Oppression as a Social Justice Issue

Most anti-oppressive social work writers base their ideas and writings on some notion of "social justice." However, there is no agreement on the meaning of this concept in the literature. David Gil (1994) makes the point that although social work professional codes of ethics require social workers to "promote social justice," these codes do not specify the meaning of social justice, instead treating it as if it were self-evident. Yet social justice cannot be promoted unless its meaning is first clarified, and we must also examine its relationship to oppression/anti-oppression.

Donna Baines (2011, 20–2) claims that the following are 10 common themes or core insights that are integral to promoting social justice in everyday, front-line social work practice:

- Oppression is generated by both micro- and macro-level social relations.
- Our everyday experience is shaped by multiple oppressions.
- Social work is a contested site where conflicts over power, resources, and affirming identities occur.
- Social work is not a neutral, technical profession, but an active political process.
- Social justice–oriented social work assists individuals while simultaneously seeking to transform the forces that generate and benefit from inequity and oppression.
- Social work needs to build allies and work with social causes and movements.
- Social work's theoretical and practical development must be based on the struggles and needs of those who are oppressed and marginalized.
- Participatory approaches between practitioners and service users are necessary (and dignity-robbing, dependence-creating "expert" models of practice avoided).
- Self-reflexive practice and ongoing social analysis are essential components of social justice–oriented social work practice.
- A blended, heterodox (i.e., anti-mainstream) social justice perspective provides the most potential for politicized, transformative social work practice.

Distributive Justice

One of the oldest and most ubiquitous concepts of social justice is that of distributive justice, which focuses on distribution and redistribution issues with respect to how rights, opportunities, and material resources are allocated in society (Morgaine and Capous-Desyllas 2015). However, if we are to adopt a social justice form of social work, we must recognize the severe limitations of the distributional view of social justice. In *Justice and the Politics of Difference*, Iris Marion Young presents a concept of social justice that goes beyond mere distributive/redistributive notions of social justice. Because it encapsulates such elements of oppression as social practices and processes that cause inequitable distributions in the first place, we believe that Young's concept of social justice has much more potential for understanding oppression than any distributive notion of social justice.

In defining social justice as "the elimination of institutionalized domination and oppression," Young (1990, 15) contends that contemporary philosophical theories of justice do not

Middle- or Upper-Class Privilege

- I can avoid members of other classes or races and only be with people like me if I choose.
- I do not worry about going hungry or being homeless.
- I can be charitable or not as I please.
- I can live where I choose and move when and where I choose.
- I can enjoy frivolous spending without worrying about end-of-the-month payments.
- I can join clubs and organizations that many cannot.
- I enjoy respect and trust in most situations from most people.
- I am assumed innocent by the criminal justice system at least until proven guilty.
- I do not have to worry about getting adequate or competent legal help.
- I do not have to shop around for the best buy or wait for sales.
- I can be sure that my children will not be mistreated by teachers and staff at school.
- I do not worry about paying for music lessons or sports memberships for my children.
- I do not worry about how an emergency might affect me financially.
- I can hire people to help me care for my children or do the housework.
- Entertainment or going out is readily available to me.
- I can take expensive vacations when and where I want.
- I can get discounts on major purchases and preferred interest rates on my investments because I am seen as a valuable customer.
- I do not have to worry about how I can afford my retirement.
- I can afford excellent medical and hospital care.
- I am not presumed to be immoral, lazy, evil, unmotivated, stupid, incompetent, work-shy, alcoholic, or promiscuous because of my social class.
- I can leave my children with an inheritance to make things a little easier for them.
- I can assume that I am entitled to these privileges because of the dominant social beliefs.
- I can take advantage of all the income tax breaks that are not available to those with lower incomes.

Thanks to the Women's Theological Center in Boston for several of the above privileges.

White Privilege

- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my own race most of the time.
- If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.

- I can be pretty sure that my neighbours in such a location will be neutral or pleasant to me.
- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- I can turn on the television or turn to the front page of the newspaper and see people of my race widely represented.
- When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization," I am shown that people of my colour made it what it is.
- I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.
- If I want to, I can be pretty sure of finding a publisher for this piece on white privilege.
- I can go into a music shop and count on finding the music of my race represented, into a supermarket and find the staple foods that fit with my cultural traditions, into a hairdresser's shop and find someone who can deal with my hair.
- Whether I use cheques, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin colour not working against the appearance of financial reliability.
- I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.
- I can swear or dress in second-hand clothes or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.
- I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.
- I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
- I can remain oblivious to the language and customs of persons of colour, who constitute the world's majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.
- I can criticize our government and talk about how much I fear its policies and behaviour without being seen as a cultural outsider.
- I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to "the person in charge," I will be facing a person of my race.
- If a traffic cop pulls me over or if my tax return is audited, I can be sure that I haven't been singled out because of my race.
- I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines reflecting people of my race.
- I can go home from most meetings of organizations I belong to feeling somewhat tied in rather than isolated, out of place, outnumbered, unheard, held at a distance, or feared.
- I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.
- I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated in the places I have chosen.

Continued

- I can be sure that if I need legal or medical help, my race will not work against me.
- If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not question whether each negative episode or situation has racial overtones.
- I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color that more or less matches my skin.

Taken from Peggy McIntosh, White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack, 1990.

Male Privilege

- I can dominate a conversation without being seen as dominating.
- I am praised for spending time with my children and for cooking and doing household chores.
- I am not expected to change my name when I get married.
- I can walk alone in public without fear of being harassed or sexually violated.
- I never worry about being paid less than my female counterparts.
- Prospective employers will never ask me whether I plan to have children.
- I am confident that I will never be accused of sleeping my way to the top in my workplace.
- When I get dressed in the morning, I never worry about whether my clothing will invite sexual harassment.
- I don't have to choose between having a career or having a family.
- I can be moody, grouchy, or abrupt without it being attributed to my sex or to menopause or to PMS.
- If I am sexually active, even promiscuous, I can largely count on not being called a slut or a whore. In fact, I will be seen as a stud in some circles and held in high regard.
- I can count on my wife or partner doing most of the housework and childcare even if she has a job outside the home.
- Should I have a medical problem, I can rest assured that more is known about male health problems and how medicines affect male bodies.
- I can find positive male role models in positions of authority almost everywhere I look.
- Should a woman with whom I had sex unexpectedly become pregnant, I can rest assured that it will be seen as her fault and her responsibility.
- There is no social pressure on me to marry before the age of 30.
- I can express anger or outrage without being seen as irrational, emotional, or too sensitive.

Thanks mainly to Devon Carbado (2004) and also to Steven P. Schacht (2003) for most of the above male privileges.

Heterosexual Privilege

- I can, if I wish, be in the company of other heterosexual persons every day.
- I can be assured that I will not be blamed for creating or spreading the AIDS virus.
- I don't have to worry about people trying to cure me of my heterosexuality.
- My partner and I can display affection in public without fear of ridicule or harassment.
- I can be assured that I will never be denied medical treatment because I am heterosexual.
- My children will never have to explain why they have parents of different genders.
- I am guaranteed that if I marry, it will be legally recognized in every country in the world.
- I can take a job with almost any employer and be assured that my partner will be included in the benefits package.
- I can be assured that I will never be asked to speak for all heterosexual persons.
- I can be assured that my children will be taught in schools (explicitly or implicitly) about the naturalness of heterosexuality.
- My heterosexuality will be affirmed in every religious tradition.
- I do not have to struggle with "coming out" or worry about being "outed."
- I can display my partner's photos at work without causing office gossip or hostility.
- I don't have to worry about being bashed after leaving a social event with other heterosexuals.
- I can apply to adopt children without having my motives questioned.
- I can be assured that I will not be refused hospital visitation rights to see my partner because of my heterosexuality.
- My heterosexuality is never mistaken as a lifestyle but is merely one more component of my personal identity.
- As a heterosexual man, I am welcome to become a Big Brother or leader of a Boy Scouts' troop.
- My parents do not love me "in spite of" my heterosexuality, nor do they blame themselves for it.
- I can introduce my partner to my work colleagues without fearing that it may block me from promotion or other workplace opportunities.
- I don't have to be exposed to someone expressing pity or saying "that's okay" on learning that I am heterosexual.
- I do not have to worry about any negative consequences that my heterosexuality might have personally on my children, especially as it relates to their social life.
- Whether on television or at the movies, heterosexuality is always affirmed as healthy and normal.
- If a child is sexually abused by a heterosexual person, I do not have to worry about being suspected as a pedophile because of my heterosexuality.
- I will never be accused of recruiting others to join my heterosexual orientation.
- Every day is "Heterosexual Pride Day."

Thanks to Devon Carbado (2004) for most of the above privileges.

The next set of privileges was originally developed by Peggy McIntosh as examples of heterosexual privilege. It seems to me, however, that these privileges could just as easily be applied to the traditional form of family that is still considered the norm in North America and in other Anglo democracies—that is, a heterosexual couple with children. This type of family is, of course, a form of heterosexism, but it is also a family type that enjoys certain privileges that are not available to other family forms—single-parent and two-(same-sex)-parent families. The fact that a heterosexual "different-sex" couple lives together under the same roof triggers all kinds of societal assumptions about their individual worth, politics, life, and values and triggers a host of unearned advantages and powers for each of them (McIntosh 2003).

Traditional Family Privilege

- My children do not have to answer questions about why they have two different-sex parents.
- I have no difficulty finding neighbourhoods where people approve of our household.
- I will never be turned down on an application for housing because there are two parents.
- Our children are given texts and classes that implicitly support our kind of family unit and do not turn them against my choice of domestic partnership.
- I can travel alone with my family without expecting embarrassment or hostility from those who deal with us.
- Most people I meet will see my marital arrangements as an asset to my life or as a favourable comment on my likeability, my competence, and my mental health.
- I can talk about the social event of the weekend without fearing most listeners' reactions.
- I will feel welcomed and "normal" in the usual walks of public life, both institutional and social.
- As a male adult in a traditional family unit, I can be seen as all right if I work in traditional areas of women's work—nursing, hairdressing, and so on—because I do not live with men.

Excerpted & paraphrased from McIntosh, Peggy (2003). 'White privilege and male privilege', in Michael Kimmel and Abby Ferber, eds., Privilege: A Reader. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Non-Disability Privilege

- Because I do not have to be concerned about my disability status, I can simply regard myself as a human being.
- I can be assured that most people do not assume I am incapable of a sex life or of having children.

- I am not likely to be singled out at school based on stereotypes that underestimate my abilities and be put in a special education class that doesn't allow me to develop my potential.
- I am not likely to be shuttled into some dead-end, menial job, given inadequate job training, paid less than I am worth regardless of my ability, or separated from other workers on the job.
- I can ask for help without worrying that people will assume I need help with everything.
- I don't have to deal with an endless and exhausting stream of attention to a disability status and can simply take my non-disability status for granted.
- I can succeed without people being surprised because they have low expectations of my ability to contribute to society.
- I can pretty well be assured that heroes, role models, and respected people will share my non-disabled status.
- I can be assured that when I express my ideas, they will not be dismissed or ignored but will be taken more seriously than if I were disabled.
- I can have access to polling stations on election day and vote in privacy without the help of others.
- When I go out in public, I can be pretty sure that I will not be stared at or looked at as odd or not belonging and that most buildings will be accessible to me.
- I can be assured that I will usually be taken seriously and not treated like a child.
- I assume that when I need to travel, I will have access to buses, trains, airplanes, and other means of transportation.
- I am assured that wherever I go, most people will not feel awkward or uncomfortable around me.
- I am assured that I can participate actively in mainstream society and will not be segregated into living situations such as nursing homes or into special schools and sports programs.

Thanks to Allan G. Johnson (2006) for the above examples of non-disability privileges.

Young Adult and Middle-Age Privilege

- I do not have to endure people yelling at me because they assume I cannot hear.
- I can be assured that people will not infantilize me by talking "baby talk" to me.
- I am assured that other people will not try to make decisions for me, often without consultation.
- I am not likely to be viewed as a burden on society and as draining the country's resources.

Continued

- I do not have to experience people assuming that I am stupid or cannot do anything for myself.
- I do not have to endure receiving endless advertisements in the mail for funeral arrangements, estate planning, pension and insurance schemes, nursing-home care, and specials on incontinence supplies.
- I am not likely to feel useless, lonely, and suicidal because of my age or to have people pity me because they assume I am lonely and useless.
- I can be assured that people will not equate my age with illness and infirmity.
- I am assured that people will not consider me as incapable of having a sex life or that if I do, it must be because I am a "dirty old man."
- I don't have to endure being called "dear" or "love" by people I don't even know.
- I do not have a steady stream of people coming to my door lying to me about what my house needs and trying to rip me off with various questionable products and schemes.
- I can pretty well be assured that characters my age in the movies or on television will not be made fun of because of their age.
- I am not likely to be referred to in derogatory terms such as an "old fuddy-duddy" or "dirty old man" or "you old fart" or told that I am "over the hill."
- I do not have to endure colleagues discounting my scholarship without even reading it because they assume it must be out of date or just contains old ideas.

Social Work and Privilege

Because everyone in society is affected by oppression and privilege and because everyone grows up within and participates in systems of privilege and oppression, we can say that privilege is an issue for social workers personally and professionally and for social work organizations. Social workers generally are members of privileged groups. This is not to say that many social workers have not experienced oppression or are not members of oppressed groups. Overall, however, they enjoy many of the privileges outlined earlier in this chapter by virtue of their race, job, education, middle-class status, professional status, economic status, age, non-disability, and so on. In addition, a service user quickly learns that the social worker often has control over the resources that the service user needs and has decision-making power over certain aspects of the service user's life that the service user does not have over the social worker's (Marsiglia and Kulis 2009). Unfortunately, just as privilege is not handled very well by privileged people generally, so too are social workers and social work organizations often oblivious to or in denial of privilege issues in the course of their social work practice. As argued earlier, members of privileged groups are not only more likely than subordinate groups to believe that existing inequalities are legitimate and natural, they also are more likely to act in their own self-interests and are encouraged to do so (Sidanius and Pratto, 1999). So, a crucial question for social work and for those who believe in social justice is, what would encourage people with privilege to give up their privilege and seek greater social equality?

Table 3.1 Assumptions of Order and Conflict Perspectives

	Order	Conflict/Change
Beliefs about human beings	competitive, contentious, individualistic, acquisitive	co-operative, collective, social
Nature of social institutions	must endure and regulate human interactions (political, economic, educational, religious, family) to avoid disorder	dynamic, with no sacred standing; facilitate economic co-operation, sharing, and common interests
Nature of society	consists of interdependent and integrated institutions and a supportive ideological base; viewed as an organism or system with each part contributing to the maintenance of the whole	in a society of structural inequality, the social nature of human existence is denied, with social institutions seen as serving private rather than public interests
Continuity of social institutions	prevail because of agreement (consensus) among society's members	prevail in a society marked by dominant–subordinate relations because of control and coercion
Nature of relationship between people and society	members are expected to conform and adapt to consensus-based social arrangements	acceptance, conformity, and adaptation to a coercive and hierarchical social order is questioned; faulty socialization is more a matter of discriminatory institutions and defective rules that promote the interests of the dominant group
Nature of social problems	socialization will occasionally fail whereby reverence for institutions and respect for rules will not be learned; such occurrence on a large scale is a social problem	institutions, ideology, and social processes and practices must be changed to protect the social nature of human existence and promote the celebration of cultural diversity
Approach to social problems	a) behaviour must be changed through resocialization (rehabilitation, counselling) or neutralized through formal systems of state control (criminal law, prisons, asylums, etc.) b) social reform can only involve minor adjustments that are consistent with the nature of the existing system	behavioural change can only involve minor adjustments consistent with co-operative and collective nature of society; massive commitment to behavioural change is a form of blaming the victim
Social work theories and approaches	psychodynamic, systems, ecological, behavioural, problem-solving, strengths perspective	feminist, radical, structural, anti-racist, narrative therapy, just therapy, anti-oppressive

Table 3.2 Key Contrasts between Social Order and Conflict Perspectives

Theoretical perspective	Assumptions about society	Assumptions about dominant values	Assumptions about social inequality	Assumptions about social change	Assumptions about theory
Social Order Theory	Society is the crucial regulator that prevents people from acting in their narrow self-interest and makes it possible for large groups of people to live relatively peaceful and productive lives.	Social order is maintained by a strong set of shared norms and values, as well as by a strong state. A healthy society will promote shared values and a common culture.	People will accept inequality provided that they believe that the overall system is fair and that people at the low end of society have the chance to move up the ranks if they work hard.	Change is sometimes necessary in order to eliminate unjust practices that threaten continued order and stability. Meaningful social change can be imposed from above.	Theory should be developed as a tool to help us understand how to maintain order.
Conflict Theory	Society is not free, fair, and based on equality for all; rather, society is organized around fundamental inequalities that privilege some groups and individuals and disadvantage others.	Dominant norms and values, as well as the powers of the state, effectively support the ruling order and marginalize subordinate groups. A common culture hides these realities.	Inequality plays a central role in shaping modern societies. The privilege of certain groups is maintained through the exploitation of other groups.	Substantive social change occurs when subordinate groups actively challenge the existing social order and construct new forms of social relations. Meaningful social change must come from below.	Theory is a tool to help unleash human capacities by challenging the power structure that keeps disadvantaged groups down.

Source: Sears and Cairns 2010, 23.

Table 3.3 Selected Conventional and Progressive Social Work Perspectives/Approaches

Conventional (consensus-order-based)		Progressive* (conflict-change-based)
personal change (goal = change the person)	*person-in-environment* (goal = personal change and/or limited social change)	*fundamental social change* (goal = social transformation)
• psychodynamic • behavioural • client-centred • psycho-social • clinical • family therapies • casework	• general systems theory • ecosystems (ecological) • life-model • problem-solving • strengths perspective	• feminist social work • Marxist • radical • structural • anti-racist • anti-oppressive • critical postmodern • post-colonial • Indigenous (decolonization) • narrative therapy • just therapy

Note: Any of the above can be used within a critical or progressive framework, although traditionally this has rarely occurred.

* Progressive social work today recognizes that fundamental social change cannot occur without fundamental personal change also occurring. Earlier versions of progressive social work tended to emphasize structural changes and psychological preparation to participate in social change activities but gave little or no consideration to the impact of oppressive structures on oppressed groups and how to respond to them in a way that was meaningful.

problems, because although the system might not be perfect, mainstream social workers believed that it was the best one possible and could not be transformed but only fine-tuned to help meet human need.

In contrast to the conventional view, the progressive or critical view does not hold that our present social institutions are capable of adequately meeting human need. Social workers holding this view are quick to point out that in spite of the existence of a social welfare state as well as social work interventions over most of the past century, social problems are not decreasing but, on the contrary, appear to be worsening. They also point to the growing gap between rich and poor, to the worsening plight of traditionally disadvantaged groups in the face of globalization, to the resurrection of conservatism, and to the social control functions of welfare programs and social work practice as proof that the present set of social arrangements does not work for large numbers of people.

Although there has always been a progressive or radical contingent within social work, theirs has been a minority voice. However, the contingent's numbers have been growing over the past three decades, as have their challenges to the conventional view. For example, whereas only a few radical or progressive social work courses were offered in Canadian schools of social work

reinforce social relations of superiority, and they can take a number of forms: *micro-assaults* or hurting through name-calling, exclusion, or discrimination; *micro-insults* or demeaning of identity; and *micro-invalidations* or the undermining of lived experience. Regardless of the form, micro-aggressions result in "attributional ambiguity" (Sue et al. 2007) or second-guessing if what happened really just happened. In this way, micro-aggressions contribute to internalized oppression (David and Derthick, 2014) and can produce reactions similar to those of other chronic stressors (Gonzalez, Simard, Baker-Demaray, and Iron Eyes 2014). Micro-aggressions include

- veiled compliments such as highlighting the exception to the anticipated norm—*you are so articulate*
- codes of silence such as not acknowledging a form of discrimination in order to preserve the social order—*I am sure they likely had the best intentions*
- erasing lived experience—*Canada is a safe country to live in,* or *I don't see colour,* or *anyone can succeed if they just work hard enough*
- reinforcing second-class or alien status—*oh I thought you were the waiter,* or *where are you from?*
- ascribing dangerousness, criminality, sexual deviance—*I am surprised they let you become a teacher*
- fetishizing/pathologizing difference—*you are such an exotic beauty,* or *your people are so emotional*
- exclusion—not looking at, or not including in emails, or speaking about as if the person was not present
- environmental—rivers named after only white male explorers or only Christmas songs playing in stores after October

Rather than overt sexism, racism, and so on, the above are examples of covert acts of oppression or of oppression having gone underground. Many members of the dominant group exhibiting these aversive and unconscious acts would deny that they are prejudiced or that they acted in an oppressive way. In fact, many of these same people may be consciously committed to equality and respect for members of all social groups. This shows how entrenched sexism, racism, ageism, classism, and the like are in our individual, collective, and cultural psyches and why unconscious oppression is so difficult to counteract and eradicate. Unlike explicit acts of aggression and exclusion, acts of aversion and avoidance cannot be legislated against. There is no legal or policy remedy for this kind of oppression.

Effects of Oppression on the Individual

Thus far, this chapter has looked at acts of oppression that occur at the personal level—that is, acts of aversion or avoidance directed specifically (though not necessarily intentionally) at subordinate group members personally by dominant group members. The remainder of the chapter discusses the impact and effects of oppression on the individual who is oppressed. Of course,

oppression at any level (personal, cultural, or structural) is felt eventually by subordinate persons at the individual level. In effect, what exists is a three-headed monster (i.e., personal, cultural, and structural forms of oppression) that treats subordinate groups in an inhumane, unjust, and discriminatory manner. The oppressed person experiences the full impact of multiple-level oppression every day. Therefore, questions to be addressed here include the following: How does oppression affect one's identity or sense of self? How does it affect one's sense of location in society? And what effect does it have on the individual's self-esteem and other facets of the personal psyche? Obviously, identity is a complex and multifaceted concept, and its complete coverage is well beyond the reach of this book (or any other book). However, given its crucial relationship to oppression and, in turn, to anti-oppressive social work, a number of salient features of identity are summarized in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1 Selected Features of Identity

- Identity refers to the conditions or distinguishing features that mark or characterize or identify an individual.
- A person's identity may be based on one's name, social status, gender, race, personality, age, appearance, religion, geographical origin, etc.
- A person's identity is formed through interactions with others in a number of different domains simultaneously.
- Because many factors and many groups have a role in forming a person's identity, each of us has many identities. These identities intersect and overlap with one another, giving us privilege in some areas and oppression in others.
- The politicization of difference by the dominant group gives privilege to those attributes that it possesses at the expense of other groups and the means to maintain this privilege across all domains of society (i.e., across social, political, cultural, and economic realms).
- One of the ways that the dominant group maintains its privilege is that it is able to define subordinate groups in negative ways as different and inferior (i.e., the Other) and impose this identity on them. This identity of difference and inferiority is reinforced in the media, the education system, the political system, the church, literature, and other social institutions, which are all controlled by the dominant group.
- A contest is entered into with the dominant group attempting to maintain its privileged position and subordinate groups attempting to (re)claim their self-defined identity and sense of self, to become full-fledged citizens, and to achieve a society marked by social equality.
- The subordinate individual is not without power or agency. Because everyone has multiple identities, subordinate groups have alternative identities different from the ones imposed on them, some of which may be privileged. These privileged identities can be used for political purposes, such as affirming positive self-identities and deconstructing dominant categories of identity to neutralize their hegemonic potential.

Effects of Privilege on the Individual: Identity and Functioning

As described with oppression, privilege too affects both our personal and our social identities. The more privileged identities a person has, the greater access they have to opportunities, benefits, and status. Conversely, the fewer privileged identities one has, the greater marginalization they are likely to experience. As the Pie of Privilege (Figure 4.1) depicts, it is not a coincidence that

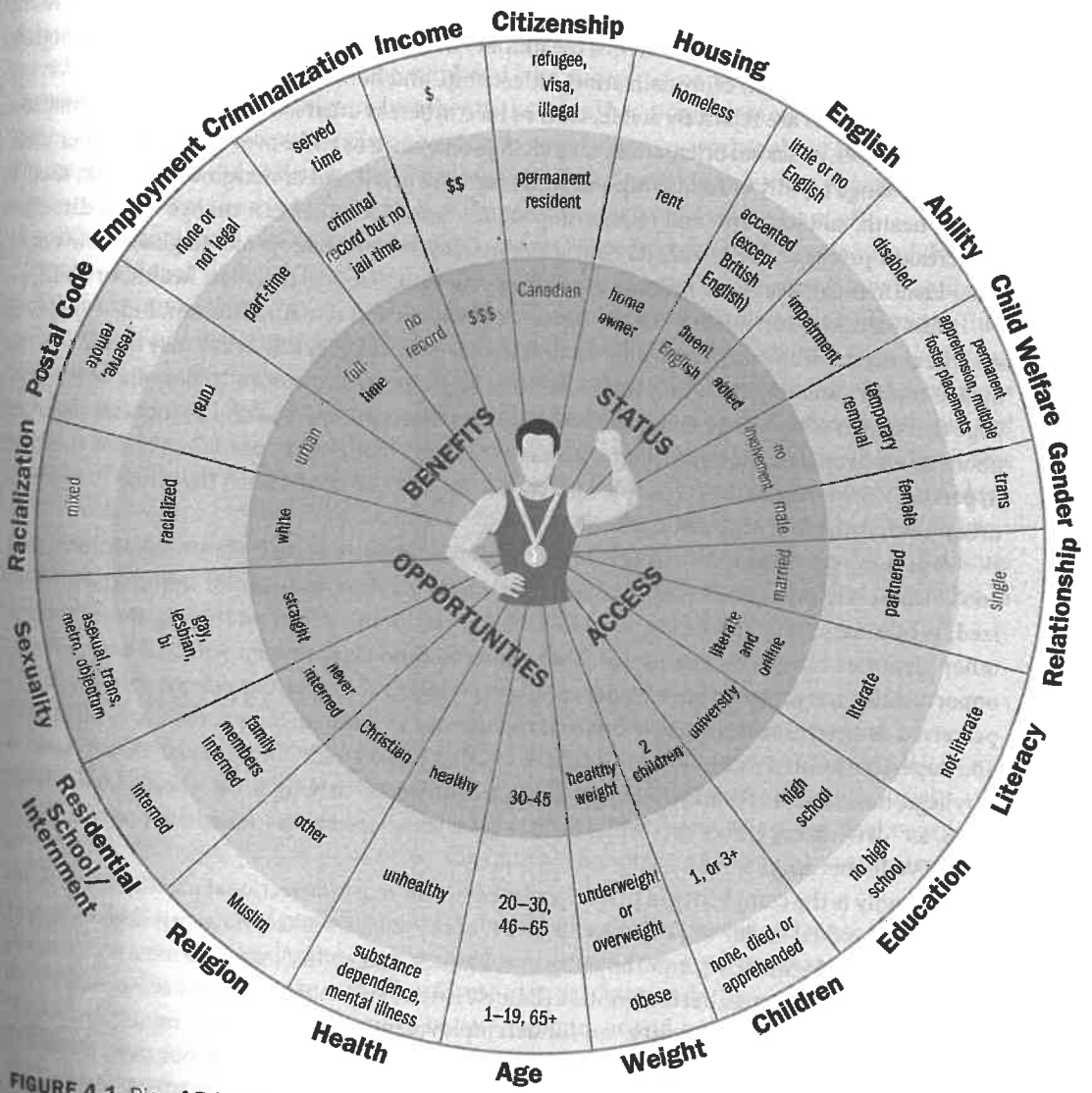

FIGURE 4.1 Pie of Privilege

Source: Juliana West, 2007, 2011, 2016. Thanks to Arnold, Burke, James, Martin, and Thomas (1991) for their inspirational Power Flower.

Table 5.1 Selected Characteristics of Cultural Studies

- Cultural studies aims to examine its subject matter in terms of **cultural practices and their relation to power.** Its constant goal is to expose power relationships and examine how these relationships influence and shape cultural practices.
- Cultural studies does not view culture as a discrete entity divorced from its social and political context. Its objective is to understand culture in all its complex forms and to analyze the **social and political context** within which it manifests itself.
- Culture in cultural studies always performs two functions: it is both the **object of study and the location of political criticism and action.** Cultural studies aims to be both an intellectual and a pragmatic enterprise.
- Cultural studies attempts to **expose and reconcile the division of knowledge,** to overcome the split between tacit (i.e., intuitive knowledge based on local cultures) and objective [or explicit] (so-called universal) forms of knowledge. It assumes a common identity and common interest between the knower and the known, between the observer and what is observed.
- Cultural studies is committed to a moral evaluation of modern society and to a radical line of political action. The tradition of cultural studies is not one of value-free scholarship but of social reconstruction by critical political involvement. Thus, cultural studies aims to **understand and change the structures of domination** everywhere but in industrial capitalist societies in particular.

Source: Sardar, Ziauddin, and Borin Van Loon (2004). Introducing Cultural Studies. Thriplow, Royston, UK: Icon Books. p. 9.

For all the above reasons, we followed Neil Thompson's lead (1997, 2002) and included culture in the first edition of this book in 2002 (informed by "cultural studies") as one area or level where oppression, resistance, and anti-oppressive practice can occur. Since that time, although lip service has been paid, little serious treatment of culture from a critical perspective has appeared in the literature on anti-oppressive social work practice in Canada or the United Kingdom or the United States. Yes, books and articles have been written on multicultural social work, culturally sensitive and culturally competent social work practice, and social work practice with diverse populations, but as will be discussed below, these approaches tend to equate culture with race (except for the white race) and/or ethnicity (for example, see *Multicultural Social Work in Canada*, edited by Alean Al-Krenawi and John Graham, 2003) or equate it with diversity (for example, see *Diversity and Social Work in Canada*, edited by Alean Al-Krenawi, John Graham, and Nazim Habibov, 2016) and contribute very little to anti-oppressive practice (see Nelson and McPherson 2003 for an insightful analysis on this point). Seldom is there any discussion of dominant, subordinate, and alternative cultures, or oppressive stereotypes and how to confront them, or dominant discourses and counter-discourses, or cultural issues outside of racial or ethnic groups. Nor is there any discussion of Western culture (Nelson and McPherson 2003). Where is the discussion on class culture, disability culture, non-heterosexist cultures, or cultures related to primary language spoken, religion, country of birth/adoption, age, or on the multi-dimensional nature

Table 5.2 Critical Social Theories of Culture

Marx and ideology	• Ideology creates the mystifications to protect capitalism • Dominant ideology is portrayed as promoting everyone's best interests • Culture acts as an opiate for the masses • We lose distinction between what is real and illusionary
Reification and hegemony	• Lukács's concept of reification explains how the system is presented as natural and inevitable • Gramsci's theory of hegemony describes how all systems reproduce dominant ideology and are replicated by the language people use
The Frankfurt School and the culture industry	• Culture is inseparable from the economy • The culture industry diverts attention away from social issues • Manufactures compliance through false needs and consumption
The Birmingham School and everyday cultural practices	• Everyday cultural practices reflect dominant ideology • Emphasizes "working class" culture
Postmodern perspectives on culture	• Simulations replace reality • Marketing myths sell products and lifestyles • Media colonizes domestic space • Spectacles detract from content
Feminist, queer, and critical race perspectives on culture	• Politics of representation look at how marginalized groups are portrayed and audiences are positioned • Examines the intersectionality of gender, sexuality, normalcy, race • Media denounces existence of oppression while simultaneously reproducing it
New technology, media conglomerates, and globalization	• Technology and media intricately linked in shaping our leisure, our social relationships, and our identity • Media conglomerates ensure content supports corporate profit • Selective "news" manufactures consent

The cultural studies of the Birmingham School show us how the ruling hegemony is carried out at the level of everyday cultural practices that support a white, male, bourgeois, Eurocentric domination. Baudrillard helps us to see how strategies for social or political change are thwarted through simulations of reality more consistent with that of dominant groups than of subordinate groups. Feminist, queer, and critical race cultural studies help us to see how subordinate groups have integrated analysis, theory, and practice into a politics of recognition, empowerment, and emancipation. Finally, new technology, media conglomerates, and globalization have identified how technology and economy are intricately linked in shaping our leisure, our social

social, economic, and political power) rather than the service users (Mullaly 2007). Many progressive social work writers have argued that the "culture of professionalism" is conservative, self-interested, and oriented towards the status quo. In effect, professionalism is for professionals, not for service users (Carniol 2000; Galper 1980; Hardy 1981a; Laursen 1975; Mullaly 2007; Wagner and Cohen 1978).

Professionalism contains elements of oppression not only for service users but also for the profession as a whole and for certain groups of social workers in particular. An example may help to clarify this. Recall the discussion in Chapter 1 of "powerlessness," one of Young's (1990) five faces of oppression. It was noted that the norms of respectability in our society are associated with a professional culture—professional dress, speech, tastes, and demeanour. It was also noted that professional respectability tends to be associated with white males, who dominate the professions. White males are still overrepresented in the traditional professions of medicine, law, and engineering. And it is not just a matter of domination by numbers but also a matter of domination in terms of those who hold the powerful positions in the professions.

Table 5.3 12-Step Recovery Program for Professionals

My name is _____ and I am a recovering professional.
(fill in your name)

1. I admit to believing that I had no useful skills or knowledge—unless I called myself a "professional."
2. I came to believe that as a "professional," I could fix people and solve their problems.
3. I came to believe that "professionalism" was not a way to distance myself from service users.
4. I admit to calling myself a "professional" in an attempt to cover up my insecurities and self-doubts.
5. I came to believe that the "professional relationship" is not hierarchical. Just because I am the expert doesn't mean that we're not equals.
6. I came to convince myself that wearing expensive clothes and driving a fancy car did not separate me from my resource-poor service users. After all, we're all just people.
7. I admit to adding my professional credentials to everything I wrote or signed.
8. I admit to sending a memo (with my name and credentials) to people rather than bothering to talk to them.
9. I admit to using my voice mail to screen certain difficult people.
10. I admit to saying, "Call me, and we'll do lunch."
11. I admit to using professional jargon, acronyms, discourse, and my prolific propensity for elite, exclusionary vocabulary to impress, overpower, intimidate, and distance people.
12. I admit to embracing "professionalism" without taking into account its undermining effects on my stated beliefs in social justice, egalitarianism, and other social work values and ideals.

along lines of gender and race (and other social divisions). This shows how difficult it is to work and practise in a way that confronts, resists, and attempts to change the larger culture. An anti-oppressive social work practice is not restricted to working with people experiencing social problems. It must include social workers working with each other in ways that (1) do not reproduce the inequalities of the larger society, (2) challenge attitudes and agency cultures that moralize social problems and blame their victims, (3) do not ascribe all social problems to individual deficiency (Mullaly 2007), and (4) avoid the pursuit of a professional culture of respectability gained at the expense of others.

Privilege at the Cultural Level

How best can we understand privilege at the cultural level? Kimmel (2014) offers the presence of wind as a metaphor for privilege. When wind is behind you, it is often imperceptible—when in front, it is palpable. When I (Juliana) am walking with a wind at my back, I find I have a bounce in my step, a lightness in my journey. When I drive my car and the wind is blowing in from behind (a tailwind), I get improved gas mileage and I find myself accidentally speeding. In both circumstances I find myself ascribing the speediness I enjoy either to my fitness or to my excellent choice of car. I rarely notice or acknowledge the wind unless it is blowing against me as a headwind. When I am walking against a strong headwind, I feel the effort of each step, the chill on my cheeks, the tears in my eyes. When driving against a headwind, I grip the steering wheel with both hands and notice a cramp in my foot from pressing the accelerator without pause. In other words, when I experience a headwind, I am very aware of its presence and the extra effort it takes me to get through my day. As we discussed in the previous chapters, the personal privilege one enjoys is much like a tailwind, because it is often unnoticed by the beholder. The lack of personal privilege, like a headwind, however, is all too evident for those affected. This is also true at the cultural level. Examples of privilege at the cultural level (such as gender, sexuality, ability, religion, location, class, or age) include the following:[14]

1. I can see people like me widely and positively depicted on television, in the movies, in magazines, and in bestsellers and children's books.
2. I am considered an authority even where I have no competency (e.g., mansplaining or whitesplaining).
3. In music, film, print, and art, I am reflected as a hero, leader, moral role model, and general good person despite having serious flaws.
4. When I talk about my intimate relationships or crushes, I will not be accused of flaunting my sexuality or talking about something gross.
5. Cooking shows are dedicated to the staple foods that I eat and enjoy.
6. I am comfortable in knowing that the education my children receive portrays my family in a respected status.
7. I am a citizen of a country considered to be part of the "first" and "developed" world.
8. My ethnicity is not reduced to a caricature of addiction, poverty, servitude, or dangerousness.

> One day we awake into a context—family, culture, language, ethnoracial identity, class status, country of birth and/or adoption, and sex, and physical and mental ability. . . . In each category there is a position that is considered normal [privileged]. If one is not in this group, one is seen as the "other" and is subject to the oppressions [i.e., Young's five faces of oppression] of marginalization, exploitation, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and possibly violence [Sisneros et al. 2008, 70].

Our position along the continuum of each characteristic in the web of oppression/privilege is an indicator of our status or identity. Our positions can change over time with respect to some of the characteristics in the web, which would be accompanied by a change in our status or identity. For example, one's social and economic position can change, as can one's health status. Positions on the multi-dimensional spectrum influence social, economic, and political opportunities.

Although the web in Figure 8.3 was developed for an American readership, it also has relevance to other jurisdictions. The web is a model that allows us to examine the position of an

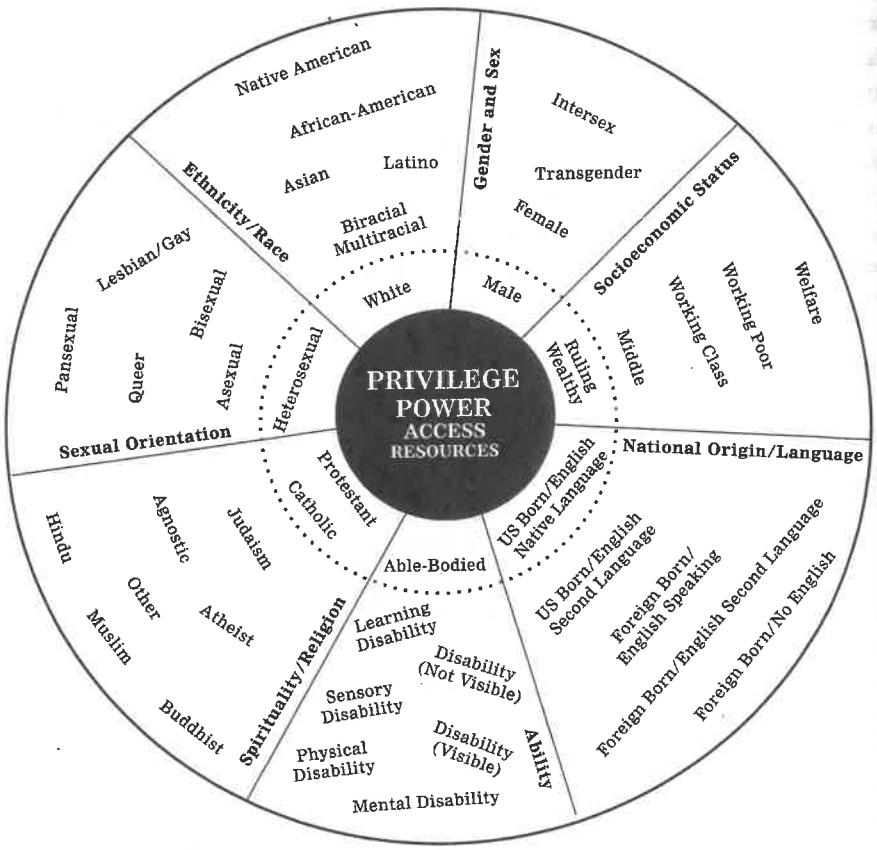

FIGURE 8.3 Web of Oppression

Table 9.1 Anti-Oppressive Practice Strategies at the Personal Level

DECONSTRUCT AND SHARE POWER

- **Promote empowerment** (Barnoff and Coleman 2007)
  - *Provide additional resources* (Hill 2010)
  - *Share knowledge* about and support system navigation (Barnoff and Coleman 2007)
- **Engage in consciousness-raising** and educate service users (Barnoff and Coleman 2007)
- Work from the analysis of **the personal is political** (Mullaly 2007)
  - Use *normalization* to frame experiences as part of the fabric of oppression (Mullaly 2007)
  - *Reframe, deconstruct, and reconstruct* (Mullaly 2007)
  - Use *dialogical communication* (Mullaly 2007)
- **Be forthright** about competencies and services offered (Hill 2010)
  - *Be clear about limits* to confidentiality and risks to service users (Hill 2010)
- **Engage authentically** (Barnoff and Coleman 2007)
- **Commit to professional self-care as ethical duty** (Carroll, Gilroy, and Murra, 1999)

BE A GOOD ALLY

- **Inform yourself** (Bishop 2002; Glick 2012)
  - *Understand oppression:* its origins, its intersectionality, its dialectic nature (Bishop 2002)
  - *Understand the myths and processes* that maintain oppression and privilege (Bishop 2002)
  - *Educate yourself on the differences and similarities* marginalized groups experience (Bishop 2002)
- **Become a worker in your own liberation** (Bishop 2002)
- **Act with humility** (Glick 2012)
  - *Be willing to risk making mistakes* (Glick 2012)
  - *Avoid liberal paternalism* (placating, avoiding honest and respectful dialogue) (Glick 2012)
  - *Follow the leadership from marginalized groups* (Glick 2012)
  - *Listen, shut up, learn* (Pease 2010)
  - *Listen more* and use your voice to support ideas and ask for further elaboration (Crass 2012)
  - *Earn the right to dialogue, learn the obstacles that impede learning* (Pease 2010)
- **Be willing to risk conflict** with members of one's privileged group (Glick 2012)
- **Educate** other service providers (Barnoff and Coleman 2007)
- **Maintain hope** (Bishop 2002)

discursive practices—the powerful ideas and assumptions of particular discourses—but power is also manifest in "resistance"—the ability of an individual or group to struggle against oppression (Thompson 1998). The notion of resistance provides oppressed people and anti-oppressive social workers with a powerful tool of empowerment for confronting and challenging oppression. Resistance is discussed more fully in the next section of this chapter.

Heterosexual Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions as honestly as possible.

1. What do you think caused your heterosexuality?
2. When and how did you first decide you were heterosexual?
3. Is it possible that your heterosexuality is just a phase you may grow out of?
4. Is it possible that your heterosexuality stems from a fear of others of the same sex?
5. If you have never slept with a member of your own sex, is it possible that you might be gay if you tried it?
6. If heterosexuality is normal, why are so many mental patients heterosexual?
7. Why do you heterosexual people try to seduce others into your lifestyle?
8. Why do you flaunt your heterosexuality? Can't you just be who you are and keep it quiet?
9. The great majority of child molesters are heterosexual. Do you consider it safe to expose your children to heterosexual teachers?
10. With all the societal support that marriage receives, the divorce rate is spiralling. Why are there so few stable relationships among heterosexual people?
11. Why are heterosexual people so promiscuous?
12. Would you want your children to be heterosexual, knowing the problems they would face, such as heartbreak, disease, and divorce?

Created by Martin Rochlin, PhD, January 1977, and reprinted from *Creating Safe Space for GLBTQ Youth: A Toolkit* (Washington: Advocates for Youth, 2005).

Young argues that when oppressed groups assert the value and specificity of their own cultures, the dominant culture becomes relative or is "relativized." In other words, it becomes more difficult for the dominant group to present its norms, values, and patterns of thinking as neutral and universal. When women, LGBTTQ persons, people of colour, and other oppressed groups assert the validity, positive values, self-development, and traditions of their particular cultures, the dominant culture is forced to see itself as one specific culture (i.e., Anglo, white, straight, Christian, masculine) among many. Young (1990, 166) elaborates on this point: "By puncturing the universalist claim to unity that expels some groups and turns them into the Other, the assertion of positive group specificity introduces the possibility of understanding the relation between groups as merely difference, instead of exclusion, opposition, or dominance."

Challenging the Organization

Most social workers work in agencies, whether public or private. Most agencies were established within a conservative or liberal paradigm and therefore tend to reflect such fundamental beliefs and values as (1) capitalism is not perfect but is the best system there is, and therefore social work should attempt to help people hurt by the system to cope with it and fit into it; (2) social agencies

Table 9.2 Anti-Oppressive Practice Strategies at the Cultural Level: Organizations

IDEOLOGY **Does the organization officially or unofficially espouse anti-oppressive/anti-privilege beliefs?**

- Does it understand that personal troubles are caused by oppression?
- Does it understand that systems perpetuate marginalization?

VALUES **Are the guiding values based on notions of anti-oppression and anti-privilege, deconstruction and sharing of power, intersectionality, mutuality, reciprocity, reflexivity, support, co-operation, collaboration, strengths-based, rights-based, equity seeking, democratic participation/decision-making, empowerment, seeking people's lived experiences, consciousness-raising, social action, and person-centred?**

GOALS **Are the goals to pursue social justice, reduce oppression, or influence political transformation?**

STRUCTURE **Is the structure democratic, collective, flattened, or of minimized hierarchy?**

- *Is power deconstructed and shared?*
  - Is leadership democratic and participatory?
  - Does leadership promote and model shared decision-making processes, group and relational supervision processes, and a reorganization of hierarchy?
    - Does the leader's title and/or office reflect the guiding values; are the title and office representative of function rather than status?
    - Does the leadership model shared administrative tasks?
- *Does the leadership encourage, inspire, and reward critical thinking?*

PRACTICES **Do staff treat each other and individuals accessing services in ways consistent with the guiding values?**

- *Is the work environment a collaborative team?*
  - Are decision-making processes consensual?
  - Are salaries/benefits and office space allocated based on equity and contribution?
- *Is there a demonstrated concern for staff mental health, self-care, and safety?*
  - Are policies, processes, and services social justice and client-centred?
  - Is there ongoing anti-oppression and anti-privilege training?
  - Does the culture facilitate problematizing socially constructed values and power dynamics?
  - Does the organizational structure support wellness?
- *Is the knowledge informing service delivery derived from critical theories, research, and service users' lived experience?*

Continued

Ways of Challenging or Resisting Oppression in the Agency

- Push for definitions of problems and solutions that are grounded in people's lived realities, and do not blame victims (also ensure that case recordings reflect these realities).
- Every staff meeting or supervisory session is an opportunity to raise questions about traditional assumptions and conventional approaches.
- Circulate articles that contain structural analyses of problems dealt with by your agency.
- Bring in anti-oppressive speakers who have different analyses than the agency does.
- Work through your union or professional association to bring attention to work requirements that force workers to hurt service users.
- Develop brochures and other forms of information outlining the rights and entitlements of service users, and distribute them routinely.
- As a regular and routine part of your practice, refer all service users to existing alternative groups and organizations (to be discussed in the next chapter).
- Push for more peer and group supervision and decision-making.
- Seek out and network with sympathetic co-workers. Develop collective approaches and support others.
- Confront any behaviour or comments that defame/demean service users or reflect negative stereotypes.
- Have realistic expectations; accept that change takes time but is nonetheless worth pursuing.

In calling for social workers to become "organizational operators" (i.e., someone who seeks to have a positive influence on the organization), Thompson (1998) would add the following to the above list:

- Promote practice that is critically reflective.
- Make the value base of equality and the affirmation of difference open and explicit.

Protecting Ourselves from Reprisals

- Form a caucus or support group of like-minded people and use it for peer support and collective action.
- Know your agency—the legislation affecting it, agency policies, formal and informal power relations, points of vulnerability, who can and cannot be trusted—and use this knowledge strategically to promote anti-oppression.

- Become valuable to the agency by doing your work in a competent manner.
- Avoid adventurism and martyrdom.
- Work through your union or professional association to promote anti-oppression.
- Avoid militant confrontations. Searching questions are usually more effective than accusations or attacks.

Thompson (1998) presents a number of guidelines for "elegant challenging" by social workers. If challenging the punitive, moralistic, and/or oppressive actions or attitudes of others in the workplace is to be effective, one needs to

- be tactful and constructive rather than launch a personal attack;
- avoid "cornering people" and allow them to save face;
- choose an appropriate time and place for the challenge rather than present an immediate challenge;
- do not be punitive—the aim is to promote equality and anti-oppression, not to create unnecessary tensions and hostilities;
- acknowledge explicitly or implicitly the vulnerability of all of us with respect to oppressive practices;
- undertake the challenge in a spirit of compassion and social justice rather than take the moral high ground.

Anti-Privilege Practice at the Personal and Cultural Levels: What Can We Do?

What does anti-privilege practice look like at the personal level, how do we practise anti-privilege at the cultural level, and how do we commit ourselves to it when it seems easier to just keep quiet? How do we authentically examine our own privilege when we still experience the assaults of oppression? How can we encourage the people close to us to look at their own privilege, and how can we facilitate their burgeoning awareness when they avow they were not given anything they did not work very hard to get? How do we adopt a pedagogy that facilitates privilege awareness and anti-privilege practice among students? And how do we use the privilege we have to work for social justice?

These are important questions and their answers are not easy. But if we want to challenge oppression then we must confront our privilege. Peggy McIntosh (2012), nearly 25 years after inviting us to unpack our invisible knapsacks, cautions us that if we do not examined privilege, our efforts to reduce oppression are compromised: "I am convinced that studies of oppression will not go anywhere toward ending oppression unless they are accompanied by understanding of [*sic*] the systems of privilege that cause the systems of oppression" (204).

We need to understand what privilege is and what it is not and how it manifests in all its rarely visible but always intersectional processes. Our decision to include privilege and

Table 9.3 Anti-Privilege Practice Strategies at the Personal Level

AWARENESS

- **Take responsibility for own growth and learning** (Walz 2012)
  - *Unpeel the layers* and "go deep and go personal" (Crass 2013, 144)
  - *Work through your own guilt* (Crass 2013)
    - Do not ask or expect marginalized individuals to take care of you (Walz 2012)
  - In a mixed group, *keep track of how much you speak*, how much you listen, and who you listen to (Crass 2012)
  - *Read* about other people's paths to activism (Crass 2013)
- **Acknowledge that oppression and privilege exist** and interact at the personal, cultural, and structural levels (Johnson 2006)
  - Develop an intersectional analysis of capitalism, patriarchy, heterosexism, whiteness, and colonization (Crass 2013)
- **Pay attention** to authors, activists, individuals, and groups who are challenging and furthering your awareness (Johnson 2006)
  - *Go to meetings*, rallies, and events to learn (Crass 2012)
  - *Understand you will be helpful only after you realize you are not needed* (Crass, 2012), act with humility, receive the encouragement of others, accept your and others' mistakes, engage with your heart
  - *Learn to listen* to people who can help you check your privilege (Johnson 2006)

ACTION

- **A little bit, Everyday**
- **Little risks. Do something** (Johnson 2006)
  - *Commit to praxis—action with reflection* (Crass 2013)
  - *Make noise and be seen* (Johnson 2006)—speak up
  - *Be brave and creative* (McIntosh 2012)
    - *Become a traitor to privilege* (Pease 2010)
    - *Find little ways of getting off the paths of least resistance* (Johnson 2006)
      - *Choose and model alternative paths* (Johnson 2006)—speak up
      - *Develop social justice, social change interests* (Pease 2010)
      - *Challenge social practices* that normalize privilege (Pease 2010)
        - *Participate* in the work that is traditionally considered subordinate work (child-rearing, cleaning, secretarial, nurturing, running errands). Notice and thank people who do this work (Crass 2013)
    - *Dare to make people feel uncomfortable* (Johnson 2006)—speak up
      - *Reclaim words* (Johnson 2006) such as racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, oppression, violence, or privilege over sanitized and inaccurate words
      - *Address privilege with family and friends* (Walz 2012)

effectiveness. Effective education requires modelling reflexivity and critical reflectivity and using exercises where observations and understanding can be integrated cognitively and emotionally. These strategies highlight the importance of not asking or expecting marginalized individuals to speak for their represented group, educate their privileged peers, or defend their experiences. And finally, these strategies stress the importance of offering opportunities to translate awareness into action.

Table 9.4 Anti-Privilege Strategies at the Cultural Level: Anti-Privilege Pedagogy and Educating Others

Introduce privilege as an intersectional process, intimately linked with oppression and based on socially constructed classifications (Ferber and Herrera 2013)

- Emphasize privilege as *unearned invisible group advantages* (Case 2013a)
- Identify that *privilege carries benefits* and perpetuates oppression (Bradley and Nash 2009)
- Discuss layers of privilege within marginalized identities and layers of marginalization within privileged identities (Coston and Kimmel 2012)
- Discuss the *costs of privilege*—internalized prejudice and bias, unhealthy entitlement and lack of stamina when facing obstacles, being part of the problem (Wise and Case 2013)
- *Link structural privilege* with personal privilege (Wise and Case 2013)

Explain the emotional processes involved when increasing privilege awareness—defensiveness, guilt, race to innocence, entitlement, fear, belief in meritocracy (Wise and Case 2013)

- Explain why dominant groups perceive their *experience as normal* and not privileged (Case 2012; Pratto and Stewart 2012)
- Explain *paths of least resistance* and distancing (Case 2012)

Give topics the respect and time they deserve—nothing good is completed in 2 hours (Hunter 2012)

- Use *conversation starters*—asking to clarify, validating, paraphrasing, assuming the best, using I statements, providing evidence for one's assertions (Bradley and Nash 2009)
- Avoid *conversation stoppers*—arguing, personal attacks, stereotyping, self-promotion, preaching from religious texts (Bradley and Nash 2009)

Model reflexivity (Case 2013a; Wise and Case 2013)

- Facilitate *transferable understandings* (Case 2012)—women's experience with sexism as a source of empathetic imagining of heterosexism
- Ask students to note *observations about their own privilege* (Armstrong and Wildman 2013)
- Connect *intersectionality and focus on everyday privileges*, not economic privilege—for example, the "How did you get to this classroom today?" exercise (Wise and Case 2013)
- Raise awareness through news stories or case vignettes and switch privileged identities for marginalized identities (Armstrong and Wildman 2013)

Continued

Ensure marginalized individuals feel safe and are not expected to represent their group or educate their peers (Blackwell 2010), or defend their experiences (Case 2013a)

Offer opportunities to channel awareness into action leading to social change (Case 2013a; Ferber and Herrera 2013)

- Shift *motivation from paternalism to self-interest* (Bradley and Nash 2009)
- Reframe *privilege as a responsibility* to be used for social change (Case 2012)
- Identify *action as "a way of life . . . a lifestyle"* (Case 2012, 87)
- *Interrupt privilege*—speak up when people make assumptions and judgments (Case 2012)
- Make *anti-privilege part of the agenda* (Johnson 2006)
- Practise noticing and questioning who is represented, who is consulted, who has power (Crass 2012)

A number of writers advocate that members of privileged groups become "allies" of subordinate groups and work collectively to overcome relationships of privilege and oppression (e.g., Sisneros et al. 2008; Bishop 2002). In her book *Becoming an Ally: Breaking the Cycle of Oppression*, Anne Bishop presents a portrait of allies as persons who are socially aware, are connected with *all* other people, have a critical analysis of social structures, possess a collective orientation as opposed to one that is individualistic, have an acceptance of struggle and a sense of process, have an understanding of "power with" as opposed to "power over," and have a high degree of self-understanding, a knowledge of history, and an understanding that good intentions do not matter if there is no action against oppression. She makes the point that the same characteristics are typical of people who are well advanced in their own liberation process. Bishop (2002, 110) says of allies:

> [A]llies understand that, as part of various oppressor groups (white, male, able-bodied, heterosexual, middle or above in the class structure), they did not individually bring the situation [of oppression] about and they cannot just reach out with goodwill and solve it. They understand that they must act with others [not for others or on behalf of others] to contribute to change. They believe that to do nothing is to reinforce the *status quo*; . . . They take responsibility for helping to solve problems of historical injustice without taking on individual guilt. Most look for what they can do, with others, in a strategic way, and try to accept their limitations beyond that.

Allies would carry out most if not all of the activities outlined above with respect to confronting and trying to change systems of privilege. Bishop presents an extensive list of questions and guidelines that persons considering becoming an ally to oppressed groups should ask themselves. The most important guideline for being an ally, in our view, is that the role of the ally is to help or assist oppressed groups in any way they can in their struggle for liberation. Under no

Being privileged by education means we can share tactics, principles, and teachings from concurrent and historical movements. Having economic privilege means we can assist with donations or use our car to help with transportation. Having professional privilege means we can use our networks to spread the word and assist community activists in finding sponsors and new members. Being aware of our own privileges and oppressions means that when we participate, we can participate in social movements both as individuals and allies in our own liberation (Bishop 1994) and as anti-oppressive and anti-privilege social workers. Table 10.1 offers strategies for message-crafting and organizing for social movements.

Table 10.1 Anti-Privilege Strategies at the Structural Level: Social Movements

ORGANIZING

- **Study social movements and effective organizing** (Crass 2013), go to training programs and social justice conferences, go to events at progressive bookstores and food co-operatives
  - *Take leadership from* those who have experienced oppressions (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)
  - *Ask* people who have experienced particular oppressions for their perspective, analysis, and recommendations, ask what needs to be done (Crass 2012)
- **Use privilege to promote change** in how systems are organized around privilege (Johnson 2006)
  - *Challenge patriarchy* (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)
    - Speak up for feminist organizing principles (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)
    - Enable, don't dictate. Be supportive, visionary, creative, encouraging (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)
    - Speak up in favour of meetings not dominated by men (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)
      - Notice who is represented, who is consulted, who has power (Crass 2012)
    - Be first in volunteering for logistical work traditionally considered subordinate—child-minding, cleaning, secretarial, errand-running, calling volunteers (Crass 2013). When men take on much of the logistical work, women have more time to assume leadership positions (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)
      - Speak up for authentic participation in decision-making (Arnstein 1969)
- **Build bridges and solidarity** with other social movements (use social networks to connect to union, environmental, and social justice groups) (Crass 2013)
  - *Make new people feel welcome* (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)
    - Invest in people who want to come out and help, match them with a mentor, assist with transportation, child care, provide food
- **Praxis**—theory, action, reflection—makes perfect (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)
  - *Understand that social change is a process* intimately linked to individual awareness and growth requiring ongoing reflection, action and evaluation (Crass 2013)
    - Structure with clear processes for accountability is necessary and not the same as hierarchy (Boyd and Mitchell 2012)

- *Foster a "developmental organizing approach"* (Crass 2013, 274)
  - Study and share knowledge about the "patterns, stages, and common dynamics" (274) that help movements and individuals within movements reach goals as well as those factors that obstruct. Understand how momentum builds; how movements emerge, grow, and stagnate; how relationships, alliances, or factions develop; how leaders form and inspire; how goals can be set for each stage and processes can be anticipated; and how we can learn from similar endeavours and move collective understanding and prowess forward.
- *Focus on what went well, lessons learned, and opportunities presented* (Crass 2013)
  - What are members' strengths, what were the positives that may have been taken for granted, what was accomplished, and what were the teachings from each day/stage? Remember, most success is incremental with many sites for opportunities.
- *Incorporate "both/and" thinking* instead of right/wrong and either/or (Crass 2013)
- *"Show up, show up again,* show up even if it seems like there's no point and keep showing up" (Crass 2013, 247)

CRAFTING THE MESSAGE*

- **Know your audience**
  - *Understand if your audience is sympathetic,* neutral, hostile, or ambivalent towards you
  - *Know their preferences,* tastes, resistances, needs, fears
- **Tailor your message** to make it palatable
  - *Deliver the message artfully.* How you present your message is key, we reach people through their hearts to their minds
  - *Show, rather than tell*
    - Craft the message so that people themselves can arrive at the awareness you want
  - *Know the cultural terrain*
    - Use the medium that will be most effective
    - Partner with artists, videographers, graphic artists for mutually beneficial relationships
  - *Make the invisible obvious*
    - Make awareness real and close
    - Reframe issues to reveal injustice
  - *Practice the message, stick to the message, return to the message*

Source: *All points adapted from Boyd and Mitchell (2012).

Life in general and social work in particular might be a whole lot easier if we anti-oppressive and anti-privilege social workers just accepted the way things are and all became mainstream social work practitioners or academics. Certainly, our relationships in our workplaces, at least, would be much more pleasant. However, we think that mainstream social workers are much more susceptible to burnout than anti-oppressive and anti-privilege social workers. Their analysis and explanations of social problems do not explain the persistence of problems, nor does