

The Journey of Oppression:
Through the Eyes of the Privileged and Oppressed

Kevin Hull
Western New England University, Springfield MA.
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One of the first things we learned about in this class was different social identities. More specifically, we learned about the privileged group also known as the agent group and the oppressed group also known as the target group for each one of these identities. After completing the worksheet in class, I realized I was considered privileged in the privileged group for identities such as gender, sex, race, class, age, ethnicity, sexual orientation and religion. This made me uncomfortable because I do not feel I should receive special treatment based on these things. As I continued with the worksheet, the box for abled or disabled made me stop and think. Throughout my education I have been labeled as disabled because of a reading disability, however, early on I promised myself I would not let my diagnosis of dyslexia put me into a disabled category. I realized that when we began to talk about ableism in the future, it may be somewhat uncomfortable for me because it would bring me back to the early days of being labeled as disabled and my personal struggle to overcome such a label.

However, during the discussion in class on November 24th, I was pleased to learn that all of my classmates understood that not all people with disabilities show it at all times and most people with disabilities are high functioning. In contrast to what I have said, the article "What I'd Tell that Doctor," discusses that many times people with disabilities are told they will never learn and people with disabilities are not high functioning. The author of this article has proven that many doctors are wrong when they classify disabled people as low functioning and he says "when I was born, the obstetrician said that I cannot learn, never see my mom and dad and never learn anything and send me to an institution. Which I think was wrong" (Kingsley, p.510, 2004).

I did not share that I had dyslexia with the class on November 24th, because I did not want to be embarrassed and looked down upon. However, if I could go back I would share my struggles. The fact that I did not share about my dyslexia shows the cycle of socialization. When I was younger I would find myself hiding my disability out of embarrassment because I was afraid to be called dumb or stupid, and this happened again last week because I still experience embarrassment with my dyslexia with people I don't know very well. Society doesn't always accept people that are different and being different can be difficult at times.

My subordinate identity and this class together have helped me to become a more compassionate person. I believe compassion is an important trait for a social worker to have. People working in a helping profession need to understand the struggles their clients live through. Although my disability has never been a devastating struggle, I have often felt "different" than others. I feel having these experiences will make me a better social worker. I also feel I am an accepting person. I do not judge people and always accept people for who they are. This is also an important trait for a social worker to have. A social worker can not judge their clients. They need to be open minded about each and every client and do the best they can to help them.

Along with compassion and acceptance, understanding diversity and the oppression connected to that diversity is an important aspect of the field of social work. Many of the clients that social workers have to work with are a part of a community whose diversity puts them at risk of experiencing prejudice, discrimination, and oppression. At one time, diversity was seen as a great barrier to overcome; however, these times have changed, and the barrier has become less, yet it is not gone. Social

worker's must make changes to the manner in which services are delivered by being sensitive to diversity. Social workers must be able to explore different ways to serve a widely diverse amount of clients in a manner that is expected within their diverse group. For instance, a male social worker might need to be able to use a masculine approach while working with some of his male clients, but also be able to use a feminist approach while working with his female clients. Also, a social worker needs to understand the multiple types of oppression and the possible effect it has on their client.

I will live with dyslexia for the rest of my life, however through my journey in this class I was taken aback by the fact that simply being a male allows for many privileges that go along with being a male, or the dominate identity. I first began to realize this fact when we began talking and reading about sexism. In the article "Night to his Day," it states "From society's point of view... one gender is usually the touchstone, the normal, the dominate, and the other is different, deviant, and subordinate" (Lorber, p. 328, 1994). This idea was reinforced when we began to talk about how females are sexualized in media. Since we discussed this in class, I have seen it time and time again in my everyday life. For example, in *Modern Family*, Gloria is a very stereotypical Latino who often mispronounces words and does not know certain English words. For instance, Gloria says, "men need their hobbies. Manny's father had many hobbies like hiking in the desert, that kind of skiing where they drop from the, how do you say in English [Makes helicopter sounds]"(Lloyd & Levitan, 2009)? When Gloria mispronounces words like this make her come off as being ditzy. Christopher Lloyd and Steven Levitan, the creators, of *Modern Family* use sexist stereotypes to get laughs from its audience. On the other hand, the film "Killing Us Softly 4" points out the

ways media and advertisement use the idea of beauty and perfectionism to target their female audiences. However, in reality the beauty and perfectionism shown is often achieved through the use of make up, airbrushes and digital technology. In these advertisements, women are turned into “objects” instead of people with feelings and emotions (Kilbourne, 2010).

Being the only male in this class, I found this topic of discussion to be very interesting and learned a lot by listening to my female classmates. Being male, I have a different outlook on many of these topics and hearing what the females in class had to say gave me a new perspective on how they view oppression compared to my male point of view.

I have continually been conscious about transferring what I have learned in this class to the real world. For example, I have begun calling people out and asking them what they mean when they say words such as, "fag or gay." Since tracking *Modern Family* I have become aware of what is on television, and constantly see oppression in media. For instance, the television show *Key and Peele*, often use GLBTQ stereotypes to get laughs out of people because they are an easy group of people to attack. I believe shows such a *Key and Peele*, should not be allowed to air on television because oppression will never be eliminated as long as we continue airing these type of television shows (Key & Peele, 2012-present).

Oppression is socially created, by continuing what is "normal" so you are accepted in society.

When public and private worlds are split, women (and children) have often been relegated to the private, and so have the disabled, the sick, and the old. The public world is the world of strength, the positive (valued) body, performance and production, the non-disabled, and young adults

Weakness, illness, rest and recovery, pain, death, and the negative (devalued) body are private, generally hidden, and often neglected. Coming into the public world with illness, pain, or a devalued body, people encounter resistance to mixing the two worlds; the split is vividly revealed. Much of the experience of disability and illness goes underground, because there is no socially acceptable way of expressing it and having the physical and psychological experience acknowledged. Yet acknowledgement of this experience is exactly what is required for creating accessibility in the public world (Wendell, p.483, 1996).

Hiding your oppressed identity is the way to become accepted into society however, I

have learned this semester that hiding your oppression actually will make the oppression continue and there will never be the elimination of oppression.

To truly have a world without oppression, prejudices, and discrimination, then the concepts such as races, sexes, classes, genders would first have to be totally eliminated by everyone. All people have to be placed on even playing field. To do this, we have to condition our children and teach them that even though oppression are seen as negatives, they are not really, its more that they can have negative consequences. It is important to understand that young children act and behave the way they do by the way they are socialized by the people they trust around them, so if adults change the way they act then oppression would possibly be eliminated. A two year old being scared of another child for seeming different is quite different from a fifty year old boss treating an employee differently for being different.

In the article by Allan Johnson, he points out that there are many different steps we can do to eliminate oppression. The first step to eliminating privileged and oppression is to acknowledge that it exists. Johnson states, "a key to the continued existence of every system of privilege is unawareness, because privilege contradicts so many basic human values that it invariably arouses opposition when people know about it" (Johnson, p. 613, 2006). Second, after you acknowledge oppression exists you must pay attention and

understand how oppression operates. Then find a way to participate in change. Next, you must learn to listen, especially if you are part of the dominate group, because you are the people that will make the change. Lastly, to eliminate oppression you must actually do something and take risks. For example, make noise and be seen. By this I mean stand up for people that do not have the privilege that you have. (Johnson, p. 613-615, 2006)

I am still confused about some of what we learned in class this semester such as gender expression. I get confused by the terms and being a social worker I believe that these terms should be second nature. Also, I am not sure about how to make the changes I want. I am aware of the steps that I talked about previously however, I am not sure they will absolutely eliminate oppression.

On the other hand, through this semester I was taken aback mostly when we talked about sexism and heterosexism. First, I was amazed to learn about how females are treated compared to men. As I stated previously, media often portrays females as "objects" and not people, and this is very distrubing to me because females have emotions just like all other humans. Next, I have become very passionate about heterosexism, and the assumption that heterosexual acts are the "correct actions." I was amazed to read that only five years ago it became a federal crime to assault or attack a person based on sexual orientation. Also, "homosexual acts were outlawed in a number of states until 2003" (Blumenfeld, p. 381, 2013).

I often hear people say, "a world where everyone is equal would be boring." However, I don't think a world without oppression would be boring. Not only would people feel safe at all times, but the elimination of oppression would allow more people to be empowered.

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