Terminology in Anti-Oppression Practice (AOP)

Basic Terms

Anti-Oppression Practice: a person-centered philosophy; and egalitarian value system concerned with reducing the deleterious effects of structural inequalities upon people's lives; a methodology focusing on both process and outcome; and a way of structuring relationships between individuals that aims to empower users by reducing the negative effects of social hierarchies on their interaction and the work they do together. (Dominelli, 1994, p.3)

Diversity: "Diversity refers to the broad range of human experience, emphasizing the following identities or group memberships: race, class, ethnicity, national origin, color, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, age marital status, political belief, religion, mental or physical disability, immigration status, language and linguistics." (Portland State University, 2009)

Individual racism: "The beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can occur at both an unconscious and conscious level, and can be both active and passive" (Wijeyesinghe, Griffin & Lowe, 1997, p. 89).

Institutional racism:

- "The network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages and benefits for Whites, and discrimination, oppression, and disadvantage for people from targeted racial groups. The advantages to Whites are often invisible to them, or are considered "rights" available to everyone as opposed to "privileges" awarded to only some individuals and groups" (Wijeyesinghe, Griffin & Lowe, 1997, p. 93).
- Institutional racism consists of those established laws, customs and practices which systematically reflect and produce racial inequalities… whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have racist intentions (Jones, 1972, p.131)

Internalized Dominance: Occurs "when members of the agent group accept their group's socially superior status as normal and deserved" (Griffin, 1997, p. 76).

Internalized Oppression: Occurs "when members of the target group have adopted the agent group's ideology and accept their subordinate group status as deserved, natural, and inevitable" (Griffin, 1997, p. 76). Furthermore, "oppressed people usually come to believe the negative things that are said about them and even act them out" (Bishop, 1994, p. 131).

Power: "A relational force, not a fixed entity, that operates in all interactions. While it can be oppressive, power can also be enabling" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 116).

Privilege: "Privilege exists when one group has something of value that is denied to others simply because of the groups they belong to, rather than because of anything they've done or failed to do. Access to privilege doesn't determine one's outcomes, but it is definitely an asset that makes it more likely that whatever talent, ability, and aspirations a person with privilege has will result in something positive for them." (*Peggy McIntosh)*

Social justice: "Social justice is both a process and a goal that (1) seeks equitable (re)distribution of resources, opportunities and responsibilities; (2) challenges the roots of oppression and injustice; (3) empowers all people to enhance self-determination and realize their full potential; (4) and builds social solidarity and community capacity for collaborative action." (Portland State University, 2009)

White Privilege: "White privilege is the other side of racism. Unless we name it, we are in danger of wallowing in guilt or moral outrage with no idea of how to move beyond them. It is often easier to deplore racism and its effects than to take responsibility for the privileges some of us receive as a result of it...Once we understand how white privilege operates, we can begin addressing it on an individual and institutional basis." (*Paula Rothenberg*)

Advanced Terms

Agency: "(1) a common name given to an organization, private or public, that provides social services to people; (2) the capacity to act or to exert power" (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001, p. 345).

Ally: "A member of an oppressor group who works to end a form of oppression which gives her or him privilege. For example, a white person who works to end racism, or a man who works to end sexism" (Bishop, 1994, p. 126).

Conflict perspective: "A view that assumes divergent and competing interests in society, based on differences in power and influence" (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001, p. 345).

Consciousness-raising: "A process of educating people about the political and social policies that affect their lives. The term comes from the work of Paulo Freire (1970), a Brazilian educator, and involves increasing the awareness of people as active and knowing agents in deepening their understanding about the social and structural realities of their lives, and searching for a way to transform their lives through active participation in social change" (Heinonen & Spearman, 2001, p. 346).

Deconstruction: "Analysis that takes apart socially constructed categories as a way of seeing how a particular world is constructed" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 114).

Discourse: "A set of assumptions, socially shared and often unconscious, reflected in the language, that positions people who speak within them and frames knowledge" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 114).

Discrimination: "The prejudgment and negative treatment of people based on identifiable characteristics such as race, gender, religion, or ethnicity" (Barker, 1995, 103).

Ethnicity: "An orientation toward the shared national origin, religion, race, or language of a people. Ethnicity is a powerful determinant of an individual's patterns of feeling, thinking, and behaving" (Barker, 1995, 124).

Ethnocentrism: "An attitude that one's own culture, society, or group is inherently superior to all others. Ethnocentrism means an inability to appreciate others whose culture may include a different racial group, religion, morality, language, political system, economic system and so on" (Hick, 2002, p. 276).

Exploitation: "When a person or people control another person or people, they can make use of the controlled people's assets, such as resources, labour, and reproductive ability, for their own purposes. The exploiters are those who benefit, and the exploited are those who lose" (Bishop, 1994, p. 129-130).

Hegemony: "The construction and imposition of unified thinking that serves the interests of dominant groups, homogenizes difference, and disadvantages non-dominant groups" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 115).

Location: "The position of researchers, identified in terms not only of who they are, but of why they are doing the research, and what their subjectivities bring to their work" (Ristock & Pennell, 1996, p. 115).

Marginalized/margins: "Groups that have a history of oppression and exploitation are pushed further and further from the centres of power that control the shape and destiny of the society. These are the margins of society, and this is the process of marginalization" (Bishop, 1994, p. 133).

Prejudice: "An opinion about an individual, group, or phenomenon that is developed without proof or systematic evidence. This prejudgment may be favourable but is more often unfavourable and may become institutionalized in the form of a society's laws or customs" (Barker, 1995, 290).

Stereotype: "An undifferentiated, simplistic attribution that involves a judgment of habits, traits, abilities, or expectations and is assigned as a characteristic to all members of a group regardless of individual variation and with no attention to the relation between the attributions and the social contexts in which they have arisen" (Weinstein & Mellen, 1997, p. 175).

Tokenism: "A dominant group sometimes promotes a few members of an oppressed group to high positions, and then uses them to claim there are no barriers preventing any member of that group from reaching a position with power and status. The people promoted are tokens, and the process is called tokenism. Tokens can also be used as a buffer between the dominant and oppressed groups. It is harder for the oppressed group to name the oppression and make demands when members of their own groups are representing the dominant group" (Bishop, 1994, p. 136).

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Comparing Cultural Competence with Anti-Oppression Practice
In its most rigorous institutional context, cultural competence is strongly equated with anti-oppression practice. When rigorously applied to organizations, cultural competence requires that organizations:
- Have a defined set of values and principles, and demonstrate behaviors, attitudes, policies and structures that enable them to work effectively cross-culturally.
- Have the capacity to (1) value diversity, (2) conduct self-assessment, (3) manage the dynamics of difference, (4) acquire and institutionalize cultural knowledge and (5) adapt to diversity and the cultural contexts of the communities they serve.
- Incorporate the above in all aspects of policy making, administration, practice, service delivery and involve systematically consumers, key stakeholders and communities.

Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum. (adapted from Cross et al., 1989)

In its more common application, the following definition is used:
- Refers to an ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures. Cultural competence comprises four components: (a) Awareness of one's own cultural worldview, (b) Attitude towards cultural differences, (c) Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews, and (d) cross-cultural skills. Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.[ ]

Emphasized in the work is that the problem is one of understanding and appreciation of difference. Missing from this context is the root of power and conflict in these social relations. When workers and organizations presume that they simply need to work harder to understand the other, there is a severe diminishment of the inequality rooted in this difference.