that they are ineffective because they function to sustain domination. Adam (1978) identified seven such responses.

1. *Mimesis*. One response to oppression is for a member of a particular oppressed group to mimic or imitate the behaviours and attitudes the dominant group displays towards that group in an attempt to gain a slightly more privileged status. Some examples are: often the harshest critics of the non-working poor are the working poor (who repeat all the punitive and moralistic accusations held by the dominant group), even though both groups suffer the oppression associated with poverty; an organized women's group called REAL Women of Canada has been unrelenting in its attack on what it sees as the efforts of the feminist movement to diminish the importance of the family as the bedrock of society; 'Uncle Tom' black persons historically have been given positions of authority over other black persons and then treat their subordinates as inferiors rather than as compatriots.

Each oppressed group has a small class of converts and apologists who assist the dominant group in the preservation of the status quo by conforming to the values of their 'masters'. Impressed with the small privileges that go with their 'borrowed status', they savour them and will often defend them with fear and harshness. Often the converts will,

over time, identify more with the dominant group than with their own community, thus presenting the community with a chronic threat.

2. *Escape from identity.* To avoid or ease the burdens of oppression some inferiorized persons will attempt to escape from the 'composite portrait' (with its accompanying range of social penalties) used by the dominant group to define their particular place in society. Although it may be regarded as neurotic behaviour in that one cannot escape from what one is, to the person attempting to flee from his or her identity, this escape is an attempt to move into another social category—one with fewer social penalties attached to it. However, escaping one's identity personalizes failures on the part of the person who rejects by recognizing or denying that one is a member of a subordinate group. Examples are: Jews who converted to Christianity solely to escape their primary identity (e.g., in Nazi Germany and during the times when immigration policies of some countries such as Canada during and after World War II discriminated against Jews); gay and lesbian persons who enter into heterosexual marriages to be socially accepted; people of one colour or ethnicity who 'pass' as being members of the dominant group or of the subgroup to which they belong socially/occupationally.

Escape from identity, like other inferiorized responses to oppression, functions as a false consciousness that subordinates the person to the rationality of oppression. As well, it successfully isolates the person from others who share the same form of oppression. This false consciousness and the atomization of oppressed people serve to maintain the status quo with respect to dominant-subordinate relations in society.

3. *Psychological withdrawal.* Oppressed persons may adopt a cautious, low-profile conservatism as a way of decreasing their visibility (and social penalties) and compensating for a disfavoured identity. Overly visible behaviour by fellow members is strongly condemned as it gives the rest a bad name (e.g., the 'loudmouthed' black, the 'pushy' Jew, or the 'swish' homosexual). An effort to reduce the hazards of a high-risk environment outweighs active resistance. This coping effort is often manifest in psychological responses such as passivity, lethargy, and submission. Afro-Americans during the period of slavery and Jews in Nazi concentration camps often exhibited these psychological characteristics. Obviously, psychological withdrawal fails to confront the oppressive order.

4. *Guilt-expiation rituals.* Sacrifice is classically conceived as the destruction of a victim for purposes of maintaining or correcting a relationship with the 'sacred' order. Some oppressed persons will see the dominant order as sacred and immutable, and to atone for the guilt of not being able to become full-fledged members they will engage in certain conscious or unwitting guilt-expiation rituals. These rituals become manifest in certain self-mutilating alterations, such as black people straightening their hair and lightening their skin; gay men acquiescing to aversive therapy such as extended electroshock treatment to atone for their imputed transgressions; and the ultimate self-sacrifice by suicide of Aboriginal persons and others as a guilt-ridden response to oppression.

5. *Magical ideologies.* Some oppressed people will see their situation with respect to the dominant group as so immutable that they will appeal to 'divine' ways out of their

oppressed condition, such as fantasies that may lead to neuroses, astrology, superstition, messianism, and even gambling. The appeal is made to someone or something else full of power and authority to fix what is wrong. Internal blinders shield the person from confronting the real menace causing his or her inferiorized situation and lead the person on a search for a magical solution.

6. *In-group hostility.* Hierarchies provide a self-perpetuating dynamic that allows the dominated to console themselves through a comparison with yet more degraded people. It constructs what Adam (1978) calls a 'poor person's snobbery' that sets up a superior-inferior relationship among persons in oppressed groups similar to that between dominant and subordinate groups. It can occur on an intergroup basis, as in the case of white, working-class members oppressing black people, or within an oppressed group, such as closet gay people ridiculing homosexuals or light-skinned black people treating their darker-skinned compatriots with disdain. In this way the dynamics of oppression are reproduced by dominated groups themselves.

7. *Social withdrawal.* Social withdrawal is a coping strategy in which the oppressed person externalizes identity conflict into the immediate social environment. The oppressed person will develop repertoires of behaviours for different audiences. That is, he or she will behave in one way when in contact with the dominant group (usually assuming a low profile to escape attention) and in another way when in contact with the subordinated community (in a way that affirms with others his/her true identity). Social withdrawal does not challenge or negate the dominant view of the oppressed group, as it is a means to placate the powerful other. For example, black parents will often advise their children to avoid (withdraw from) confrontation with the dominant white society as a means of coping with harassment. In effect, this behaviour contributes to a strategy of invisibility, but also supports the dominant view that black people are by nature servile and passive.

The other side of social withdrawal is that it permits the first move towards reconciliation with identical others. As oppressed individuals withdraw from the dominant group by acts of compliance and communicate with other members of their subordinated community, they may discover their identity with them. That is, they become acquainted with their identity as defined by their own group, as opposed to the identity that has been defined and imposed on them by the dominant group. A dialectical movement towards integration occurs as community members discover each other and, in the process, discover themselves. Although the discovery of self and community requires some degree of social withdrawal from an inhospitable social environment controlled by the dominant group, the danger is that it may lead to a ghettoization, which, though seeming safe from the dominant group, probably is also stifling and confining for the oppressed. The ghetto or haven is a response to oppression and potentially a first assertion of community. It has the potential for developing true identity, a sense of community and solidarity. Confidence within oppressed groups can grow so that members are able to 'come out' and assert their authentic identity and differences in ways that contravene the prevailing rationality of the dominant group.

EMANCIPATION OF OPPRESSED GROUPS: ASSIMILATION, MULTICULTURALISM, AND A POLITICS OF DIFFERENCE

In contrast to the above inferiorized coping mechanisms that comply with or accommodate oppression, three emancipatory sets of politics attempt to overcome oppression: assimilation through a politics of integration; multiculturalism through a politics of cultural pluralism; and collective resistance through a politics of difference. Assimilationism would render equal social status to everyone according to the same principles, rules, and standards, while a politics of difference would sometimes require different treatment for oppressed groups (Young, 1990). The former has been the traditional approach of social work, as evidenced by its emphasis on 'impartiality', whereas the latter is more consistent with structural social work's emphasis on democratic cultural pluralism.

Assimilation

Wasserton (1980, cited in Young, 1990) outlines three reasons for choosing the assimilationist ideal of liberation. First, by imagining a society in which class, race, gender, and so forth have no special social significance, one sees more clearly how these categories unnecessarily limit possibilities in our existing society for some people. Second, a clear and unambiguous standard of equality and justice for all is promised, and any group-related differentiation or discrimination would be suspect. That is, any social benefits distributed differently according to group membership would be viewed as unjust. Third, the assimilationist ideal eliminates the situation of group differences resulting in social differences. Thus, people would be free to develop themselves as individuals. In sum, assimilationism promises a 'deal'. The identities, cultures, and values of oppressed groups are to be surrendered for the promise or opportunity of improved life chances. Submission to the social rules of the superordinate group supposedly mitigates the barriers confining subordinate groups (Adam, 1978).

Some writers, such as Young (1990) and Adam (1978), have criticized assimilation as a goal of liberation politics. Today in North American society, and in many other societies, there is widespread agreement that no person should be excluded from political, economic, or social activities because of ascribed characteristics. However, group differences continue to exist, and certain groups continue to be advantaged. Although some persons from disadvantaged groups have succeeded in improving their overall life chances, the general scheme of allocating privilege and resources has remained unchanged (Adam, 1978).

Young (1990) outlines three ways that assimilationism, by ignoring group differences, has oppressive consequences. First, assimilationism entails bringing formerly excluded groups into the mainstream, but this means coming into the game after the rules and standards have already been set and having to prove oneself according to these rules and standards. The privileged group, of course, defines the standards against which all will be

measured, and because their privilege involves not recognizing these standards as culturally and experientially specific, they are perceived to be the ideal of a common, universal, and neutral humanity in which all can participate regardless of race, class, gender, and so on. Because the standards are in fact group-specific to the dominant class, they put subordinate groups at a disadvantage in trying to measure up to them, and for that reason assimilationist policies perpetuate their disadvantage.

Second, the notion of a universal humanity devoid of group differences allows dominant groups to overlook or not recognize their own group specificity. The assimilationist's blindness to difference perpetuates cultural imperialism because the subordinate groups are the ones that must drop their culture and adopt the dominant culture, which is assumed as a common, universal humanity.

Third, assimilationism often produces an internalized devaluation by members of subordinate groups. Assimilationist participation means to accept an identity other than one's perceived own and to be reminded by others and by oneself of one's other identity. As a result, children of non-English speaking groups may become ashamed of the accents of their parents, women control their tendency to cry, and gay and lesbian couples avoid displaying affection to each other in public.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism as a concept and as a public policy issue dates back to the 1970s in most Western industrialized countries. Although there have been many progressive activists and supporters of multiculturalism, Agger (1998) contends that the concept of multiculturalism has been appropriated to some extent by some schools of postmodernism and that, consequently, a change in meaning has occurred. Basically, Agger argues that multiculturalism is a recognition and acceptance of cultural pluralism, but it does nothing to change the situation of there being one dominant culture with all others subordinate to it. This situation violates the position of earlier multicultural activists that there not be a hierarchy of cultures (this position has now been adopted in the 'politics of difference' approach as outlined below). Multiculturalists today will acknowledge and accept cultural pluralism and will often equate multiculturalism with annual ethnic celebrations. Although many self-proclaimed advocates of multiculturalism may enjoy these annual exotic festivities, some of these same people will show little interest in or knowledge of the struggles, blocked opportunities, and second-class citizenship that members of these subordinated cultures experience on a daily basis (Mullaly, 2002).

The dominant theory of multicultural social work in Canada, the US, and Australia is that of cultural sensitivity. The aim of this theory is to increase worker and agency awareness of and sensitivity to different cultural norms and to reduce (but not eliminate) institutional racism. Cultural sensitivity enables white social workers to better establish a 'helping relationship' with members of other races and cultures to make services more accessible and to advocate for the enactment of equal rights legislation. Although the cultural sensitivity model represents an advance over the colour-blind and assimilationist (melting-pot)

approach to issues of race and culture, it can actually, without intending it, allow racism to persist, but in a more 'respectable' form (Ahmad, 1991; Thompson, 1997). The cultural sensitivity model ignores the fact that cultures and races are ranked in order of perceived merit and it ignores the power relations in Western society between people of colour and white people, both historically and in the present (Ahmad, 1991; Williams, 1989).

The Politics of Difference

As an alternative to assimilation and multiculturalism, Adam (1978) argues for collective resistance to assimilation and/or to an acceptance of a dominant culture on the part of subordinated groups. He emphasizes the importance of community for developing self-identity, solidarity, and resistance to domination. Communication among members of a subordinate group over time engenders social networks and language that nurture collectivization and a new understanding of their life situation—one defined by the group itself.

Shared experiences identify effective strategies for coping with social limitations, methods of survival and self-betterment, sources of freedom and joy. Brotherhood or sisterhood is not the simple correlate of, for example, physical resemblances; it is the mutual creation . . . of each member by the other. (Adam, 1978: 122)

Young (1990) elaborates on this notion of community by calling for a 'politics of difference' as the means of overcoming oppression. Rather than attempting to transcend group differences as the assimilationist approach would do or simply to accept them as the multicultural approach would do, the politics of difference seeks equality among all socially and culturally differentiated groups, where mutual respect and affirmation of one another in their differences would occur. Group differences are considered positive and desirable rather than a liability or disadvantage or simply a fact. The positivity of group difference is liberating and empowering in that the identity the dominant group has taught them to despise would be reclaimed, affirmed, and celebrated. This positive view of one's specific culture and experience makes it increasingly difficult for the dominant group to parade its values and norms as universal and neutral.

The politics of group difference also promotes a notion of group solidarity against the individualism of liberal humanism. It is recognized that a positive view of one's specific group requires separate organizations that exclude others. This does not eliminate the need for coalitions among groups or the need for oppressed groups to combat other types of oppression (e.g., white people against racism or men against sexism), but it is a recognition that group autonomy is an important vehicle for empowerment and the development of a group-specific voice and perspective (Young, 1990).

Young notes that many fear that asserting group differences will lead to a justification of subordination. However, she contends that a politics of difference confronts this fear because it presents group difference not as essential, other, or exclusively opposed, but as ambiguous, relational, and shifting, marked by specificity and variation. In this way

group differences are conceived as relational rather than defined by substantive categories and attributes (Minow, 1985, 1987, 1990, cited in Young, 1990). A relational view of difference does not focus on the attributes of groups as the measure of difference, but on the interaction of groups with institutions (Littleton, 1987, cited in Young, 1990).

In this relational view, the meaning of difference becomes contextualized (Scott, 1988, cited in Young, 1990). Group differences are conspicuous, depending on the groups compared, the purposes of the comparison, and the point of view of those making the comparison. Such contextualized understandings of difference undermine essentialist assumptions. Young (1990) provides the following example to underscore this point. Wheelchair-bound persons are different from other people in terms of athletics, health care, and social service support, but they are not different in many other respects. At one time disabled persons were excluded and segregated from society because the differences between able-bodied and disabled were conceptualized as extending to all or most capacities.

A relational understanding of group difference rejects exclusion. Differences among groups do not mean they are different in all respects. They have overlapping experiences, common goals, and shared attributes. The assumption that oppositional categorization is inherent in group differences must always be challenged. A relational and contextualized understanding of difference also undermines the notion of an essential individual identity. Persons have many different identities as they tend to be members of many affinity groups, not just one. Black persons, for example, may be poor, rich, old, or gay. These differences produce different identities as well as potential conflicts among other blacks and affinities with some whites. Thus, contextualizing the meanings of difference and identity helps us to see the differences that may exist within affinity groups. Oppressed persons are seldom oppressed along one dimension only. As we have seen, they tend to be multiply oppressed. 'In our complex, plural society, every social group has group differences cutting across it, which are potential sources of wisdom, excitement, conflict, and oppression' (Young, 1990: 172-3).

A politics of difference, of course, has serious implications for policy-making. A goal of social justice (and structural social work) is social equality. As discussed previously, social equality not only refers to an equitable distribution of social goods but to full participation of everyone in society's major institutions and to the socially supported opportunity for all to develop and exercise their inherent capacities. Although in Canada, and in many other Western societies, formal legal equality exists for most groups, these societies still are marked by extreme social inequality. Instead of policies that are universally formulated and thus blind to differences of class, race, gender, age, and so forth, a politics of difference would require policies that reflect the specific situations of oppressed groups. 'Groups cannot be socially equal unless their specific experience, culture, and social contributions are publicly affirmed and recognized' (Young, 1990: 174).

A politics of difference would require a dual system of rights: a general system of rights for all, and a more specific system of group-conscious rights and policies (Young, 1990). We already have a precedent for such a system in the form of civil, political, and

human rights for all citizens, along with some affirmative action and employment equity programs for some groups who have historically been disadvantaged in our society. To extend this dual system of rights to the point that there would be effective recognition and representation of the voices and perspectives of oppressed groups (as opposed to interest groups), Young proposes the implementation of institutional mechanisms and public resources supporting: (1) the self-organization of subordinate groups whereby group members could achieve collective empowerment and a reflective understanding of their collective experiences and interests in the context of society; (2) group analysis and generation of policy proposals in institutionalized settings where decision-makers are obliged to demonstrate that their deliberations have taken relevant group perspectives into consideration; and (3) group veto power regarding specific policies and decisions that affect a group directly, such as land use for Aboriginal communities or reproductive rights for women.

STRUCTURAL SOCIAL WORK WITH OPPRESSED GROUPS

An understanding of oppression has several major implications for structural social workers. First, recognizing the limitations of a distributional model of justice is important because this helps in avoiding the pursuit of a more equitable distribution of goods and services without attending to (and thereby reifying) the institutional rules and the social processes and practices that caused the maldistribution in the first place. The goal of structural social work is not simply to compensate and care for victims of oppression. It is to transform the entire constellation of oppressive rules, processes, and practices. Only a theory of social justice that has oppression as its central concern can accommodate this goal.

Second, an understanding of how oppression and its dominant-subordinate relations have been socially constructed is important if social work is to avoid notions and practices of 'blaming the victims'. Only by knowing that oppression is a social construction can social work embark on a deconstruction of oppressive practices and a reconstruction of society characterized by true social equality.

Third, only an understanding of oppression as a systemic situation that is produced and reproduced in everyday social processes and practices—and an awareness that oppression carries out several important social functions for the dominant group—will lead to structural solutions. Otherwise, social work will continue to treat oppression as a technical problem (e.g., as a lack of 'goodness of fit' between the individual and society) amenable to technical solutions rather than as the moral and political (i.e., structural) problem that it is.

Fourth, an understanding of the various forms of oppression allows structural social workers to make more sense of the situation of oppression of those they serve. All forms of oppression are not the same and will, therefore, require attuned responses and actions. This knowledge will also enable the social worker to engage in a more meaningful way in consciousness-raising and normalization activities with oppressed persons.

Fifth, at a micro level of social work practice, an understanding of personal or individual oppression and the various types of internalized oppression will enable the structural social worker to better understand how oppressed persons may be experiencing and coping with their situation of oppression. Through dialogue, this knowledge will assist the worker in sorting out with members of subordinate groups helpful and counterproductive responses to their oppression.

Sixth, at the macro level of social work practice, an understanding of the politics of difference will help the structural social worker to encourage and support group-specific organizations and groups or the establishment of new ones. These are important mechanisms for oppressed people discovering themselves, reclaiming their identity, creating community and solidarity, and developing a group-specific voice and perspective. The politics of difference will also encourage structural social workers to advocate for policies and decision-making mechanisms that give full recognition and representation to the voices of oppressed groups.

These, then, are some implications that a theory of justice, based on a politics of difference and having oppression as its central concern, would hold for structural social work. They may be viewed as the 'what is to be done' aspect of combatting oppression. The elements of 'how to do it' are the subjects of the following two chapters.

CONCLUSION

This chapter looked at the concept of oppression along a number of dimensions. Oppression was described as a type of second-class citizenship that is assigned to people, not on the basis of lack of merit or failure, but because of their membership in a particular group or category of people. Oppression exists and persists because of the number of positive functions it carries out for the dominant group at the expense of subordinate groups. A number of myths that help to rationalize and perpetuate oppression were presented. It was argued that the (re)distributional model of justice that has historically underpinned the modern social welfare state and social work practice only compensates victims of oppression and does nothing to alter the causes of inequality. Furthermore, it was argued that structural inequality goes beyond a simple notion of an inequitable distribution of society's resources because social inequalities lead to higher rates of morbidity and to slow, agonizing, premature, and unpunished death for countless numbers of subordinate persons all over the world on a daily basis.

Although there are different forms, sources, levels of severity, and experiences associated with oppression, a common set of dynamics is engaged between dominant and subordinate groups. Iris Marion Young's five categories of oppression, of which all oppressed groups experience at least one, were presented. This categorization is adopted here because it includes both distributive issues of social justice and social practices that go beyond distribution. A model of oppression that located oppression at three levels—personal, cultural, and structural or institutional—was outlined. The multiple nature and persistence of oppression were discussed and two sets of responses (acceptance and

resistance) to oppression by subordinate groups were outlined. Finally, some implications of adopting oppression as the major explanation for social problems for structural social workers were presented.

CRITICAL QUESTIONS

1. Studies have shown that members of dominant groups are often unaware of their many privileges and take them for granted. Furthermore, the studies show that members of subordinate groups tend to be more aware of the privileges that members of dominant groups enjoy. Why is this? What are the implications of this for social workers, who are usually members of dominant groups working with members of subordinate groups?
2. Identify those characteristics of yourself that make you a member of dominant groups (e.g., class, gender, race, age, religion, sexuality, ableness, etc.). Make a list of privileges that you have in society that are associated with each of your dominant group characteristics.
3. Compare your lists of privileges with the lists compiled by those in your class who are not part of the dominant groups of which you are a member. In other words, if you are a male, how does your list of privileges compare to the lists that were compiled by the female members of your class? Similarly, if you are white, how does your list of privileges compare to the lists compiled by the non-white members of your class?
4. Take any source or form of oppression, such as poverty, racism, sexism, homophobia, or ageism, and identify some of the ways it is carried out at the personal, cultural, and structural levels. What would a structural social worker do with this information in his or her social work practice?
5. A single, poor, black mother of three small children is experiencing problems in several areas of her life. She is often turned down by employers for jobs in which she is qualified. She has difficulty finding (being accepted by landlords) decent housing for her family. She often receives derogatory treatment from store clerks, her children's teachers, hospital/medical personnel, employees delivering public services, and others with whom she interacts as a consumer or customer. Is there one subordinate characteristic (single parent, race, class, gender) that is most responsible for the degrading and insulting treatment that she receives on a daily basis?
6. Does the composition of the profession of social work in Canada reflect the diversity of the country's population? Should it? Why or why not?