



CONCEPTS FOR MAKING JUSTICE



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Compassion

The experience of interconnection and interdependence to all beings. An act of compassion seeks to alleviate suffering.

Power

Ability to affect the world or to change your circumstances. This is often determined by access to resources:

Power Over – ownership or connected to those who have it; depends on coercion, and the power of the state.

Power With – community and solidarity; depends on mutual care, respect and cooperation.

Power from Within – spiritual, emotional or intellectual depends on trusting ones own experience and taking initiative.

Social Power

How one is viewed and the self images one has. This often dictates a sense of entitlement or lack of it. The more marginalized the group(s) that people are a member of, the less they are looked to for solutions; the less they will put their experience forward in settings dominated by people from more privileged groups. This determines who dominates a situation and whose opinion is taken seriously. Generally the people with the least social power know the most about what is taking place because their survival depends on it. The more the setting is dictated by a *stand* for the status quo the less the particularity of their experience will be expressed relegating those from the dominant culture with less information. These dynamics cause the problem that the ones who are expected to solve problems are the least equipped to do so.

Oppression (Racism, Sexism, Classism, Ablism, etc.)

Prejudice plus institutional power and cultural hegemony. For those in the oppressed group this leads to the limitation of options at best and physical survival threatened at worst. For those in the privileged it leads to material benefits from the exploitation of others, but deprives them of their humanity. All oppressions have a history, they were created by people and can be dismantled by people.

Privilege

Access to resources accorded to one based on membership in particular groups resulting in increased options and social power. This access is not as a result of individual accomplishments. (white, heterosexual, male, able-bodied, adult etc.) Privilege is usually taken for granted by those who have it; relegating it invisible.

Internalized Oppression

This is a result of being a member of an oppressed social group and having absorbed some of the dominant culture's views of your group. Having adopted the oppressor's view of what is true often causes one to look to one's oppressors for solutions and to discount one's own sense of reality and humanity. This in turn leads to behaving in ways that serve the oppressor and perpetuates low self-esteem.

Internalized Privilege

This is a result of being a member of a privileged social group and absorbed the dominant cultural view of your group. It leads to sense of special entitlement i.e. feeling that being in a dominating position is the "natural" state of affairs because you are more capable. The more privilege one has the more one views the world as an individual devoid of social and historical context.

Background

The positions one occupied in childhood which influenced how one was socialized and which helped shape worldview. These tend to form assumptions regarding appropriate behavior (e.g. differing assumptions about the expression of emotions are rooted in class, ethnicity, race and gender).

Position

What groups one is *currently* a member of. Positions can change in some categories (class, physical ability, transsexual, age etc.). In other categories positions do not change (race and ethnicity).

Stand

Who one identifies with; where one looks to for the source of problems and solutions; who one is loyal to and will defend; and what ones aspirations are. A light skinned person of color may assimilate and pass as white; this would be called “white identified,” or a lesbian may be closeted and pass as heterosexual (“straight identified”). As individuals there is both economic and physical security awarded in passing but the price is often feelings of shame and a ruptured sense of identity and loss of solidarity.

Bias

Whose interests that an idea or attitude serves. All concepts have a bias along a particular axis of power. Some may have more than one bias. (The idea of efficiency comes from a middle and ruling class bias, the idea of the nuclear family has inherent in it a heterosexual bias).

Impact / Consequence

Who is served by any action, policy or belief. Who benefits? Who pays? Where does the power sit? What resources are used? What are the ecological effects?

Ally

Someone whose position is a member of a dominant group (white, male, ablebodied etc) but who stands with those in the oppressed group. An ally knows that standing with oppressed people is in her own best interest. If this is not the case the relationship is patronizing; the supposed “ally” is working “for” not “with” the oppressed—acting out of sympathy and/or guilt rather than compassion and solidarity. An ally believes that oppressed groups know best what they need and supports self-determination.

Solidarity

When you are a member of an oppressed group and you stand for your own group’s interests and integrity; therefore stand with members of your own group against your common oppression. Also refers to people (allies) who are not in the oppressed group, but use their use their privilege to undermine the oppression and who stand for the group’s self determination.

Assimilation

To change ones ways of being in order to conform to mainstream cultural norms so that one has access jobs, upward mobility and or financial resources. The very sensibilities that are left behind are often the ones that inspire more humane and connected ways of living. This is why “outsiders” provide key leadership for social transformation.

Gate Keeper

A person who controls access for poeple in a "served" group to power and resources and who provides information about the "served" group to those in power. (Concept developed by The People's Institute.)

Multicultural Organization

Reflects the contribution and interests of diverse cultural and social groups in its mission, operations, and product or service delivery; acts on a commitment to eradicate social oppression an all forms within the organization; includes the members of diverse cultural and social groups as full participants, especially in decisions that shape the organization; and follows through on broader external social responsibilities, including support of efforts to eliminate all forms of social oppression and to educate others in multicultural perspectives. (From "Vision" by Jackson & Hardiman)

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