

Chapter

5

Dynamics of Oppression and Discrimination

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Oppression will be analyzed as a by-product of socially constructed notions of power, privilege, control, and hierarchies of difference. Each notion is explicit in the institutional arrangements of racism, sexism, ethnocentrism, ableism, heterocentrism, classism, xenophobia, and religious bigotry. Oppression will be defined, and its common elements of institutional power, economic control, violence and invisibility, and distortion will be discussed. Diversity will be analyzed from the perspective of assimilation, melting pot, and multicultural theories. Stigma and stigma management will be discussed as the result of discrimination based on social stratification, prejudice, and stereotyping of social constructed characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, and social class.

This discussion will become the foundation for our investigation of social psychological theories related to individual and group identity development, which, in turn, will help to explain the differences in individual and group attitudes, values, and behaviors. Identity development will help clarify variations in intergroup mobility, resiliency, and conflict, as well as bridge our understanding of such core ideas as hierarchies of oppression, oppressed and oppressor roles, internalized oppression, resistance to oppression, and, finally, multiple oppressions.

These ideas will be integrated into the person-in-environment (PIE) system presented throughout the text. Specifically, some of the macro, or sociological/anthropological, processes will help you formulate an appropriate assessment based on Factor II (Environmental Problems), while the micro, or social psychological, processes will add to assessment skills related to Factor I (Problems in Social Role Functioning).

Oppression and Power

A primary construction in Western cultural thought is the belief that the superior should control the inferior. Western religious and philosophical thought is the ideological basis of all forms of oppression in the United States. Interactions based on differential power can be characterized by dominance-subordination or inequality and can be affected by a variety of statuses and roles assigned by society.

In her study of gender inequality, Pellegrini (1992) points out that oppression is all about power: the power to enforce a particular worldview; the power to deny equal access to housing, employment opportunities, and health care; the power alternately to define and/or to efface difference; the power to maim, physically, mentally, and emotionally; and, most importantly, the power to set the very terms of power. Racism, classism, sexism, ableism, and heterosexism together form a system of institutionalized domination. Being oppressed means the absence of choices. Power thus defines the initial point of contact between the oppressed and the oppressor.

Pharr (1988) broadens the analysis of oppression, focusing specifically on lesbian, gay, and bisexual people by pointing out that homophobia is a weapon of sexism. She suggests that the following are elements of all oppression: the imposition of normative behavior supported by institutional and economic power; disincentives for nonconforming, including the threat and use of violence for those who do not conform; social definition as "other"; invisibility of the "outsiders"; distortion and stereotyping; blaming the victim; internalized oppression; and the isolation or assimilation with tokenism of the "outsider." Most gay and lesbian scholars who view power and oppression from a social psychological or sociopolitical framework reference each of these elements of oppression (DeCecco & Shively, 1984; D'Emilio, 1983; Herek & Berrill, 1992; Humphries, 1972).

The discussion of power and oppression reminds the practitioner that social institutions have been developed by the dominant group to meet its needs and to maintain its power. When assessing the problems related to the six environmental systems, the worker must not assume that the client's access and use of these systems is consistent with his or her needs or appreciative of his or her strengths or barriers. As an example, when assessing Economic/Basic Needs System, ethnic foods may be unavailable in the local market or be priced higher than a client's budget allows. The lack of availability of ethnic food may be a barrier to maintaining ethnic practices, such as religious traditions, which may in turn be interpreted as not following one's parental/family duty. The client may experience this socially as isolation or psychologically as shame and alienation. There may be few multifamily homes in the area close to a client's employment, thus making it difficult to maintain a connection with his extended family and arrive at his job on time. The market owner or the employer may discriminate against the client in either scenario because he or she is viewed as less valued and not deserving of consideration or accommodation.

While oppression based on race, or ethnicity, or class, or gender, or age, or sexual orientation, or other social factors is each unique, all groups share life experiences with other oppressed people, in that power or the lack thereof is central to their social reality. Access to power and the individual's place within the social hierarchy of rank and authority are contingent upon the above social factors (Ehrlich, 2009).

The converse of power, powerlessness, is the inability to exert such influence. Cyrus (1997, pp. 156–159) suggests that people who have power under any system find it beneficial to retain that system and to maintain the status quo. The interests and needs of the less powerful groups are not relevant to their goals. In any system, social arrangements operate to marginalize—that is, to confine to the edges of society—and subordinate the less powerful.

This is often accomplished by stereotyping. Others project a set of assumptions and beliefs about the physical, behavioral, and psychological characteristics onto these groups. While stereotypes are a convenient filter and may seem harmless, it is hardly a benign process and provides the basis for prejudice. When prejudice is acted on, it is defined as discrimination, behavior that disadvantages one group in relation to another group and maintains and perpetuates conditions of inequality. "Discrimination includes those policies, procedures, decisions, habits, and acts that overlook, ignore, or subjugate members of certain groups or that enable one group of people to maintain control over another group... Such discrimination creates obstacles and barriers for its targets and provides unfair privileges for its beneficiaries" (p. 159).

New immigrants and Native Americans often find that public schools lack culturally relevant education that supports their community and family norms. Religious holidays are not recognized or taboo subjects are discussed without family consideration.

Powerlessness is painful, and people defend against feeling powerless by doing whatever is necessary to bring them a sense of power. The stereotype of overly aggressive, cynical verbal behavior, commonly associated with many minorities, is an example of trying to redefine the interaction between people with unequal power. It both mocks and rejects the norms of the more powerful and serves to render them outsiders.

Basch (1975, p. 513) states, "The feeling of controlling one's destiny to some reasonable extent is the essential psychological component of all aspects of life." A sense of power is critical to one's mental health. Power is manifest in the individual's sense of mastery or competence. Coping with submission to power is the earliest formative experience, be it in the family, in the group, or in the adaptation to social roles. John Hodge (1975) stresses that families in our society, both traditionally and legally, reflect the dualist values of hierarchy and coercive authoritarian control, exemplified by parent-child and husband-wife relationships. As hooks (1984, p. 36) notes:

It is in this form of the family where most children first learn the meaning and practice of hierarchical, authoritarian rule. Here is where they learn to accept group oppression against themselves as non-adults, and where they learn to accept male supremacy and the group oppression of women. Here is where they learn that it is the male's role to work in the community and control the economic life of the family and to mete out the physical and financial punishments and rewards, and the female's role to provide the emotional warmth associated with motherhood while under the economic rule of the male. Here is where the relationship of superordination subordination, of superior-inferior, or master-slave is first learned and accepted as "natural."

Power and privilege relationships are played out within a complex web of gender role expectation, performance, and violation. The dynamics of sexism provide valuable insights into our understanding of the power relationships implicit in heterosexism. In her text, *Feminist Theory: From the Margin to the Center*, bell hooks (1984) notes that unlike other forms of oppression, most people witness and/or experience the practice of sexist domination (a primary oppression) in family settings. We tend to witness and/or experience racism, ableism, or classism as we encounter the larger society, the world outside home.

Heterosexism and negative religious attitudes, however, like sexism, are often first experienced within the home. Sexism is then defined as the subordination of an individual woman or group of women and the assumption of the superiority of an individual man or group of men based solely on sex.

Sexual Oppression

In our society, sexist oppression perverts and distorts the positive function of family. Family exists as a space wherein we are socialized from birth to accept and support forms of oppression. In his discussion of the cultural basis of domination, John Hodge emphasizes the role of the family: "The traditional western family, with its authoritarian male rule and its authoritarian adult rule, is the major training ground which initially conditions us to accept group oppression as the natural order" (hooks, 1984, p. 36). Power struggles, coercive authoritarian rule, and even brutal assertion of domination may shape family life for many so that it is often the setting of intense suffering and pain. According to Hodge (1975), the domination usually present within the family—of children by adults, and female by male—are forms of group oppression that are easily translated into the "rightful" group oppression of other people defined by "race" (racism), by nationality (colonialism), by "religion," or by "other means" [sexual orientation (homophobia and heterosexism)]. Thus, politically, the white supremacist, patriarchal state relies on the family to indoctrinate its members with values supportive of hierarchical control and coercive authority. However, it is still important to affirm the primacy of family life because family ties are the only sustained support system for so many exploited and oppressed people. Practice designed to rid family life of the abusive dimension created by sexist and/or heterosexist oppression without devaluing it should be a goal of interpersonal or clinical social work intervention.

Herek (1990) argues that ideologies related to sexuality and gender hold this system of hierarchical roles together. The ideology of gender, a system of beliefs, values, and customs concerning masculinity and femininity, is the context in which the individual defines his or her gender identity:

For a little girl there are now dolls to play with and take care of, pretty clothes to try on, shiny black patent-leather shoes, and as a special reward she may help mommy with housework and stir the batter in the big white bowl. No one ever really tells her to be "domestic" or "esthetic" or "maternal" but she's learning. A little boy, meanwhile, is learning other things. Balls and bats have miraculously appeared to play with, realistic toy pistols, and trains, blocks, and marbles. The shoes he finds in his closet are sturdy enough to take a lot of wear, and just right for running. One day there is an old tire hanging by a rope from a tree in the back yard, just right for swinging. No one ever tells him to be "active" or "aggressive" or "competitive" but somehow, he's learning. (Blumenfeld & Raymond, 1993, p. 23)

This gender ideology is a socially constructed and learned process wherein many meanings are attached to the self as male or female. Heterosexuality is equated with "normal" masculinity and "normal" femininity, whereas homosexuality is equated with violating norms

of gender (Herek, 1992, pp. 89–104). Acceptable sexual roles and desires are gender and sexually prescribed, while role violations are stigmatized as deviant, abnormal, inherently sick, or dangerous. This can be seen in extremist and violent reactions to gay men who violate gender role expectations or who reject by default their “god-given” male privilege. In the recent past there have been a significant number of brutal murders of lesbians, African American men, and gay white men that have received national attention. Confusion is sometimes increased with the gender role nonconformity of growing numbers of straight men and women, as well as with the greater visibility of norm-violating lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals.

This dynamic has all the ingredients of violence, too often experienced by minorities who are visible. Greater visibility appears to be interpreted as a challenge to white, heterosexual male privilege. Even in the absence of violence, these attitudes and prescriptive beliefs affect all minorities who must then process this hostility in developing their own identities, fashion their own responses to gender roles or social expectation, and navigate in a world of blatant discrimination. Discrimination, in terms of access to and respectful service by the health, safety, and social services, has been a concern of minority advocates in recent years. Health and human service professionals, who know little of the family and religious norms of an ethnic group or their cultural traditions dealing with health problems or psychological stress, are not prepared to intervene effectively. When they see no need to understand and modify procedures accordingly, they maintain the status quo, the hierarchy of difference, and do psychological violence to the integrity of the ethnic client.

Gender role conformity and nonconformity must also be evaluated within the context of different cultural expectations. What constitutes appropriate male or female role behavior is not always the same within or across cultures. Cultural cues may be sufficiently different so as to result in a misinterpretation of behaviors, especially related to gender role performance. These cues may be misinterpreted and labeled as deviant (lesbian/gay), as when diverse and culturally defined gender roles of macho men, androgynous men and women, passive men, and assertive women come in contact with dominant stereotypes. These diverse gender roles will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 10.

Rubin (1984) observes that acceptable sexuality should be heterosexual, marital, monogamous, reproductive, and noncommercial. It should be coupled, relational, within the same generation, and occur at home (pp. 280–281). It should not involve pornography, fetish objects, sex toys, or roles other than male and female. Gay and lesbian sexuality overtly and heterosexuality covertly violate many of these rules.

In any discussion of institutional oppression, the interrelatedness of power, gender role socialization, family, and religion must be recognized. Religion is a system of beliefs, values, and customs that forms the basis for group members’ shared perception of social reality. It involves a worldview that is shared by its members, such as valuing patriarchy—male privilege, with its system of roles, relationships, and approved behaviors. One major function of religion is to support the social order. While the family teaches us the preferred gender roles along with the expected behaviors, religion teaches us to value these roles as good, necessary, appropriate, and legitimate. These religious and cultural lessons are well learned and serve as the foundation for much of sexism and homophobia.

Racial Oppression

Gender roles and sexism have been seen as social constructs, a classification based on social values. This is also true of race and racism, which are not simply black and white issues. Racism is the subordination of any person or group because of skin color or other distinctive physical characteristics. Racism, like sexism, is reflected in both individual and institutional acts, decisions, habits, procedures, and policies that neglect, overlook, exploit, subjugate, or maintain the subordination of the individual or the group. At some point in time, many different peoples have been considered racial groups and each subjected to racist treatment: the Irish, Jews, Italians, Poles, Latinos, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and African Americans. The hierarchy of difference and the social processes identified with sexism are in operation in the development and maintenance of racism. It is important that each client is asked about racism from the standpoint of his or her experience. Workers may be surprised at the distinctions groups make that may or may not be racist but may be barriers to their access and use of environmental systems. While overt racism has been the focus of social policy for some time, institutional racism, residual racial inequities that survive as indirect institutional subordination, has been given increased attention in recent years. This type of racism is the process of making decisions based on skill level, residential location, income, or education, all factors that are considered racially neutral. These outcomes appear to be the result of barriers set by both racism and classism, which may result in continued inequities associated with race alone.

Discrimination

The experience of discrimination often includes harassment, violence, and the social tendency to blame the victim for somehow being responsible for what is done to him or her. It is necessary in the PIE assessment to look not only for evidence of system problems but also for the severity and duration of this and other problems. Blatant discrimination in one area, such as employment, over a long period of time, may become a major factor if combined with mild and periodic discrimination by landlords, teachers, lawyers, and doctors, over the short run. This cumulative experience with discrimination may spill over and manifest in a psychological hurtful relationship in the Affectional Support System or in an over-the-top, angry response when talking with a child's teacher.

Cyrus (1997) notes that power and privilege are unevenly distributed, and members of the dominant group tend to use their power to confirm and maintain the legitimacy of their privilege and to enforce the subordination of members of other groups. To survive socially, these groups develop strategies to cope with their subordination. This is more complicated, because our society is organized in such a way as to make hierarchy based on difference appear natural and inevitable. Throughout our early socialization in families, churches, schools, and reference groups, we are taught to define others and ourselves in this way and to accept this kind of classification as natural. Quite apart from accepting the myth or ideology of difference, we come to believe that there should be differences in the first place. An example of this can be seen in Altman's (1982) analysis of why gay men are so hated by so many straight men. He concludes that gays challenge the conventional roles governing a person's sex, as well as the female and male roles in society. The assertion of a gay (and lesbian)

identity is interpreted as an unacceptable difference by the dominant group, which, in turn, raises doubt related to the apparent naturalness of gender roles.

When looking at all oppressed groups, we see that each is predicated on the notion of difference constructed as deviance or deficiency. While value is placed on some differences, others will be devalued, thus a social hierarchy is established. Once this happens, it is possible to divide wealth, opportunity, and justice unequally without appearing to be unfair. The social construction of race, class, gender, and sexuality is different, where being white, male, Christian, European-American, heterosexual, physically and mentally able, and prosperous is the norm, and therefore the basis of privilege. Anyone who does not have these characteristics is understood to be less able or less worthy. The sense of privilege has been reinforced and perpetuated by both intentional and unintentional discrimination (Rothenberg, 1995). This hierarchy of difference and privilege is interrelated and reinforcing, each having significant influence on the social and psychological experience of marginalized people. When the marginalized individual or group internalizes this thinking, the process is complete and insidious. The worker in her assessment of a culturally diverse client's presenting problem must consider the client's description of the problem from the perspective of possible stigma internalization.

This discussion would be rejected by most Americans who believe they are not prejudiced (Vedantan, 2005). Over one million independent studies using the Implicit Association Test designed to examine which words and concepts are strongly paired in people's minds have been employed across a wide range of population groups. Harvard psychologist Mahzarin Banaji invited people via the Internet to take this test anonymously on the Harvard website. She found that 88% of white people had a pro-white or anti-black implicit bias; almost 83% of heterosexuals showed an implicit bias for heterosexual people over gays and lesbians; and two-thirds of non-Arab non-Muslims displayed biases against Arab Muslims. We use mental shortcuts—stereotypes—that require less effort to manage our complicated social environments. To take the Implicit Association Test, go to <http://implicit.harvard.edu>.

Diversity

Concepts such as hierarchies of difference and experience with oppression are helpful in understanding the social reality of marginalized people. However, the practitioner still needs to explore how these various subgroups interact with one another and how they fit overall into American culture. Three popular theories offer an explanation of the impact of different immigrant cultures on one another, and on the American way of life. The assimilation theory assumes that all new arrivals to the United States become absorbed into the dominant culture. According to this theory, Protestants from England created a society that reflected their home culture, and that new immigrants, those enslaved and transported here, or those who were here but lost power and autonomy, were forced to abandon their own cultural traditions and to adopt the values and norms of an Anglo culture. The assumption is that assimilation is necessary to survive here.

A second theory rejects the notion of British or European superiority and describes the United States as a melting pot. This theory emphasizes the blending of all heritages to create

a culture that is uniquely American. The assumption is that no group is able to make its values dominant. Everyone is equally American.

Current theory suggests that the United States is multicultural, a combination of many subsocieties. "Each group retains some of its customs and traditions, that these are accepted as valid and valuable, and that all groups coexist" (Cyrus, 1997, p. 4). Each theory has a kernel of truth. However, we are not all assimilated, and some groups with specific values dominate American culture while others are marginalized, devalued, or repressed. Multiculturalism has come under attack because of its supposed devaluation or destruction of traditional values. It is believed that ethnic, racial, gender, and sexual orientation perspectives distort American traditions. Some claim that supporters of diversity demand that everyone be politically correct. These critics argue for a single perspective, the traditional one, while multiculturalism values diversity, the usefulness of examining cultural ideas from multiple perspectives, including the traditional one. This process will enrich our lives, broaden our society, and increase our understanding of the world.

The political reaction to each of these theories falls along a continuum. Some people are reactionary, opposing any change; some are radical, they support extreme change; in between are conservatives who want to maintain the status quo; and others are liberal, who favor reform. Cyrus (1997) reminds us that each position reflects a different response to the traditional ideology of American culture. She defines ideology as a system of assumptions, theories, and beliefs characterizing a particular group or culture; the system supports or questions political, social, and economic arrangements. There are three tenets of traditional American culture; each has been challenged throughout our history, but the combination remains the national ideology.

The first tenet is Eurocentricity, the assumption of the supremacy of European Americans and their values and traditions. Judeo-Christian monotheism, Protestant work ethic, and scientific rationality are examples of subsets of this tenet. The conflict that these pose for some of the cultures found in our society is enormous.

A second principle is patriarchy, a hierarchical system of social organization in which structures of power, value, and culture are male-dominated. In this system, men are the natural heads of households, presidential candidates, corporate executives, college presidents, and so on. Women are seen as men's subordinates, playing supportive roles. This principle has been under serious attack over the last thirty years.

A third principle of American ideology is the belief in capitalism, the economic system of private ownership of property and free enterprise, with its accompanying importance of profits and competition, inequitable distribution of resources (income and wealth), economic recessions and depressions, and poverty. Our culture's emphasis on individualism and personal responsibility as components of capitalism stands in sharp contrast to the cultural values of cooperation, mutual responsibility, collective ownership, or sacredness of resources characteristic of many ethnic cultures living in the United States.

These ideological principles have left us a heritage of divisiveness and inequity. These tenets have been used to rationalize prejudice and negative attitudes about certain groups, and to justify discrimination, the actions that flow from those prejudices. Eurocentric

prejudice and discrimination results in racism, ethnocentrism, and xenophobia, that is, the subordination of certain groups based on their origins and physical characteristics. Patriarchal values lead to sexism; heterocentrism; the subordination of women, gay men and lesbians, bisexuals and transgender people; and the assumption of the superiority of men solely on the basis of sex. Classism, which results from capitalism, fosters stigmatizing the poor and the working class and the devaluation of those less able. In this culture, high status is assigned to the affluent and their culture solely based on their relative wealth. The worker must always tune into her own assumptions and examine these as barriers to a thorough assessment of the client's social role and environmental functioning concerns. A PIE assessment that fails to consider the type of cultural adaptation the client has made is less than thorough. A culturally competent evaluation of the client's perception of the severity and duration of the problem, as well as his or her coping skills, will result in an effective problem-solving process.

Identity

The concepts of race and ethnicity are not easily distinguished from one another. Ethnicity is defined as membership in a subgroup within an environment dominated by another culture. The ethnic subgroups may be categorized by such traits as language, culture, customs, religion, traditions, physical characteristics, or ancestral origin. Race is defined as any group of people united or classified together on the basis of common history, nationality, or geographical distribution. Most scientists identify race solely in terms of physical characteristics, such as skin color, hair, or facial attributes. These characteristics are not as discrete as it would seem. Contemporary social science theory assumes that race is less of a scientific actuality than a social construct, a classification based on social values. Social scientists refer to this as social assignment rather than singularly as genetic composition. Racial and ethnic identity are considered fixed and unalterable, but, in fact, they are fluid and quite subjective. An assessment that does not attempt to clarify what the client thinks about her race and ethnicity or the worker's race and ethnicity will miss invaluable information and possibly the best direction in the intervention.

It is important to realize that many of us have multiple identities, which assume different levels of importance at different points in time. Most of us have acquired multicultural skills and strategies for accommodating identities that conflict or place demands on us at different points in our lives. These identities are modified via assimilation, those activities by which minority groups, either influenced by the dominant group overtly or covertly, abandon the unique features of their former cultures and adapt to the values and norms of European American culture or the Anglo-Protestant ethic. Society is made up of numerous subgroups, and every subgroup has been transformed by the influences of the dominant group. However, even if many features of the origin culture are lost or altered, members may continue to identify with the cultural group. Many European Americans, such as Poles, Italians, Greeks, and Slavs are associated with the working class and are thus marginalized, unappreciated, and derided despite their many contributions. While some may struggle with their ethnic identity because of discrimination, others find that ethnic identity is not necessarily problematic but a source of connection, pride, and support. What cultural or group identities a client draws from

or what skills are available to him can best be understood through the building of his narrative, his personal story, which has been guided by ethnic-sensitive communication.

In American culture, gender is the most remarkable feature of one's identity. It shapes our attitudes, our behavior, our experiences, and our beliefs about others and ourselves. Gender is so central to our perception of social reality that we often are not even conscious of how it shapes our behavior and social interactions (Cyrus, 1997, p. 64). Through socialization, we come to know the traditional definitions of masculinity and femininity. A man should be strong and mechanically oriented, ambitious and assertive, in control of his emotions, knowledgeable about the world, and a good provider. A woman should be passive and domestic, nurturing and dependent, emotional, preoccupied with her appearance, and maternal. These supposedly unalterable gender characteristics affect the physical and psychological aspects of one's life, as well as occupational choices and interpersonal relations.

Scientists will continue to debate the nature/nurture mix of gendered behavior, specifically its genetic etiology. Social scientists, on the other hand, see strong evidence of the central importance that culture plays in creating gender roles, which are only one kind of role we learn. We acquire our appropriate gender roles through socialization, a process by which we are taught those roles, social expectations, and the rewards and punishments that require us to conform. These are embedded in every aspect of culture. The treatment of infants and children, language, educational systems, religion, mass media, laws, medical and mental health institutions, occupational environments, and intimate relationships all teach appropriate gender behavior. Social science has helped us to understand how adults, as well as children, make assumptions about gender and then reinforce traditional expectations. We also learn how language teaches us about the ideas of male superiority and female inferiority. Heterocentrism is another process that limits our choices based on gender, in that it is an assumption that only heterosexual relationships and interests are acceptable. We see stereotypic behavior reinforced by notions of masculine supremacy and privilege, while violations of gender expectations result in stigma, anger, and violence. These gender expectations, in this society, are too often white, middle class, white-collar, and heterosexual values. These values then become the standard by which minority groups evaluate themselves, by which the dominant group evaluates them, and, too often, by which social workers and other human service professionals assess their clients and design what they think are appropriate interpersonal interventions.

Stigma and Stigma Management

Oppression is an institutional process that is experienced personally as stigma, stress, guilt, and shame. Stigma significantly influences identity development. It is stigma that results in internalized oppression, which every minority person must learn to manage in the process of developing a healthy identity. It is the social, economic, political, and psychological consequences of stigma that the social worker may be called on to help reduce, extricate, or relieve. The concept of stigma comes out of labeling theory. This theory may be especially useful for social work practice because it unambiguously distinguishes between behaviors commonly believed to be stereotypic and the feelings of being stigmatized that arise as a particular reaction to them.

Erving Goffman (1963) examines the nature of self-presentation and the role of stigma in interpersonal relations. People with stigmas are thought to be not quite human. The standards the stigmatized person incorporates from the wider society equip her to be acutely aware of what others see as her failing, inevitably causing her to agree that she does indeed fall short of what she really ought to be. Shame is one common consequence of a stigmatized person's failure to meet a specific set of standards, rules, and goals. Another is what Meyer (1995) terms "minority stress," or the conflict that arises with the social environment when the person does not fit the dominant values (p. 39).

Stigma represents for Goffman (1963) a spoiled identity, the idea that somehow one is imperfect in regard to the standards of the society in which one lives. It is a "mark or characteristic that distinguishes a person as being deviant, flawed, limited, spoiled or generally undesirable. The deviating characteristics of the person are sufficient reason for the occurrence of the stigma" (Lewis, 1992, p. 194). Stigma relates the self to others' views and, although the feelings of being stigmatized may occur in the absence of other people, the feelings associated with it come about through the stigmatized person's interactions with other people, or through his anticipation of interaction with other people. Thus stigmatization is an interpersonal process. Stigmas represent a violation of what is considered normal. The very idea of stigma implies that social value and worth reside not in the spoiled individual but in the societal value system as reflected in its standards, rules, and goals. Thus a stigmatized person has an expectation of rejection and vigilance about prejudice (Meyer, 1995).

As a result of continued exposure to prejudice and stigmatization, devalued individuals become members of a minority group, a segment of the population that suffers unjustified negative acts by the rest of society. These acts may range from mild discrimination to scapegoating.

While there are important differences between the two groups, there are many similarities in the development of a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity with the development of racial or ethnic identity. Comparable stages in identity development have been found. The primary task for each involves the transformation of a negative, stigmatized identity into a positive, affirming one. However, a racial or ethnic identity is an ascribed status that is recognized and acknowledged from birth, while sexual identity is an achieved status that is generally not discovered until adolescence or adulthood (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993). Another way in which the groups differ is that persons of color, for the most part, are taught strategies by their families to manage their stigmatized identity. The families of gay men and lesbians cannot teach skills they don't have; on the contrary, these parents are often the initiators of gay and lesbian stigma and discrimination.

Effects of Stigmatization

People who have been stigmatized respond in a great variety of ways. Allport (1958) terms these "traits due to victimization" or "persecution produced traits." Some of these traits can be quite constructive and creative, while others can be rather unpleasant or destructive:

Every form of ego defense may be found among members of every persecuted group. Some will handle their minority-group membership easily, with surprisingly little

evidence in their personalities that this membership is of any concern to them. Others will show a mixture of desirable and undesirable compensations. Some will be so rebellious that they will develop many ugly defenses. (Allport, 1958, p. 140)

Allport enumerates the varieties of negative responses to stigmatization including: (1) obsessive concern resulting in feelings of deep anxiety, suspicion, and insecurity; (2) denial (from both oneself and others) of actual membership in the minority group; (3) social withdrawal and passivity; (4) clowning, being the court jester in an effort to be accepted by the dominant group; (5) slyness and cunning—oftentimes for mere survival; (6) identification with the dominant group, a sign of self-hate; (7) aggression against and directing blame to one's own group; (8) redirecting prejudice and discrimination against other minorities; (9) excessive neuroticism; (10) internalizing and acting out the negative social definitions and stereotypes, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy; and (11) excessive striving for status to compensate for the feelings of inferiority. Blumenfeld and Raymond (1993) emphasize that many of these more undesirable characteristics often are attributed to the minority as intrinsic but are in reality defenses to discrimination. Unfortunately, when these responses occur, they often lead to reinforcement of negative stereotypes and beliefs. When culturally diverse or oppressed clients interact with any of the six environmental systems, their behaviors and attitudes often are misinterpreted as psychologically inappropriate, possibly representing psychiatric qualities, and not as a cultural adaptation to the loss of power, control, or privilege.

The negative effects of stigmatization on some groups, such as gay, lesbian, and bisexual people, have been known for some time, especially the connection between stigmatization and psychosocial dysfunction (Meyer, 1995). Stigmatized individuals have been characterized as having disrupted emotional, cognitive, and behavioral response systems, likely to be caused in part by their feelings of shame and in part by their efforts to cope with prejudice. The stigma felt by the individual is profound, resulting in emotions as diverse as anger, sadness, humiliation, shame, and embarrassment. Lewis (1992) draws a major distinction between shame and guilt or regret. With shame the entire self is "no good," as captured in the expression "I am a bad person." Goffman's definition of stigma as a spoiled identity makes clear that a stigma constitutes a global attribution about the self as no good. In this case, a spoiled identity reflects a whole self made bad by minority status. The adjustment difficulties associated with stigma follow from the idea that the stigma defines the individual. The very act of stigmatization is shame inducing. It is not surprising to find in the discussion of stigma associated feelings of low self-esteem, depression, and acting-out behaviors: "Stigmas speak to the idea of difference and how difference shames us and those we know" (p. 207).

Christopher Bagley (*Advocate*, 11/12/96), a professor of social work at the University of Calgary, in his study of 750 youth (eighteen to twenty-seven years old) found a profoundly negative response to stigmatization in the fact that young gay and bisexual males are nearly fourteen times more at risk of suicide than their heterosexual contemporaries. These rates are far greater than the conventional wisdom that gay youth are at three times greater risk of suicide than their straight counterparts.

The negative impact of stigma is quite broad: It not only affects those who are stigmatized, but those associated with the person so too are spoiled. Goffman called this phenomenon "courtesy stigma." Thus stigmas are contagious; they impact on members of the family,

friends, and even those who help stigmatized persons, such as social workers and other mental health professionals. For example, the parents of someone with a stigma are then stigmatized and may suffer a similar fate as their stigmatized disabled daughter or son. We see the impact of stigmatization when parents are informed that their child is physically or mentally disabled: First, they express shock and disbelief that their child is imperfect, lacking in "moral strength or physical or mental health." Second, they experience anger and rage. Third, sadness replaces the anger. Finally, the parents enter the coping stage; that is, they learn to cope with their shame and embarrassment over having such a child. The shame at having such a child can last a lifetime and can lead to many family difficulties, including a high rate of marital discord and divorce as each parent seeks to blame the other for the stigmatized child. It can become the family secret, it can be tolerated, or it can be mourned as a loss. However, some parents may resist the negative social construction of their child's marginalized status and accept it in the fullest sense. Some become active in support groups or advocacy organizations, such as Association of Retarded Citizens or National Association of Mental Illness. This may be the most positive adjustment for the parents.

It is important to remember, however, that "stigmatized individuals are not merely passive victims but are frequently able actively to protect and buffer their self-esteem from prejudice and discrimination" (Crocker & Major, 1989, p. 624). Blumenfeld and Raymond (1993) note some positive outcomes of stigmatization for gay and lesbian people:

1. Strengthening of ties with fellow minority-group members, which deMonteflores (1986) calls "ghettoization";
2. Sympathy with and support for other minorities;
3. Enhanced striving and assertiveness; and
4. Challenging the status quo so as to bring about progressive social change, which deMonteflores (1986) calls "confrontation."

In fact, members of stigmatized groups often have much higher levels of self-esteem than might be predicted based on the prejudice and discrimination that they face (Crocker & Major, 1989). There are several self-protective strategies that have been described which help increase self-esteem, such as identifying the prejudice directed against them for what it is and explaining experiences of rejection and perceived differences between themselves and others in the nonstigmatized group on that basis. Members of the stigmatized group may also reframe their own characteristics as positive and selectively devalue those of the dominant culture, what deMonteflores (1986) terms "specialization," that is, making oneself special as a consequence of the stigma. These strategies all tend to strengthen bonds among members of the stigmatized group (Crocker & Major, 1989). Browning, Reynolds, and Dworkin (1991) in discussing generational differences with regard to handling stigma describe how the term *queer* has become a badge of pride, a signature of generational difference, a marker of a more freewheeling, combative social style. This process has been described extensively by scholars in relation to the use of the title black versus negro or Hispanic versus Latino.

Concealment, or "passing," is one possible way to cope with stigma. Those who are invisible, in that they do not fit the stereotype, may pass, that is, can allow or encourage others to believe that they are normal, while those who do meet the stereotyped expectations

become visible. An individual may come to recognize his or her homosexual orientation without realistic models of what this means. The reaction may be "I'm the only person in the world like this" or "I'm not like them, thank God." Parents and other family members and friends are also likely to avoid or deny disclosure when their loved one does not fit the stereotype. Passing also implies what deMonteflores (1986) calls "assimilation," or learning the ways of the dominant group. Thus a minority person may have in-depth knowledge of both the dominant culture and the culture of the stigmatized subgroup, leading some to suggest that all minority people may be considered bicultural (Lukes & Land, 1990). It is possible to misunderstand behavior as constituting passing in the case of Native Americans or Asian Americans and racial identity. Neither group considers themselves people of color nor accepts the notion of white racial supremacy, thus they remain uninvolved in the debate related to race.

The process of consciously hiding requires lying and often omitting some personal information. This strategy of deception distorts almost all relationships and creates an increasing sense of isolation. A major aspect of passing, or concealment, is the ever present need to self-monitor (Martin & Hetrick, 1988; Morrow, 1993).

Hammersmith (1988) suggests that there is a range of responses to stigmatization. These include stereotypic interpretation of behavior; social rejection, distancing, and discrimination; passing and altered self-concept; development of special subcultures; and "secondary deviation." The individual, his or her family, and often friends are confronted daily with stereotyping and social rejection. The images are all negative. By the time one reaches adulthood, the association (not necessarily conscious) between the minority status and the stereotype is formed. The peer groups, the mass media, and cultural tradition perpetuate these dehumanizing stereotypes. The individual may feel pressure or desire to establish distance from his negative status. Too few people, then, are socially and emotionally prepared to deal with this issue when it arises.

Rejection is another consequence of stigma, which produces distancing between those with the stigma and those without. The final means of coping with stigma is that of self-fulfilling prophecy or secondary deviance. This means that features of the stereotype may be reinforced by the individual's protest or defiance or for lack of support for more normative styles of life. In deMonteflores's (1986) terms, this strategy combines elements of confrontation and specialization.

The PIE system was designed with an understanding of the complexity of these negative environmental dynamics, in that Factor II: Environmental Problem is given prominence in this classification system. The authors specifically listed discrimination as a potential problem for clients in each of the environmental systems. They identify a range of possibilities: age discrimination (mandatory retirement at age 65), ethnicity, color or language discrimination (African Americans are not able to move to Greenwich, Connecticut), religious discrimination (Hindus required to work on a sacred day), sexual orientation (gay men and lesbians refused adoptions), lifestyle (landlords will not rent to people with pets), noncitizen status (schools will not enroll children of undocumented workers), veterans status (employers are biased against veterans of the Kosovo war), dependency status (landlords will not rent to people receiving TANF), disability (there are no elevators to the second floor), marital status (married

women not able to advance to supervisory levels), and other types of discrimination (landlords will not rent to parents of young children) (Karls & Wandrei, 1994).

While all clients may experience an inadequate level of available resources in any given environmental system or lack the necessary coping skills for a given problem, clients whose race, ethnicity, gender, social class, sexual orientation, age, ability, or immigrant or religious status are marginal may be blocked from access to a resource or full use of a resource because of their status. They are targets of discrimination.

The client's perception of the severity and duration of the problem are important qualifiers. The worker, in either case, not necessitating intervention, might not perceive the discrimination as disruptive, or it may be seen as nondisruptive by the client but disruptive by the social worker. The discrimination might be disruptive to the client's functioning but the distress is not judged as impairing general functioning, or the client is in a clear state of distress, either of which requires intervention. The discrimination is such that it requires changes in key or multiple areas of social role functioning (internalized racism) or in the environment (hate crimes), or sudden and negative changes out of the individual's control with devastating implications for adjustment (quarantine of people with AIDS or acute psychiatric disorders). These might require immediate and direct intervention.

Conclusion

Change in disempowering social arrangements is one of the goals of social work. As we develop an appreciation for the type, severity, and duration of stress on minority communities and the cultural barriers to their full participation in social institutions, we come to realize the importance of social change as a goal of contemporary practice. If, when assessing an environmental system, we identify a lack of resources or an inadequacy in resources, we are professionally required to initiate a process that will organize clients to develop their own capacity to find new resources, challenge service providers to use their own resources in a more appropriate fashion, or advocate for change on a legislative or administrative policy level. These interventions may or may not be driven by us, but we are obligated to initiate such action. Discrimination requires more than helping a client put up with this assault; the worker may help all affected clients organize or challenge the personal action or the de facto or de jure policy through advocacy, service evaluation, and policy or program change. Most community institutions, including social services agencies, have not engaged in this type of analysis or may not be committed to the organizational change necessary to accommodate the needs of marginalized people. Community education, organizing and development, case and class advocacy, social action, and policy and organizational change are transformative professional activities directed at social institutions. While these modalities are in less favor today, they continue to be among the most effective ways to promote social change. The experience of minority clients offers evidence that these modalities should be in great demand. Students and practitioners are encouraged to use the vast resources of the Internet. One site designed specifically for social workers is www.nyu.edu/socialwork/ip/.

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Women and Sexist Oppression

Barbara Drahus Worden

Gender identity is the root of socially assigned male and female gender roles. Gender traits are valued when those traits facilitate success in assigned social roles (Diekman & Goodfriend, 2006). From birth we are considered either male or female and are treated accordingly. Society places certain values on gender identity that are both descriptive and prescriptive. Although these values are constantly present, they can shift with changing cultural norms. Beginning in infancy and extending through childhood, our names, our clothes, our friends, our sports involvement, our family roles, and the importance of our education are often decided on the basis of our gender. As working adults, our pay scales, our professions, our work environments, even the public bathrooms we are allowed to use are affected by whether we are considered male or female. All human languages make a distinction between sex groups, and all societies use sex categorization as a basis for assigning people to different adult roles (Stockard & Johnson, 1992). Mimi Abramovitz (1996) asserts that gender, like race and class, structures the organization of social life, and gendered divisions often support the status quo. Because gender roles are assigned and enacted within our own family, gender is the most basic and perhaps the most pervasive category of diversity.

When examining scientific research on the differences between men and women, a review of the literature shows that in meta/analysis studies on gender, differences in cognitive abilities (Hyde, 1981), personality traits (Cohen, 1991), and social behavior (Aries, 1996), gender differences accounted for typically less than 5% of the variance. This means that there were greater differences within each gender than between them. Therefore, men differed more from other men and women from other women than men and women differed from each other. Some theorists and writers postulate that gender itself is a social construction and as such there are no universal truths about the nature of gender or gender identity. Social constructionism views people as active participants in perceiving and making sense of their surrounding environments. In this perspective, there are no universal truths about *innate* differences between men and women—but what exists, instead, are beliefs about gender differences, which are socially constructed, consensually held, and reinforced. These beliefs become our definitions of reality. Because of the consensual nature of these beliefs, the ability to define reality for a culture is inherent in those who are in the majority and those who hold the most power in the dominant society. These constructed beliefs then serve to maintain the status quo, particularly of those in the culture's power hierarchy (Worden & Worden, 1998).

In the past ten years the field of psychology has slightly shifted its emphasis from a focus on pathology to topics of positive psychology and wellness... positive attitudes and those things which make life worth living. In addition, feminist theories continue to develop, many of which posit that feminism can improve women's lives by increasing awareness of the social impact of a male dominated culture. In one recent study (Saunders & Kashubeck-West, 2006) women who identified as androgynous, rather than stereotypically feminine, had significantly higher well-being scores. Since these psychological and cultural shifts continue to evolve, more questions can be raised about the pervasiveness of social role expectations, gender identity, and oppression.

If gender is a social construct, and that social construct is evolving and changing, then can all women be victims of oppression? Linnea GlenMaye (1998) argues that although women as a group are fragmented in a number of ways, women as a whole are united in two fundamental ways: (1) we are a distinct and separate biological sex, and (2) as members of this sex we share both the bodily experience of female sex and the social expectations of female virtue of our sex (p. 30).

Therefore, writing about women and oppression is a complicated task because the philosophical topic is generally broad. At the same time, the condition of oppression and subordination affects women of all colors and social classes, and the feelings generated from this condition are personal to individual women. These feelings and conditions vary among women of similar social class and race and may vary greatly among women of different social classes and races. Hierarchies of domination are experienced simultaneously and differently by different types of women. Wendy Hulko, (2009) writes about women and oppression from the paradigm of intersectionality and interlocking oppressions. Intersectionality is a metaphor for the micro processes of how each individual and group (or social network) occupies a social location. Each social location holds its own system of privilege and oppression. Intersectionality proposes that when examining gender oppression, there is more than one frame. The analysis must embrace issues of race, migration status, history and social class (Samuels, Ross-Sheriff, 2009) Therefore, interlocking oppressions are macro level connections linking systems of oppressions and privileges. There is no *single* definition or experience of gender oppression. As no one theory or position can speak for all perspectives, this chapter does not address the oppression of all types and classes of women. It attempts to provide a broad framework of types of oppression that constrain women and a way of thinking about empowerment that can help release our clients and ourselves from various oppressive forces.

Other chapters in this book have defined the notion of a development of multiple selves or social identities. These social identities are used in the process of assimilation into the dominant group to avoid stigmatization. This chapter will not duplicate an explanation of these concepts but will seek to illustrate their use when working with women. Because gender is the earliest and the most basic unit of diversity, all women must develop a multitude of social identities to negotiate their way through various social roles.

There are many levels and lenses through which we can dissect and examine these identities. We shall begin our examination on a micro level of analysis by looking at a case study from the PIE framework. We flesh out our thinking in a mezzo level of analysis by looking at the broader conditions of gendered oppression in various contexts that affect women's lives.

Our macro level of analysis takes a general look at knowledge construction and dominant versus subgroup positions and how this affects the contexts by which we acquire and verify knowledge. By adopting this approach, students who are interested in seeking further reading in any of the areas are clearly pointed in the desired direction.

As in other chapters, this chapter will analyze the following case study utilizing the PIE classification system for problems in social functioning (Factors I and II). We will frame the interventions from an empowerment perspective. This perspective enables practitioners to carry a dual focus: (1) to investigate and acknowledge the often oppressive reality of marginalized clients in our society and thereby give credence to the effects of internalized oppression; and (2) to help clients discover their own strengths and potentials to mitigate the effects of that internalization process. The empowerment approach assumes that oppression is a structurally based phenomenon that affects both individuals and communities. It makes connections between social and economic justice and individual pain and suffering, and adopts the ecological perspective (Lee, 1996). A third focus can be added for our purposes, which is to explore the various social identities women use to fulfill their social roles.

Case Study: Jean

Jean is a twenty-seven year old half Korean and half American Caucasian woman. She is married to Tom, an American Caucasian, and the mother of three children: Brent, age six; Sarah, age four; and Tommy, age two. She recently sought counseling from a crisis service for battered women. Jean is depressed and withdrawn. She has a very small frame and reports that she has lost ten pounds in the past month. This weight loss, coupled with her flat affect, makes her appear quite ill. She denies any suicidal ideation, although she says that she doesn't know how she will continue to take care of her children and Tom's sick mother.

Jean's husband, Tom, is given to bouts of heavy drinking and questionable drug use. He has violent episodes in which he alternately verbally and physically abuses her. He likes to bring his friends home after a drinking binge and make her serve them breakfast. He verbally abuses her in their presence, adding to her humiliation. During these episodes he calls her sexual names and tells her he wants to send her back to Korea and keep the children here.

Jean and Tom met and married seven years ago when he was in the army and stationed in Korea. They moved to the United States and settled near his family. Jean wanted to come to the United States to escape a suffocating family in Korea and to find a better life. When they were first married, Tom was kind and loving. Although he liked to go drinking with his friends, he always came home at night, worked hard as a computer technician, and brought home his paycheck. The marriage was good after they had Brent. By the time Sarah was born, Tom was staying out later and later and coming home and passing out. At this time, his company had its first downsizing. Although Tom's job was saved, several of his friends lost their jobs. Rumors circulate that another big layoff is coming. Jean knows Tom is scared that he will lose his job.

After Tommy was born, the marriage was marked by increasing arguments over money and Tom's drinking and suspected drug involvement. Tom began some minor drug dealing to make extra money. He swears he doesn't use anything himself.

When studying the social science literature on gender and racial inequities, one finds a variety of terms to describe conditions of oppression and discrimination. Gender discrimination tends to focus on individuals (women of all races) and their unequal access to resources and opportunities. Gender stratification implies a more institutional and systematic web of sexual inequality. Sexism is a term used as a parallel to racism, although the sources of *sexism* and racism are different (Stockard & Johnson, 1992). (For a more thorough discussion of these terms and their uses, see "Gender Inequality in Cultural Symbolism and Interpersonal Relations" in Stockard and Johnson [1992].)

Given these perspectives and frameworks for weighing the various "isms," we could struggle endlessly with knowledge construction and definitional issues and still not reach agreement concerning the labels for and types of gendered oppression and discrimination. Therefore, we will leave this issue and hopefully have given you some thoughts and questions to further explore. We move now to a mezzo level of analysis, examining the various forms of oppression that all women experience in various degrees.

What Do We Mean by the Oppression of Women?

To be conscious of external oppressive forces is the beginning of a sense of empowerment. Bartky (1990) states, "feminist consciousness is a consciousness of victimization" (p. 15). This consciousness is a divided consciousness in two ways. First, it is an awareness of unjust treatment of women by the surrounding environment that enforces an often stifling and oppressive system of sex-role differentiation. Victimization is impartial, and occurs on a macro, societal level. The damage is done to each one of us personally and is felt at a familial and individual level. Understanding this sense of victimhood raises one's level of consciousness, and, through this increased awareness, one can begin to release energy and begin a journey of personal growth. Second, women of different colors and classes are privileged in ways that are uneven.

Lacking a culture of our own, we adopt the culture of our men and therefore subscribe to a truncated definition of the self, which either conforms to cultural stereotyping or sets parts of us struggling against each other. This is true for Jean, who leads her life through rigid cultural and gender role stereotypes. Her (1) lack of education, (2) economic dependence, (3) cultural proscriptions, and (4) lack of cultural and social supports inhibit her from articulating and meeting her own needs.

Linnea GlenMaye (1998) describes three general conditions that all women share as a result of being subject to psychological and structural gender oppression: (1) profound alienation from the self, (2) the double-bind of either meeting one's own needs or serving the needs of others, and (3) institutional and structural sexism (p. 31).

gender-specific topics, but the easy-to-read hierarchical structure can point you in the right direction for useful information. There are almost 2,000 links from which to choose for further research.

www.wcwonline.org

This web site celebrates 35 years of work at Wellesley College. The work addresses macro areas such as the social and economic status of

women and girls and education and development of youth. It also examines micro areas of emotional and mental health. You can browse for publications by topic, or author.

SCILS, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey sponsors vandergrifts feminist websites which gives a brief summary of and links to other topical areas of interest.

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