



# Coalition Chronicles

*A newsletter of the*  
**Wisconsin Coalition Against Domestic Violence**

**Volume 28 Issue 1**



## ENSURING ACCESS TO SERVICES FOR ALL VICTIMS

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### *From The Director:*

There are sixty-seven domestic violence programs in Wisconsin, located in over 100 program sites and serving all 72 counties and all 11 tribes. As services expanded to cover every county and tribe, our intention was to make them more accessible to all victims. But creating true accessibility for victims requires that we address more than the geographic challenges. We know that any person can become a victim of domestic and sexual abuse regardless of race, culture, gender, sexual orientation, gender identity, ability, age, language, immigration status and economic level. While not intentional, it has become clear that not all services speak to all victims. And when services are not designed to reach all victims, the very real consequence is that lives are endangered. It is those diverse victims and advocates who are now helping us to steer our work towards total inclusivity and full access for all victims.

WCADV is committed to working in collaboration with Wisconsin service providers to identify ways, both great and small, that services can be designed and redesigned to meet the needs of all victims. With our allies at the Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse, the Department of Justice Office of Crime Victim Services and the Violence Against Women Advisory, we have launched a statewide effort to assist local programs with accessibility issues. This work towards full accessibility will not be easy but we believe that we are up to the task at hand. We are determined because safety is a basic human right and everyone should have access to life-saving services. The alternative is just too difficult to contemplate.

— *Patti Seger*

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## What Kinds of Services Would Make a Difference?

Sujata Warriar, Ph.D

One New York advocate explained how New York City emergency shelters limit a woman's stay to ninety days, but public housing is not accessible to her if her immigration status is

questionable or her papers haven't yet cleared. Sometimes, shelters deny access to undocumented women because of their reimbursement policy in that state. Now with welfare reform, the troubles for battered immigrant women are amplified.

Concerns about the judicial system included its lack of trained interpreters, and that the interpreters should be held accountable for any collusion with the perpetrator to pressure the woman to drop charges, etc. Another concern was the trouble the system causes the women when it pushes them to prosecute. The participants agreed that there needs to be a mandate to provide clear and concise training for all professionals in all systems and to encourage creative solutions.

Mainstream programs should integrate services for all women and collaborate with community-based programs. Discussion ensued about the kinds of funding necessary. Funding should fit the needs of the women in the community rather than the community fitting the needs of the funding agency and institutionalizing the community-based program. Funding has to be consistent, and a wide range of essential services must be provided. Lack of such services may force a battered woman to return to the perpetrator, especially for financial reasons.

Survivors felt that crisis services should be enhanced and consistently provided to all women. Continued services that help women after they have left shelters should also receive funding, such as transitional and affordable housing, job skills training and job placement assistance, child care, ESL classes, driving lessons, and continued support services. Service professionals should undergo cultural sensitivity training to better assist all women. The training should address the intersections of the various forms of oppression. All of the services should work together to alleviate a woman having to repeat her story to the different providers.

\* (Un) Heard Voices, DV in the Asian American Community, FPF, 2005  
"This material was reprinted and/or adapted from the Family Violence Prevention Fund's publication entitled "(Un) heard Voices: Domestic Violence in the Asian American Community." This report was authored by Sujata Warriar, Ph.D. Production was made possible by a grant from the Violence Against Women Office, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice."

**We all agree that resources for battered women should be made available. These include a national hotline to provide crisis intervention in all languages, safe homes in all counties of the nation, legal services that understand the issues facing all survivors, and better intervention by the judicial system.**

**Additional resources and services should be mobilized for both documented and undocumented battered immigrant women. The latter should have access to special services due to their precarious situation.**



# Study Finds Domestic Violence Shelters Are Meeting Needs of Most Victims 03.02.09

Becoming homeless. Losing everything, including their children. Doing something desperate. Facing continued life-threatening abuse. That is what victims of domestic violence who received help from shelters say their fate would have been if those shelters did not exist, according to Meeting Survivors' Needs: A Multi-State Study of Domestic Violence Shelter Experiences. Released today, the groundbreaking study is based on a survey of 3,410 people served by domestic violence shelters in eight states during a six-month period in 2007 and 2008. It finds that three quarters of domestic violence victims (74 percent) rate the assistance they received at a shelter as "very helpful" and another 18 percent say it was "helpful."

"The National Institute of Justice (NIJ), a component of the Department of Justice's Office of Justice Programs, is proud to have administered this study, which will help us better understand the challenges facing domestic violence survivors," said NIJ Acting Director Kristina Rose. "Domestic violence shelters are a critical resource for keeping victims and their children safe. The data from this study will be instrumental in enhancing the coordinated community response to violence against women."

Meeting Survivors' Needs finds that the most victims staying at domestic violence shelters are 18 - 34 years old, and have children under age 18. One in four (24 percent) had stayed at a shelter before the visit during which they took this survey. Ninety-two percent say they "know more ways to plan for my safety" because of the shelter, 85 percent know more about community resources, and 84 percent of those who are mothers say "my children feel more supported" as a result of their shelter stay. "This study shows conclusively that the nation's domestic violence shelters are meeting both the urgent and longer-term needs of victims of violence, and helping them protect themselves and their children," said Dr. Eleanor Lyon of the University of Connecticut, Institute for Violence Prevention and Reduction at the School of Social Work, who was the primary researcher for the study. "Victims attribute meaningful change to the help they received at the shelter - but they also see room for improvement."

One-quarter of shelter residents (24 percent) faced transportation challenges, and 54 of those challenges were resolved. One-third (32 percent) say they had conflicts with other residents, and 73 percent of those conflicts were resolved. Some victims say that the shelter was unable to fully meet their needs related to housing, education and finance, as well as their emotional, mental health and physical health needs.

The study is based on surveys of residents of 215 domestic violence shelters in Connecticut, Florida, Illinois, Michigan, New Mexico, Oklahoma, Tennessee and Washington. It is the most comprehensive study of its kind ever done.

## Other findings:

**-78 % of survivors had children under age 18, and 68 % had minor children with them at the shelter.**

**-Nearly all survivors (99 %) reported they got the help they wanted with their own safety and safety planning (95 %).**

**- Four in five of those who needed it (81 %) got help finding affordable housing, and three in four got help with a job or job training.**

**- Nearly all mothers who needed it got help with their children's safety (98 %) and schooling (92 %).**

**- Nine in ten survivors (91 %) who needed it got help with a protective or restraining order, more than four in five with divorce issues (82 %), immigration issues (84 %), and custody/visitation issues (83 %).**

Shelter residents were asked to complete a written survey at or near entrance, and again at or near exit.

*Note: Meeting Survivors' Needs is available online at [www.vawnet.org](http://www.vawnet.org).*

*This project was supported by Grant No. 2007-IJ-CX-K022, awarded to the National Resource Center on Domestic Violence by the National Institute of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, U.S. Department of Justice.*

*Points of view in this document are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice.*

*Source: National Resource Center on Domestic Violence*

# Transforming the Challenges of Creating Inclusive Organizations

by Kathy Germann

*An inclusive organization is one in which members of diverse social and cultural groups are actively included and where the dignity of all of its members and potential members is respected so everyone can thrive and reach their fullest potential. Inclusive organizations fully value different perspectives and reflect the interests of diverse members throughout all levels and aspects of the organization starting with its mission. Finally, inclusive, multicultural organizations actively strive to eliminate all forms of oppression. (Jackson & Hardiman, 1981)*

In this article I discuss twelve beliefs which, when held strongly, can be major obstacles to change. When these barriers are acknowledged and worked with, we can begin creating safe, inclusive, multicultural organizations.



## **1. A belief that change can be imposed.**

State and federal laws and organizational rules may change some behaviors. However, laws and rules do not necessarily change attitudes. Deeply ingrained attitudes and beliefs often prevail. People can and do find ways to get around laws and rules, thus subverting intended changes.

We don't tend to change our attitudes because somebody told us to do so. And just because we may think our ideas are correct doesn't mean we will be able to persuade others to think so as well. Rather, our behaviors and attitudes begin to shift when we are directly engaged with the issues in an atmosphere that is non-judgmental and that fosters trust.

## **2. Use of blame and guilt to motivate change.**

Blame and guilt only serve to put people on the defensive or paralyze them into not acting at all. We began to learn misinformation about others as children. It is not our fault that we were taught these things. Blaming us for believing misinformation is not useful. Understanding how we've all been hurt by this misinformation and learning the truth about ourselves and others can be a powerful personal motivation to make change.

## **3. A belief that there are quick, easy solutions.**

Creating an inclusive organization is an evolutionary process. What we're "undoing" didn't happen overnight—these systems and ways of thinking have been deeply embedded in our societal psyche for a long time. Seeing this larger picture can prevent us from getting caught up in frustration and despair over lack of quick changes.

Rather than getting caught up in the notion of a quick fix, we need to reframe this work as a process and prepare ourselves for hanging in there for the long haul. Part of the essence of creating an inclusive organization is an awareness that the very process of how we relate to one another is what makes an organization inclusive and allows all its members to succeed to their fullest.

## **4. The mission of the organization doesn't embrace diversity.**

If the organization's mission is driving activities and decisions then it is critical that it address the issues of diversity. If it doesn't, it will be too easy to avoid expending the time, money, and other resources necessary to institute meaningful and lasting efforts toward creating an inclusive organization. Having diversity in the mission statement provides an imperative to address it.

## **5. A belief that being "non-discriminatory" is enough.**

Many organizations fall short of being truly inclusive by resting on the laurels of their affirmative action efforts and anti-harassment policies. For example, having white women and people of color on staff does not in and of itself create an inclusive organization. A non-discriminatory stance can still maintain the status quo if there is failure to address more than numbers of personnel. Additional efforts are necessary to be inclusive of diversity on all levels and aspects of the organization, including the mission, personnel, operations, and product or service delivery.

## **6. A failure to understand and address the institutional nature of oppression.**

Oppression is more than individual acts of prejudice. It is systematic, routine mistreatment of whole groups of people. This mistreatment is seen in the policies, procedures and norms that educational, business, medical, governmental and other institutions carry out on a daily basis. As a result of the routine and insidious nature of this mistreatment it often becomes “invisible” and is perceived as “the way we do things” to those who are not the target of it. The more we can understand how the system affects all of us the greater chance we’ll have of dismantling it and creating new, inclusive ways of being.

## **7. Lack of awareness of privilege and the fear of giving up exclusivity of privilege.**

Privilege is an unearned right or resource that one group has access to that other groups are denied. Because it is unearned we are often unaware of the privileges we might have, since we’ve always seemed to have them it’s “normal”. Some examples of privilege are as an able-bodied person being assumed to be intelligent until proven otherwise, as a white-skinned person not having your difference of opinion being attributed to your race, as a male, not being perceived as overly emotional. The scarcity mentality has taught us to fear sharing privileges. There is a difference between giving up a privilege and giving up the exclusivity of a privilege so that it can become accessible to everyone.

## **8. Lack of action is not harmful.**

Collusion is consciously or unconsciously reinforcing and perpetuating misinformation, attitudes, behaviors and norms that lead to the systemic mistreatment of people. Silence is the loudest voice of collusion. Our lack of action when we witness an act of prejudice or mistreatment can be interpreted as support. This can range from laughing at a sexist joke to not speaking out about patterns of promotion that leave people of color behind. In order to create systemic change we must keep paying attention and naming the obvious.

## **9. The attitude that we’re doing this for “those poor oppressed people.”**

This attitude continues to perpetuate a form of one-upmanship - “I’ve got it better so I’m going to fix it for you.” This is not only patronizing, but it also fails to acknowledge the negative effects of oppression on all of us. Doing diversity work requires a partnership approach, a view of others as equals and a recognition that we all have something to gain from this. Since we are all now or all will be members of some target group, we all need each other as allies. With this understanding we will be more motivated to hang in there for the long haul and sustain positive change for and with each other.

## **10. If “they” would just change everything would be better.**

A variation on this theme is, “I’m not \_\_\_ist (racist, sexist, etc.) but I know somebody who is.” It is virtually impossible to grow up in this culture and escape being infected by the virus of oppression. This virus creates dis-ease that is manifested in many ways, one of which is the ability to see problems in other people’s behaviors/attitudes and the failure to see one’s own. Of course this serves to continue the divisive notion of “us vs. them.”

Most of us perceive ourselves as good intentioned human beings, one’s who would never purposefully hurt anyone. Yet as we discovered with the notion of collusion, our silence and inaction does hurt—not only others but ourselves as well. We have a tendency to go “dumb-up,” i.e., we fail to examine our own power and privilege and the ways that we may unwittingly act (or fail to act) that serve to maintain institutionalized oppression. (Terry, 1983) It is crucial for us to do our own work and to recognize that our behavior is a powerful example.

## **11. This is all too overwhelming.**

Yes, it’s true, this can feel overwhelming and yet we can’t let this stop us from taking action. What are our alternatives? We’ve already acknowledged that inaction perpetuates the status quo. There is no such thing as being passively anti-oppressive; we are either part of the solution, or part of the problem. This is where we are strengthened by working in collaboration with others. Through this approach we can sustain and support one another as we live our visions of inclusive organizations and communities.

A slightly different version of this is the idea that we can only choose to work on one area at a time, i.e., we’ll work on classism this year and next year we’ll focus on able-bodiedism. This fails to recognize the intricate web of relationships between the many forms of oppression. Because they are so interconnected, it is essential to work on them all.

## **12. The belief that we can just think our way through this.**

We've all been hurt and learned to fear and distrust others who may be different than us. These hurts, as well as deeply conditioned attitudes, have become held in place with the glue of emotions. We need to be able to acknowledge and work through these feelings with other people in a safe environment for there to be lasting change. It takes our brilliant minds and our compassionate hearts to do this work.

### **Conclusion**

Creating inclusive organizations is not easy work. Recently I asked a group of 130 participants at a Diversity in the Workplace Conference how many of them would like to see all forms of oppression end tomorrow. The response was unanimous—everyone agreed that would be great. Then I asked, if there was so much good intention in the room, why did the “isms” continue. Their response—lots of thoughtful, puzzled looks.

Creating inclusive organizations isn't about good intentions. It requires that our actions, both individual and institutional, be grounded in a thorough understanding of the nature of oppression. Does this mean we shouldn't start until we “get it?” No, it means getting clear about what “it” is and being willing to do some deep examination of our current behaviors and institutional structures. This requires being open to diverse perspectives, as well as a willingness to take risks, make “mistakes,” and walk through our fear and doubts. It also means creating safe space for this kind of exploration and dialogue to take place. Only when we join our allies with open hearts and curious minds will we be able to continue to strive forward in building new ways that embrace the common differences in us all.

### **References**

Jackson, B. & Hardiman, R. Organizational Stages of Multi-cultural Awareness. Amherst, MA: New Perspectives, Inc.  
Terry, R.W. (1983). Beyond the White Male Club. Videotape produced by University Media Resources, Continuing Education and Extension, Univ. of Minnesota. © 2002 Kathy Germann Consulting. P.O. Box 5054, Madison, WI 53705. 608 233-6757  
<http://kathygermannconsulting.com/inclusive.shtml>

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There are many resources available, books, videos, and websites that are designed to help individuals and organizations advance their understanding of oppression. Below is a partial list of resources that may be useful in your exploration of these issues.

### **Videos**

*The Color of Fear*, directed by Lee Mun Wah (Stir-Fry Productions)

*Follow Me Home*, directed by Peter Bratt (New Millennia Films)

*Race: The Power of an Illusion*, a three-part documentary series created by Larry Adelman (California Newsreel)

*Mirrors of Privilege: Making Whiteness Visible*, directed by Shakti Butler

### **Books**

Thomas, Barb, and Tina Lopes. *Dancing on Lives Embers*. Between the Lines, 2006.

Smith, Chip. *The Cost of Privilege: Taking on the System of White Supremacy and Racism*. Fayetteville, NC: Camino Press, 2007.

Van Ausdale, Debra and Joe Feagin. *The First R: How Children Learn Race and Racism*. New York: Roman and Littlefield, 2002.

Lui, Meizhu, et. al. *The Color of Wealth: The Story Behind the U.S. Wealth Divide*. New York: New Press, 2006.

Wise, Tim. *White Like Me: Reflections on Race from a Privileged Son*. 2nd ed. Soft Skull Press, 2007.

### **And a related and important resource:**

Incite! Women of Color Against Violence eds., *The Revolution Will Not be Funded: Beyond the Non-Profit Industrial Complex*. Cambridge: South End Press, 2007.

### **Publications**

*ColorLines*, the national newsmagazine on race and politics, published by the Applied Research Center

[www.colorlines.com](http://www.colorlines.com)

### **Links**

[www.awarela.org/oppression](http://www.awarela.org/oppression)

[www.american-pictures.com/english/racism/index](http://www.american-pictures.com/english/racism/index)

[www.uky.edu/StudentOrgs/AWARE](http://www.uky.edu/StudentOrgs/AWARE)

[www.articlesbase.com/article-tags/oppression](http://www.articlesbase.com/article-tags/oppression)

[www.naturalnews.com/oppression.html](http://www.naturalnews.com/oppression.html)



# Making Anti-Oppression Core to Your Program

Access Committee, Governor's Council on Domestic Abuse

## Set the Stage/Create an Atmosphere Through Training and Education

- ✓ Incorporate anti-oppression training for all volunteers, new staff and board members.
- ✓ Set up a series or ongoing in-services that focus on how to better serve people from traditionally marginalized groups.
- ✓ Pick one issue to focus on intensively for the year: conduct in-services for staff and volunteers, visit other organizations working on this issue, have individual staff people read an article related to the issue and lead a discussion at staff meeting.
- ✓ Conduct an accessibility audit of your facility and develop a long-range work plan to make it more accessible.
- ✓ Bring anti-oppression training to groups you are part of, such as I-teams or Coordinated Community Response teams.
- ✓ Don't push historically marginalized people to do things because of their oppressed group (tokenism); base it on their work, experience and skills.
- ✓ Realize you are never done with this work.
- ✓ Remember these are complex issues and they need adequate time and space.

## Create Space Within Your Building

- ✓ Designate an office or space within your building that staff from partner groups such as Refugee Family Strengthening, UNIDOS and Deaf Unity can call their own.
- ✓ Offer partner groups use of copy machines, phones etc. .
- ✓ Treat people from partner agencies like staff (give them keys to let themselves in, etc.)
- ✓ Get to know staff from partner agencies: invite them to join in staff meetings, agency events, notify them when you have vacancies.
- ✓ Make sure the artwork and images in your facility reflect diversity.

## Get Anti-Oppression On Your Agenda

- ✓ Ask each staff person to include at least one thing in their yearly work plan that reflects working towards making anti-oppression work core to his/her job.
- ✓ Pay for one of your staff people to attend a language class at your local Technical College
- ✓ Make anti-oppression issues part of your strategic plan as an organization.
- ✓ Conduct surveys of staff, board, and community members each year to check in on how you are doing. (Good resource: The El Paso Cultural Competency Organizational Self-Assessment Tool Kit, [http://www.thegreenbook.info/documents/El\\_Paso\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.thegreenbook.info/documents/El_Paso_toolkit.pdf))
- ✓ Have a different staff person discuss an article each staff meeting
- ✓ Focus on one issue each year to try to make learning a little less over whelming
- ✓ When recruiting board members, make sure you connect with diverse groups in your community
- ✓ Hold board positions open until you can assure you are working towards a board that is more reflective of the women and children you serve.
- ✓ Have a bilingual/bicultural position(s) be part of your general budget, not a position under a specialized grant or funding stream. Make it a permanent position.
- ✓ Make a collective commitment to hold people accountable for their behavior so that the organization can be a safe and nurturing place for all.

## Visibly Connect With Groups In Your Community

- ✓ If you have a multi-cultural center or other collective group in your community, assign a staff member to attend their meetings and events.
- ✓ If your community has annual celebrations (such as Martin Luther King Day, Cinco de Mayo), become a sponsor of the event.
- ✓ Attend/participate in other groups' events and meetings without being on the agenda. Express a genuine interest and support for their work without requesting anything in return.



**Make sure your agency “wish list” or in-kind donation requests include items that will make all your service recipients feel welcome:**

- ✓ hair care products
- ✓ personal items/toiletries (soap, lotions, makeup, etc.)
- ✓ foods
- ✓ dolls of color, toys/games from other cultures
- ✓ art and decorations that reflect a variety of cultures
- ✓ music/movies (different languages, closed captioned, etc.)
- ✓ clothing

### **Volunteers**

- ✓ Connect with your local Retired Senior Volunteer Program.
- ✓ Sponsor open houses specifically for seniors and other groups to learn about volunteer opportunities.

### **Questions to Ask**

- ✓ Are we making social change and truly working on social justice issues?  
(cultural competence is really social justice)
- ✓ What is our “big picture” on anti-oppression?
- ✓ How do we teach and mentor staff?
- ✓ Do we discuss program philosophy with the women we serve?
- ✓ Have we co-opted values for money?
- ✓ Check your privilege: how does this affect what you say and what you do?
- ✓ Are we challenging ourselves to be honest and open and take risks to address oppression head on?

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## **Access Committee**

Governor’s Council on Domestic Abuse

The Governor’s Council on Domestic Abuse works to make the issue of domestic violence visible to the residents and policy makers of the State of Wisconsin. The Access Committee of the Governor’s Council plays an important role in accomplishing this mission. The Committee works to improve the effectiveness of and access to domestic abuse services by all groups, with an emphasis on people from underrepresented groups. The Committee’s work is focused around the following goals:

1. Facilitate collaborative decision-making between domestic violence service providers and advocates for diverse communities in areas of mutual interest.
2. Provide a forum for concerns expressed by underrepresented groups.
3. Research and review statewide systems and services that have an impact on victims of domestic violence and report on such activities to the Council.
4. Plan, promote and evaluate anti-oppression training.
5. Promote the development of culturally specific services.

### **Overall goal/vision for anti-oppression work:**

“To create a cultural transformation in DV programs that makes the elimination of oppression and the promotion of social justice a core part of our work, in a way that mirrors the transformation we are working for in society as a whole.”

Recent work has included:

- Provided anti-oppression training at three statewide meetings for domestic abuse program directors.
- Held discussions on anti-oppression at regional Directors’ and Advocates’ Meetings.
- Worked to develop policies on access to service for domestic abuse programs.

The Committee meets five times a year. Members represent a diverse group of people from around the state, council and non-council members alike. If you would like to get involved or have a question about the Access Committee, contact Sharon Lewandowski at 608-266-0700 or [Sharon.Lewandowski@wisconsin.gov](mailto:Sharon.Lewandowski@wisconsin.gov).

# Diversity/Multiculturalism/Anti-Oppression Work

## Just What Kind of Work Do We Want to Do Anyway?

The following is a model which illustrates some of the ways individuals and agencies approach what is often called “diversity” work. While the terms and definitions diversity/multicultural/anti-oppression are fairly reflective of the ways most people think of these concepts, we realize that not everyone defines these terms in exactly the same way. The definitions below are adapted from work done by Beth Richie and will give us common definitions to work from. Please consider how the following definitions affect you personally and how they affect the agency.

### **Diversity**

Goal is to have people from different backgrounds integrate into the existing project/program.

One of the characteristics is that there is no recognition of power imbalances.

Empowerment is individual.

### **Organizational Level**

People from disempowered groups are invited/recruited into the organization but nothing, including the structure and attitudes of the organization, changes. People from disempowered groups are expected to change to fit the organization.

### **Individual Level**

The individual works with relates to people from other disempowered groups but doesn't reflect on how actions and attitudes might be oppressive. Sees people from oppressed groups as the same as in “I don't think of you as a lesbian.”

### **Multiculturalism**

The goal is to have people from different backgrounds integrate into the atmosphere and to profit from the richness of human diversity.

One of the characteristics is that there is no recognition of power imbalances.

Empowerment is individual.

### **Organizational Level**

People from disempowered groups are invited/recruited into the organization and surface changes are made such as putting up ethnic posters “celebrating diversity” but the overall structures and attitudes of the organization do not change. People from these groups are still expected to change to fit the organization.

### **Individual Level**

An individual works with/relates to people from other oppressed groups and recognizes differences that might exist, but doesn't work to change interpersonal and societal power dynamics.

### **Anti-Oppression Work**

The goal is to fight for social justice and create alternative models for personal, institutional, and cultural interactions.

One of the characteristics is a recognition of power imbalances and actively working to change these, both within the organization and in the community.

Both the individual and social institution are taken into consideration with empowerment.

### **Organizational Level**

People from disempowered groups are an integral part of the organization and the structure and attitudes reflect this diversity.

### **Individual Level**

The individual working with/ relating to other his/her own oppressed groups recognizes the unequal societal power dynamics and works to correct these on an individual and societal level.

# The Culture of Power

Adapted from Uprooting Racism: How White People Can Work for Racial Justice  
by Paul Kivel

**If you are a woman and  
you have ever walked  
into a men's meeting, or a  
person of color and have walked  
into a white organization, or  
a child who walked into the  
principal's office, or a Jew or  
Muslim who entered a Christian  
space, then you know what it  
is like to walk into a culture of  
power that is not your own.  
You may feel insecure, unsafe,  
disrespected, unseen or  
marginalized.  
You know you have to tread  
carefully. Whenever one group  
of people accumulates more  
power than another group, the  
more powerful group creates  
an environment that places its  
members at the cultural center  
and other groups at  
the margins.  
People in the more powerful  
group (the "in-group") are  
accepted as the norm, so if you  
are in that group it can be very  
hard for you to see the benefits  
you receive.**

Since I'm male and I live in a culture in which men have more social, political, and economic power than women, I often don't notice that women are treated differently than I am. I'm inside a male culture of power. I expect to be treated with respect, to be listened to, and to have my opinions valued. I expect to be welcomed. I expect to see people like me in positions of authority. I expect to find books and newspapers that are written by people like me, that reflect my perspective, and that show me in central roles. I don't necessarily notice that the women around me are treated less respectfully, ignored, or silenced; that they are not visible in positions of authority nor welcomed in certain spaces; and that they are charged more for a variety of goods and services and are not always safe in situations where I feel perfectly comfortable.

Remember when you were a young person entering a space that reflected an adult culture of power—a classroom, store, or office where adults were in charge? What let you know that you were on adult turf, that adults were at the center of power?

Some of the things I remember are that adults were in control. They made the decisions. They might be considerate enough to ask me what I thought, but they did not have to take my concerns into account. I could be dismissed at any time, so I learned to be cautious. I could look around and see what was on the walls, what music was being played, what topics were being discussed, and most important, who made those decisions, and I knew that this was an adult culture of power.

I felt I was under scrutiny. I had to change my behavior — how I dressed ("pull up your pants," "tuck in your shirt"), how I spoke ("speak up," "don't mumble"), even my posture ("Sit up, don't slouch," "look me in the eye when I'm talking to you") — so that I would be accepted and heard. I couldn't be as smart as I was or I'd be considered a smart aleck. I had to learn the adults' code, talk about what they wanted to talk about, and find allies among them — adults who would speak up for my needs in my absence. Sometimes I had to cover up my family background and religion in order to be less at risk from adult disapproval. And if there was any disagreement or problem between an adult and myself, I had little credibility. The adult's word was almost always believed over mine. The effects on young people of an adult culture of power are similar to the effects on people of color of a white culture of power or the effects on women of a male culture of power. As an adult I rarely notice that I am surrounded by an adult culture of power, which often puts young people and their cultures at a severe disadvantage as they are judged, valued, and given credibility or not by adults on adult terms. Similarly, as a white person, when I'm driving on the freeway I am unlikely to notice that people of color are being pulled over based on skin color. Or when I am in a store I am unlikely to notice that people of color are being followed, not being served as well, or being charged more for the same items. I assume that everyone can vote as easily as I can and that everyone's vote counts. I am never asked where I am from (and this would be true even if I had stepped off the boat yesterday). In a society that proclaims equal opportunity I may not even believe that other people are being paid less than I am for the same work, or being turned away from jobs and housing because of the color of their skin. When I am in public spaces, the music played in the background, the art on the walls, the language spoken, the layout of the space, the design of the buildings are all things I might not even notice because, as a white person, I am

so comfortable with them. If I did notice them I would probably consider them bland, culturally neutral items. Most of the time I am so much inside the white culture of power, it is so invisible to me, that I have to rely on people of color to point out to me what it looks like, what it feels like, and what impact it has on them. We can learn to notice the culture of power around us. Recently I was giving a talk at a large Midwestern university and was shown to my room in the hotel run by the university's hotel management department. When I had put my suitcase down and hung up my clothes, I looked around the room. There were two pictures on the wall. One was of a university baseball team from many years ago — 22 white men wearing their team uniforms. The other picture was of a science lab class — 14 students, 13 white men and 1 white woman dressed in lab coats and working at lab benches. In total I had 35 white men and 1 white woman on the walls of my room. "This clearly tells me who's in charge at this university," I said to myself, and it would probably send an unwelcoming, cautionary message to many people of color and white women who stayed in that room that they could expect to be excluded from the culture of power in this institution. I mentioned the composition of the pictures to the hotel management and referred to it again in my talk the next day. A few years ago I would not have "seen" these pictures in terms of race and gender.

The pictures themselves, of course, are only symbolic. But as I walked around the campus, talked with various officials, and heard about the racial issues being dealt with, I could see that these symbols were part of the construction of a culture of power from which people of color and most white women were mostly excluded. I have learned that noticing how the culture of power works in any situation provides a lot of information about who has power and privilege, and who is vulnerable to discrimination and exclusion, and this institution of higher education was no exception. The problem with a culture of power is that it reinforces the prevailing hierarchy. When we are inside a culture of power we expect to have things our way, the way we are most comfortable with. We may go through life complacent in our monoculturalism, not even aware of the limits of our perspectives, the gaps in our knowledge, the inadequacy of our understanding. We remain unaware of the superior status and opportunities we have simply because we're white, or male, or able-bodied, or heterosexual.

Of course a culture of power also dramatically limits the ability of those on the margins to participate in an event, a situation, or an organization. They are only able to participate on unfavorable terms, at others' discretion, which puts them at a big disadvantage. They often have to give up or hide much of who they are to participate in the dominant culture. And if there are any problems it becomes very easy to identify the people on the

margins as the source of those problems and blame or attack them rather than the problem itself. Every organization has work to do to become more inclusive. I want to focus on some ways that groups often fail to include members of our country's most marginalized members— those marginalized by economic status, physical ability, and English language ability. Often, when groups talk about diversity issues, they address those issues of race, gender, and sexual orientation that are most visible. Without an understanding of how class limits people's ability to participate in organizations a group may end up with a remarkably diverse group—of middle class participants. Those who are homeless, poor, single parents, working two jobs, or poorly educated (and many people fall into more than one of these categories) are unable to attend meetings or events because they cannot afford the time, the fees, the childcare, or the energy. When they do make it they may feel unwelcome because they have not been as able to participate previously, because they do not speak the language (or the jargon) of the organizers, or because they are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with the middle class values and styles of the group. People with disabilities can be similarly excluded when meetings are held in rooms and buildings which are not accessible, when signing is not provided, when accessible public transportation is not available, or when the pace and organization of the meeting does not allow them to participate. People for whom English is not their primary language may face comparable barriers to finding out about meetings, attending events, becoming part of the leadership of an organization, or simply participating as a member when interpretation is not provided, when non-English media and communication networks are not utilized, or, again, when the pace and style of the group does not allow for the slower pace that a multi-lingual process calls for.

I am Jewish in a Christian culture. I am often aware of ways that the dominant culture of organizations I work with exclude me. When I get together with other Jews in a group I can feel so relieved that we are all Jewish that I can fail to notice ways that parts of the Jewish community have been excluded. Because I am in the culture of power in terms of disability I can overlook the fact that we may all be Jews in the group, but we have scheduled a meeting or event in a place that is not accessible. We may all be Jewish, but we may have failed to do outreach into the Jewish lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender communities. Or because we are predominantly middle class Jews during our discussions we may be unaware of how we are excluding Jews who are poor or working class.

We each have ways that we are in the culture of power (for me, for example, as a white male) and ways that we are marginalized (for me as a Jew). Although we may be good at recognizing how we have been excluded, we are probably less adept at realizing how we exclude others because it is not as much a survival issue for us. We have to look to people from those groups to provide leadership for us. It is important that we learn to recognize the culture of power in our



organizations so that we can challenge the hierarchy of power it represents and the confinement of some groups of people to its margins.

Use the previous paragraphs and the questions below to guide you in thinking about the culture of power in your organization. Assessing the culture of power What does the culture of power look like in your organization? In your office or area where you work? In your school or classroom? In your living room or living space? In your congregation? Where you shop for clothes? In agencies whose services you use?

The following questions can be used to identify cultures of power based on gender, class, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, language, education.

- 1. Who is in authority?**
- 2. Who has credibility (whose words and ideas are listened to with most attention and respect)?**
- 3. Who is treated with full respect?**
- 4. Whose experience is valued?**
- 5. Whose voices are heard?**
- 6. Who has access to or is given important information?**
- 7. Who talks most at meetings?**
- 8. Whose ideas are given importance?**
- 9. Who is assigned to or expected to take on background roles?**
- 10. How is the space designed?  
Who has physical access?**
- 11. What is on the walls?**
- 12. What language(s) are used?  
Which are acceptable?**
- 13. What music and food is available?  
Who provides it?**
- 14. How much are different people paid?  
How are prices determined?**
- 15. Who cleans up?**
- 16. Who decides?**

Every person has the right to complete respect, equitable access, and full participation. Anything less limits the effectiveness of an organization by denying it the contributions, the experiences, insights and creative input of those individuals and groups excluded or discriminated against. Those inside the culture of power rarely notice it, while those excluded are often acutely sensitive to how they and others are being marginalized. Therefore leadership in efforts to eliminate the culture of power need to come from those in excluded or marginalized groups. Unless they are in leadership positions, with

sufficient respect, status, and authority, the organization's efforts to change will be token, insufficient, and have limited effectiveness. As they become better at identifying patterns of exclusion, people from within the culture of power can learn to take leadership in identifying marginalizing practices so that the organization doesn't have to rely as much on people at the margins to do this work for it. Although



groups will always need to look to the insights of people at the margins to completely identify how systems of oppression are currently operating, there is an important role for those inside the culture of power to take leadership as allies to those excluded. They can challenge the status quo and can educate other "insiders" who are resistant to change. It is precisely because they have more credibility, status, and access that people on

the inside make good allies. They can do this best not by speaking for or representing those marginalized, but by challenging the status quo and opening up opportunities for others to step forward and speak for themselves. Every institution of higher education has a culture of power. And each department, division, school, program, and office within it has its own subculture of power. These may not be consistent or overlapping. The university may have an educated white male administration while the women's studies department has a middle class white woman's culture of power which excludes poor and working class white women and women of color of all classes. To be in opposition to the prevailing culture of power does not preclude us from creating subcultures of power that, in turn, exclude others who are even more marginalized than we are. We have a responsibility, as people who have had access to educational opportunities, not to let the fact of our being on the inside of a culture of power allow us to deny educational opportunity to those who are on the outside. We need to fight for equal opportunity and full access and inclusion not just for those groups that we are a part of, but also for those groups we are not. For most of us that means listening to those on the margins, acknowledging our insider status compared to some other groups, and acknowledging our access to power, our resources and our privileges. Then we can work with others to use our power, resources and privileges to open up the educational structures to those who continue to knock on the doors. One of our goals should be to create organizations and institutions that embrace an internal culture of full inclusion and all of whose members are trained to think critically about how the culture of power operates. We each have a role to play, we each have much to contribute to creating such organizations and pushing every group we are a part of to move from a culture of power to a culture of inclusion.

# We're All In The Same Boat

April, 1980

This society this incredible way of living divides us by class by color It says we are individual and alone and don't you forget it. It says the only way out of our doom of our sex our class our race is some individual gift and character and hard work and then all we get all we ever get is to change class or color or sex to rise to bleach to masculine an

enormous game of musical chairs and that's only at its fairy tale Hereto Lager best that's only at its best

From all directions we get all the beliefs to go with these divisions we believe all kinds of things about: what real men really are what women must want what black people feel and smell like what white people do and deserve how rich people earn their comforts and cadillacs how poor people get what's coming to them

O we are all racist we are all sexist some of us only some of us are the targets of racism of sexism of homophobia of class denigration but we all all

breath in racism with the dust in the streets with the words we read and we struggle those of us who struggle we struggle endlessly, endlessly to think and be and act differently from all that

Listen you and listen hard I carry within me a vicious anti-Semite voice that says jew him down that says dirty jew that says things that Stop me dead in the street and make the blood leave my face have fought that voice for 45 years all the years that I lived with and among jews who are almost me whose rhythms of speech and ways of laughing are close beside me are dear to me whose sorrows reach deep inside me that voice has tried to tell me that that love and identification are unreal fake cannot be and I refuse it I refuse its message

I carry a shell a white and crisp voiced shell to hide my brown golden soft spanish voiced inner self to pass to hide my puertoricanness

I carry a pole 18 inches long to hold me at the correct distance from black-skinned people

I carry hard metal armor with spikes with shooting weapons in every joint with fire breathing from every hole to protect me to prepare me to assault any man from 13 to 89

I am a whole circus by myself a whole dance company with stance and posture for being in middle class homes in upper class buildings for talking to men for speaking with blacks for carefully angling and directing for choreographing my way thru the maze of classes of people and places thru the little boxes of sex race class nationality sexual orientation intellectual standing political preference the automatic contortions the exhausting camouflage with which I go thru this social space called CAPITALIST PATRIARCHY a daunting but

oh so nicely covering name this is no way to live

Listen listen with care class and color and sex do not define people do not define politics a class society defines people by class a racist society defines

people by color We feminists socialists radicals define people by their struggles again, the racism sexism classism that they harbor that surrounds them

So stop saying that she acts that way because she middle class that that's all you can expect from the, group because it's white that they're just men, quit it!

We know different things some very much ma unpleasant things if we've been women poor black

lesbian or all of those we know different things depending on what sex what color what lives v live where we grew up What schooling what

beatings with or without shoes steak or beans but what politics each of us is going to be and do anybody's guess

Being female doesn't stop us from being sexist we've had to choose early or late at 7 14 27 56 think different dress different act different to struggle to organize to picket argue to change other women's mind to change our own minds to change our feelings ours yours and mine constantly to change and

change and change to fight the onslaught on our minds and bodies and feelings

I'm saying that the basis of our unity is that in the most important way we are all in the same boat all subjected to the violent pernicious ideas we have learned to hate that we must all struggle against them and exchange ways and means hints and how tos that only some of us are victims of sexism only some of are victims of racism of the directed arrows oppression but all of us are sexist racist all of us

-- by Rosario Mori excerpted with permission

ALL IT TAKES IS A SINGLE SPARK –A single spark creates endless potential.

## THANK YOU!



The March 24 Spring Social event was a great success. Thanks to all who ventured out on such a cold & rainy Spring evening to celebrate with us. WE ARE BEATRICE rocked the stage as guests danced, mingled and bid on auction items at the HIGH NOON SALOON in Madison.

The following sponsors supported the WCADV Spring Social

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Bobbie Korenak, Jessie Libber, Andrea Libber,  
and Melissa Nelson



Patti Seger, WCADV ED and Rep. Terese Berceau

## SAVE THE DATE

The 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Together We Can End Domestic Violence luncheon will take place on Friday, September 18, 2009 at the Overture Center for the Arts.

Luncheon sponsors include:

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Email: [wcadv@wcadv.org](mailto:wcadv@wcadv.org)  
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