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Using the Five Faces of Oppression to Teach About Interlocking Systems of Oppression

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In social justice education a tension sometimes emerges between the complex ideas we want participants to grapple with and the relatively straightforward activities we use to communicate those ideas. We adapt learning activities to meet participants' evolving needs and to communicate emerging theories and analyses, but sometimes adjusting an activity's content is not enough; the activity's very structure can contradict our stated frameworks and undermine the content we wish to convey. In this article I explore two activities commonly used for teaching about systems of oppression whose structures inadvertently support linear, single-issue thinking, and largely fail to account for intersectionality, despite educators' best efforts to incorporate more complex content. I describe an alternative activity, structured around Iris Marion Young's The Five Faces of Oppression, that can be used to teach about multiple, interlocking systems of oppression while highlighting rather than obscuring the specificity of interrelationships among those systems.

As a trainer and facilitator working primarily in non-academic settings, I am deeply aware that participants' experiences in my sessions are as important as the content I present. Since people retain learning from experiences far more than from verbal information alone, nonverbal elements of sessions should reflect the concepts and points I wish to communicate. When I think about workshop activities that I might use to transmit important content, I try to consider how an activity's structure might implicitly support or contradict the content.

In teaching about systems of oppression (racism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and so on), I see many educators—sometimes, including me—using activities whose structures contradict some of the content the activity is meant to communicate or even contradict our explicit statements about frameworks and assumptions we bring to the work. In my own practice, this often stems from using legacy activities that I learned many years ago, some of which were so central to my own training that I initially had a hard time thinking past them. Over the years, I have adapted these activities based on my own evolving analysis, as well as newly published materials, but I adjust the activities' content far more often than I redesign their structure. As a result I am sometimes trying to force-fit a relatively complex analysis into activities whose structure communicates a much simpler point than the one I want participants to understand. I have worked with many other educators who similarly grapple with activities that have served them well in

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the past, but that no longer reflect their analysis. This article grows out of my experience in letting go of some legacy activities and reimagining how to convey key concepts about systems of oppression.

For the purpose of this article, I'm especially interested in activities whose role in a workshop is to provide a broad list of examples of manifestations of oppression (or of a specific system of oppression). These activities are powerful and important because the examples, whether furnished by the facilitator or generated by the group, become part of participants' working definitions of the "ism" or "isms" in question. Even if facilitators provide a formal definition, the examples and the experience of learning the examples can have a tendency to stick with participants far more than formal definitions. To the extent that experiencing these activities forms part of students' definitions of racism, sexism, and so on, it is particularly problematic when something about that experience contradicts what we are trying to communicate about how oppression works.

In this article I outline some of the problems with two specific activities that I see being used often by social justice practitioners that are inadequate to communicating a nuanced picture of how oppression works. Specifically, the activities tend to support linear, single-issue thinking, and largely fail to account for intersectionality (which I explore below). In addition, one of the activities actually replicates oppressive power dynamics upon participants. I go on to describe an alternative activity I developed, structured around The Five Faces of Oppression (Young, 1990), that I have used to teach about systems of oppression in a way that supports participants to develop an understanding of multiple, interlocking systems of oppression, and can inspire them to coalitional, issue-based action, rather than single-issue or identity-based action.

The scope of this article is admittedly narrow. As a practitioner, my aim is to offer one tool I have developed to partially address a gap I see in the field of practice, not to present theoretical innovations or make sweeping claims about the state of the field. I hope other practitioners will respond with further innovations so that our toolbox of options for workshop-based social justice education can begin to catch up with recent developments in analysis and public discourse on these issues.

INTERSECTIONALITY

Systems of oppression, such as racism, heterosexism, ableism, and so on, are systemic, directional power relationships among social identity groups, in which one group benefits at the expense of other groups (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007). These systems are multiple and interlocking, and their interaction is complex, rather than simply additive (Collins, 1990; Crenshaw, 1989; Hankivsky, 2014). Intersectionality is a framework that helps us address the complexity of identity and experience in systems of oppression.

The term "intersectionality" was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) to describe the mulitidimensionality of lived experiences of women of color in contexts of sexism and racism. Crenshaw argues that an understanding of either system, or even of both systems in parallel, does not explain their interactions. Instead, she urges an understanding of how racism and sexism reinforce and complicate each other. Similarly, Collins (1990) describes interlocking systems of oppression, not

limited to racism and sexism but including other systems, like classism, heterosexism, and so on. Although much of the theoretical work on intersectionality focuses on women of color or other multiply marginalized subjects (i.e., people marginalized by two or more system of oppression), the term also is used more broadly to address interconnections among systems of oppression as they play out for those with any combination of identities, including both privileged and marginalized identities (Collins, 1990; Hankivsky, 2014). An intersectional analysis considers the interconnections among systems of oppression, not only as they influence individual identity and experience, but also as the systems themselves are entangled, co-constructed, and mutually dependent (Hankivsky, 2014).

Intersectionality is a theory that comes from a movement; although the word's ubiquity in gender studies and other fields is relatively recent, the central ideas of intersectionality have deep roots in women of color feminism (Nash, 2008). The driving purpose behind an intersectional framework has always been to examine how best to shift systems of power, not just how best to understand or describe these systems. An intersectional analysis should focus explicitly on "transformation, building coalitions among different groups, and working towards social justice" (Hankivsky, 2014, p. 3). Therefore, a key question for educators in gauging the success of social justice education projects should be not only what kind of understanding participants gain, but also what kind of action participants are inspired to perform.

McCall (2005) outlines three approaches to intersectional research: anticategorical complexity, intracategorical complexity, and intercategorical complexity. Although McCall's work focuses on research approaches rather than teaching approaches, I find the distinction between the latter two to be useful for noting what may be intersectional, or not intersectional, about learning activities. Intracategorical complexity describes projects whose focus is on the differences within a group defined by one or more social identities (e.g., differences among women or differences among women of color). Intercategorical complexity focuses on power relationships among multiple groups. Whereas an intracategorical approach typically focuses on a specific multiply-marginalized group, for example comparing women of color to white women, white men, and men of color, an intercategorical analysis might start with the broad question of, "What identities and systems of oppression are relevant to this issue, and how?" Hankivsky (2014) highlights the intercategorical type of intersectional approach with the suggestion that "the [identity] categories and their importance must be discovered in the process of investigation" (p. 3) rather than assumed as a starting point.

Nash (2008) notes that, although intersectionality has become a gold standard framework for theorizing identity, there is no consensus as to how to do intersectional research, and that "intersectional projects often replicate precisely the approaches that they critique" (p. 6). Unfortunately, the same can be said of some teaching practices: We draw on intersectionality in theory, while in practice we sometimes, inadvertently, replicate the very gaps in analysis that we are trying to fill by introducing intersectionality. If we profess an intersectional analysis, that analysis should be reflected in every aspect of our work—not only in our verbal explanations but also in our overall program design, facilitation methods, and the structures of individual sessions and activities. The remainder of this article focuses on one small way in which we can better integrate intersectionality into our teaching: the structured activities that are often used to introduce examples of manifestations of oppression and that contribute to participants' understanding of what oppression is and how it plays out.

"PRIVILEGE WALK" AND "LEVELS OF OPPRESSION"

One activity that introduces examples of manifestations of oppression is called a "privilege walk" (or sometimes "power walk," "power shuffle," and other names) (e.g., California Newsreel, 2006). In a privilege walk, participants line up shoulder-to-shoulder in the middle of the room. A facilitator reads a list of statements that would indicate a form of social power or privilege a person has (or does not have), along with instructions for participants to step forward or backward depending on whether or not each statement is true for them. In the end, participants have arranged themselves in a spatial representation of their relative experiences of privilege and oppression. In some cases, participants may be invited to add statements, but the facilitators provide the core list of examples.

The items included in the activity vary as to how explicitly they reference social identity. In some versions they are simple statements of group membership (e.g., "step forward if you are heterosexual"). In others they refer to a specific marker of privilege or oppression and the social identity to which the facilitator assumes it is attached ("e.g., step forward if you see many people of your sexual orientation represented positively in mainstream media"). Sometimes the markers alone are used (e.g., "step forward if you see many people 'like you' represented positively in mainstream media").

Regardless of which version of the activity is used, one outcome it effectively creates is that participants have a powerful and memorable emotional and physical experience, which fixes the list of examples (or at least those that were most impactful to the particular student) in their memories. I often hear participants cite this activity as a key moment in their developing understanding of oppression or of a particular "ism." The same participants may or may not be able to articulate a definition or theory about the "ism," but they have thoroughly internalized the items they remember from that list as exemplars of the "ism."

When the privilege walk focuses on one "ism" at a time, it tends to obscure intersectionality. Of course participants still bring intersectional identities to their responses, but there is nothing built into the activity that would bring up the issue of multiple identities or interlocking systems. Even when the activity does utilize examples related to multiple "isms," the nature of the spatial metaphor enacted in one dimension (forward-backward) means that manifestations of privilege and oppression are treated as additive, rather than intersectional. For example, a black male participant who steps forward in response to a question meant to elicit male privilege and then steps backward in response to a question meant to elicit race-based oppression returns to zero, as if the two experiences cancel each other out—which, of course, they do not. A white female participant standing next to him would end up in the same place, although, of course, those participants' experiences are likely to have been very different. The items in the facilitator's list are treated as quantitatively and qualitatively equivalent, and unique positionalities are not acknowledged. Thus, even though the facilitators may be thinking of intersectionally, and even though they may seed the activity with examples from multiple "isms," the activity itself portrays a much more simplistic understanding of oppression.

Another goal of the privilege walk activity is that participants become convinced, through a kinesthetic, metaphorical demonstration, of the reality of how a particular "ism," or sometimes the "isms" together, create hierarchy. In other words, participants believe in the "ism" and believe that it's a problem. This is the point of the activity—that participants come to understand it emotionally, not only logically, and develop a felt sense that it seems true.

In the first two of the three versions described above (in which examples are named relative to a particular identity), the activity is often ineffective in pursuit of the goal of convincing participants that a system of reality is real, since it is transparently rigged to demonstrate precisely the inequality the facilitator wants to demonstrate. Recalling Hankivsky's (2014) tenet that "the [identity] categories and their importance must be discovered in the process of investigation" (p. 3), these versions of the privilege walk do not create space for participants to discover anything or to investigate their experiences. Rather, they impose an interpretation that heterosexism (in the above examples) explains the differences in participants' responses to the prompts. Participants who already believe that there is a hierarchy of power and privilege along lines of sexual orientation may experience the activity as deepening or affirming that belief, but the activity does not demonstrate anything about heterosexism except that the facilitators (or whoever created the list of prompts) believe in heterosexism. For participants who do not enter the experience already believing in the existence of heterosexism, the activity not only won't convince them, but may lead them to distrust the facilitator, who has set them up to demonstrate a premise with which they disagree.

In the third version, in which examples focus on experiences rather than on identities explicitly, the activity has the potential to be powerfully convincing in a way the first two styles rarely are. However, it can fall short in a different way. This version's success at making its point relies on the participants being a typical or average group and reporting experiences that reflect broader patterns. Otherwise, if the group, for example, happens to contain several people of color who have been sheltered from some common manifestations of racism by class privilege or other factors and will report not having experienced the examples of racism cited in the prompts, then the point of the activity may be lost. The point is not lost because it is untrue, but because the point is too simplistic to bear the complexity of systems as reflected in the lived experiences of people in the room.

Many years ago, in the role of a participant, I experienced a privilege walk activity that backfired in precisely this way. The privilege walk took place at a private liberal arts college and focused on class and race. The facilitator wanted to make the point that racism leads to class inequality across racial groups. Her expectation was that, based on questions about class, many white participants would end up in the front half of the room while most participants of color would end up in the back half of the room. In fact the race/class pattern that the facilitator's class-focused prompts elicited was much less clear. I ended up, alone among white participants, at the very back of the group, behind a cluster of black and Latina participants. There were also several black, Latina, and Asian participants who ended up near the front of the room. Following the activity, while participants remained standing where we had ended up, the facilitator elicited examples from the group to support the point (with which I agree) that racism creates class inequality across racial groups. However, the activity had put us in a spatial arrangement demonstrating that the race/class patterns in our group were not representative of the patterns the facilitator was pointing out about the general population; many of the people of color in the room came from relatively class-privileged backgrounds. (The unexpected race/class distribution might not be unusual given the elite college context; see, e.g., Massey, Mooney, Torres, & Charles, 2007.).

This could have been a powerful moment to examine racism/classism intersectionality. From an intragroup approach, the facilitator might have noted the diversity of class experiences among people of color, and likewise among white people, and prompted participants to explore the mechanisms or patterns behind those differences. From an intergroup approach, the facilitator

could have noted the diversity of experience in the group overall and initiated an exploration of what social identities and other factors might account for those differences (including race and class, but also gender, dis/ability, sexual orientation, region, individual and family history, etc.). Instead the facilitator ignored the outliers in the activity and facilitated a discussion focused solely on the pattern she had expected to see in the group—that of race and class being highly correlated. Both the spatial metaphor upon which the activity is built and the facilitator's explanation failed to acknowledge the complexity of intersectional identity and experience under interlocking systems of oppression. As a result, participants stood there embodying a representation of the racism and classism systems while listening to an explanation of those systems that did not match our embodiment.

Such contradiction is alienating and confusing for participants who are immersed in an activity to which they have implicitly agreed, by their participation, to trust as a source of information. Conducting the privilege walk without being prepared to address the range of outcomes it may produce defeats the purpose of using a highly participatory activity to demonstrate, rather than just explain, systems of oppression. One could write off the situation I described as a failure of facilitation rather than an inherent flaw of the activity; certainly the facilitator could have offered a more nuanced interpretation of the activity's outcome. Yet, even if the facilitator had embraced the surprising outcomes and followed up on them, the activity's one-dimensional metaphor would have contradicted her. The linear forward-back structure reinforces a quantitative logic of "more privileged" and "less privileged." A facilitator can verbally acknowledge more complex power relationships within and across groups, but it is hard to imagine that acknowledgement coming across as more than lip service relative to participants' embodied experience of standing and moving together in a drawn-out, emotionally-laden, one-dimensional comparison.

Finally, I and many educators I know prefer not to use the privilege walk for a reason whose articulation does not require intersectionality. That is, the activity replicates oppressive patterns upon the participants. Those who have the least amount of privilege (to the extent that privilege is quantifiable, as measured by the examples the facilitator has chosen to employ for the activity) end up standing at the back of the room, far from the facilitator, looking at fellow participants' backs. They may have difficulty hearing or seeing the facilitator from so far away. Those who have the most privilege proceed effortlessly to the front in a way that they know is unfair. Participants at the back may feel humiliated or shamed upon disclosing experiences of oppression, and participants at the front may feel embarrassed or guilty upon disclosing unearned privileges. Of course, that also describes how people often feel in the real world outside the workshop, when power and oppression manifest in their everyday, non-facilitated, interactions. Evoking the same difficult emotions that people experience about oppression is unnecessary and often counter-productive to generating the new, different, conversations about oppression in which we want participants to engage.

Furthermore, the point the activity seeks to drive home is mostly for the more privileged participants in the room. Those who will end up at the back of the group, for the most part, already know that the "ism" is real. Their discomfort in the activity serves no purpose for them, but contributes to the learning of the more privileged participants who need to be convinced. The activity affects a transfer of emotional resources from less-privileged participants to more-privileged participants, which mirrors analogous oppressive patterns in the world. The activity reproduces oppression in order to demonstrate that oppression is bad, which seems an unbearable contradiction if our practice aims not only for understanding, but also for action that is just.

Another activity often used to introduce examples of manifestations of an "ism" is sometimes called "levels of oppression." It is a much simpler activity than the privilege walk in that it is not meant to be experiential and the interaction consists almost solely of verbal exchanges among participants and the facilitators. In the activity, the facilitator introduces the idea that systems of oppression play out at various levels—interpersonal, cultural, institutional, and sometimes also internalized—and then participants are asked to brainstorm examples of manifestations of a particular system of oppression at each level (e.g., Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 2007, p. 162, 271, 240, 322). Depending on the facilitator, the brainstorm might be freeform or might include targeted follow-up questions, and might include more or less interaction and discussion among participants.

The levels of oppression activity serves to highlight the range of manifestations of a particular "ism," and is a helpful tool for ensuring that participants don't leave out a whole broad area of manifestations (e.g., thinking only of interpersonal and institutional manifestations but not cultural ones). However the activity provides little to help participants draw connections among different "isms" or to note differences within identity groups. Nothing about this activity necessitates or encourages participants to notice that, for example, being treated with suspicion while shopping is a manifestation of both adultism (oppression of young people) and racism, or to follow up on this parallel with probing questions about the reasons for it or the relationships between the two systems (which could be an example of an intergroup approach to intersectionality).

Unlike the privilege walk, the structure of a levels of oppression activity does not necessarily get in the way of an intersectional approach—it just does not especially support it. I could imagine a facilitator starting with a levels of oppression activity and then shifting into a discussion that really draws out ideas about intersections (and I have done so), but this entails adding quite a bit to the logic and ideas that are built into the activity.

The levels of oppression activity assumes participants have some basic awareness of manifestations of oppression. Particularly when the activity focuses on one "ism" at a time (which is most of the time in my experience), there is nothing about it that would lead participants to think of manifestations of oppression that they have not thought of before (although of course they may hear some from other participants). Manifestations that are less well-known or less predominant in public discourse are likely to go unmentioned. Finally, the activity is almost purely verbal and therefore not particularly engaging to participants whose learning styles tend toward visual or kinesthetic.

EFFECTS OF THIS APPROACH

Because the exemplar manifestations of oppression that we teach become part of participants' implicit definitions of oppression, it stands to reason that the way in which we provide or generate these examples has profound impacts on the understandings with which participants emerge from the classes. When we provide or generate examples one "ism" at a time, a logical result is that participants will tend to think of the systems as separate and parallel, rather than intertwined. Intersections of identity may come up as outliers or side notes, through attempts by facilitators or participants to name differences in how a system of oppression impacts people differently within an identity group (intracategorical complexity). Even so, there is nothing in either of the activities described above that would help participants make meaning of those differences. With

the privilege walk, when we provide or generate examples as part of a linear spatial metaphor, we reinforce the idea of oppression as additive rather than intersectional—even if we later articulate that the actual relationship among interlocking systems of oppression is more complex than the metaphor we just enacted. Therefore, we should not be surprised if participants' takeaways tend to reflect a single-issue or additive understanding.

Many social justice educators assert as a guiding principle that "there is no hierarchy of oppression" (Lorde, 1983, p. 9) and that it is rarely useful to get into debate about which system of oppression is worst, came first, or is the root of all others (e.g., Hardiman & Jackson 2007, p. 37). Instead, it is useful to note how these systems manifest in some ways that are similar and some ways that are different from each other. We emphasize this point because the opposite tendency—to consider one "ism" as more primary, central, or severe than the others—is woven through much of the common knowledge that people internalize about systems of oppression, as well as through some schools of academic thought. Because activities like those discussed above do little to help participants examine the similarities and differences across systems of oppression, participants may default to the dominant model of comparing "isms" quantitatively, in terms of which are most central or most severe. Alternately, they might oversimplify parallels they observe, as in the unfortunate claim that a given contemporary grievance is "the new civil rights issue of our time."

Instead, participants need a way to compare and contrast systems of oppression qualitatively and complexly, noting similarities and differences, overlaps and divergences. They need activities that demonstrate not only that the "isms" are interrelated and co-constituting, but also how their mechanisms interact to form mutually dependent, interlocking systems that impact people differently within and across a variety of social categories. Participants could draw on such complexity of analysis to consider how best to take action to address complex social issues, including forming coalitions around specific sites of common interest.

FIVE FACES OF OPPRESSION

The Five Faces of Oppression is a model articulated by Iris Marion Young (1990) to describe different forms that oppression takes. Whereas the levels of oppression model (regardless of whether it is articulated through the activity discussed above) identifies the scales at which oppression operates (among individuals, embedded in institutions, and permeating cultures) (Pincus, 2000), the Five Faces model describes qualitatively how it operates. Briefly summarizing Young's (1990) definitions of the five faces, it is noted that:

- Exploitation is the systematic transfer of resources (such as land, wealth, or labor value) from one group to another.
- Marginalization is the prevention or limitation of full participation in society through exclusion from, for example, the job market, health care system, public benefits programs, or community activities.
- Powerlessness is a deprivation of the ability to make decisions about one's living or working conditions.
- Cultural imperialism is the valuing and enforcement of the dominant group's culture, norms, and characteristics.

● Violence includes physical, sexual, and emotional violence, and the threat of violence, as well as policies and structures that condone violence.

As a conceptual model for generating a list of examples of manifestations of oppression, Five Faces has much to recommend it over the levels of oppression model. To begin with, the levels are already implicit in each face. Although Young's (1990) definitions focus mostly on the cultural and institutional levels, individual actions that can perpetuate each facet are also easy to identify. Another benefit is that the name and definition of each face is descriptive. When participants are asked to produce a list of examples, the faces may elicit ideas that would not otherwise come to mind with the less evocative "individual," "institutional," and "cultural."

The faces may even elicit hypothetical ideas that are actually beyond participants' range of knowledge. For example, the brief definition of powerlessness provided above could be enough to lead participants to think, "An example of a decision about 'living conditions' would be deciding what to eat. If someone didn't get to decide what kind of food to eat, that would be an example of powerlessness . . . Is there a group of people who are systematically denied the ability to decide what kind of food they eat?" Participants don't have to know that such a manifestation exists in order to posit the possibility of its existence and generate questions that will lead them to new information. In this case, their line of thinking could lead to discussion about the oppression of people who are incarcerated or institutionalized and about the patterns of which groups of people are disproportionately imprisoned and institutionalized. This sort of discussion reflects Hankivsky's (2014) assertion that an intersectional approach can start from a defined issue and ask, rather than assume, how various identities and systems of oppression might be relevant to the issue. It also reflects McCall's (2005) approach of intergroup complexity. Additionally, patterns and analyses that are discovered by participants in the course of their own investigations (even if those investigations consist only of brainstorming and discussion), are surely more convincing than analyses imposed on them by facilitators.

The Five Faces model is particularly powerful at helping participants generate novel examples when used to discuss multiple systems of oppression. But even when used to generate examples of one system at a time, the descriptive power of the Five Faces seems to lead participants to more readily see parallels among them. Below is an example of how I have used the Five Faces, in workshops focusing on multiple "isms," to provoke intersectional thinking and action planning. I describe the analog version of the activity (using paper and markers); it could, of course, be adapted to take advantage of the technology available in a given setting. Specifics, such as timing and exact instructions, will vary depending on the group and context. I have used this activity successfully with groups of 10 to around 40 participants.

The Five Faces Activity

Set-up

Create a station for each face (exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence) consisting of an easel sheet titled with the name and brief definition of the face, as well as several blank easel sheets and several markers. Stations should be spread out around the training space.

Introduction

Review the Five Faces model by presenting a brief definition of each face (as above). Provide two or three examples for each face (related to different systems of oppression), to help participants understand the definitions. It may be helpful to acknowledge that some manifestations of oppression could be understood in terms of more than one face. The point is not to assign each example definitely to a face, but rather to think through a variety of examples, representing some from each face.

Small Group Work

Divide participants into five groups. Each group will begin at one of the faces/stations, where the participants will generate specific examples of manifestations of that face and record them on the easel sheets. If participants are much more familiar with some "isms" than others, remind them to think about examples from "isms" with which they are less familiar. Inform participants of how much time they will have to work on the first face. When the time is up, have the groups rotate to a new face. At the new face, each group should review what the previous group has recorded, and then add their own new examples for that face. Continue rotating until every group has worked on every face. (The amount of time spent at each face may decrease in subsequent rotations, since the previous groups will have already generated many of the most obvious examples. However make sure to give groups enough time to discuss the examples at each face.)

Report Out

After all groups have rotated through all five stations, ask for volunteers to read aloud from the easel sheets at each station, giving all participants an opportunity to see and hear what has been written by the groups that worked at each station after they did.

Discussion Questions

During and/or after the report out, pose questions to the group (and encourage participants to ask questions of each other). If needed, some questions should prompt participants to fill in examples at different levels/scales (individual, institutional, cultural) where there may have been gaps in their initial lists. Other questions should support participants to get more specific in their descriptions of manifestations by specifying who is targeted, under what circumstances, and in what ways the manifestations are linked to larger system of power. For example if someone wrote "sexual assault" as an example under "violence," you might ask: "Who tends to be disproportionately likely to experience sexual assault?" Participants will probably say "women." Acknowledge that, while anyone can experience sexual assault, statistics reflect that women are more likely to be sexually assaulted than men, and in that sense sexual assault can be thought of as a manifestation of sexism. Follow up with questions like:

- What kind of women? (For example, this may elicit responses about women who are systemically disempowered in ways additional to sexism, such as those who are economically marginalized, indigenous women, women in prison, etc.)
- In what circumstances are people likely to experience sexual assault? (Responses get at similar patterns to the above question, e.g., when incarcerated, when in police custody, when in intimate relationships characterized by abuse of power, when in a war zone, etc.) And who are most likely to find themselves in those circumstances? (In the example of incarceration, participants may name young black and Latino men as disproportionately likely to be incarcerated, as well as transgender women, people with mental illness, and poor people.)
- Who besides women? In what circumstances? (While anyone can experience sexual assault, statistics show that children, people in prison, people with mental illness, LGB people, and transgender people are disproportionately likely to be assaulted.)

The first two follow-up questions get at intracategorical complexity, in terms of differences among women in how a particular form of violence is likely to manifest. The last question often draws out intergroup complexity, in identifying similarities and differences across many identity categories in how sexual assault is likely to manifest. Further questions can focus on the relationship of sexual assault to systems of power:

- Who tends to perpetrate this violence?
- Under what circumstances?
- In what ways do the perpetrators have power over those targeted?
- Who has power over the perpetrators?
- (If not already covered on the easel sheets) What policies, structures, or norms condone or support the prevalence of sexual assault?
- What are the systemic ramifications of the prevalence of sexual assault? Who benefits?

The activity thus generates a broad and deep list of examples of manifestations of oppression, spanning multiple systems of oppression, levels of oppression, and faces, in a way that makes explicit connections (spatially as well as conceptually) between different "isms" that have similar manifestations and invites explorations of intersectionality in terms of both intracategorical and intercategorical complexity.

CONCLUSION

The Five Faces activity provides a groundwork from which participants can begin to think about taking action against systems of oppression from an issue-based, intersectional approach. However, it is only a groundwork. Depending on the context and goals, it might stand alone as an activity for helping participants understand systems of oppression, or it might require substantial follow-up to connect the learning back to other salient points of the workshop, course, or training. In community-based settings, I often follow it up with other activities, projects, and discussions designed to lead participants through some beginning stages of planning issue-based collective action, including identifying priorities and goals, reflecting on spheres of influence, identifying

potential coalition partners, reflecting on their own positionalities, and establishing tools for individual and group accountability.

Of course, this is only one activity. As noted above, intersectionality offers a variety of approaches that can and should be woven throughout every part of our work. I hope that other practitioners will join with me in reimagining some of the tried and true activities that may no longer be reflective of our analysis, in applying an intersectional approach to the methods, as well as the content of our practice, and in creating new tools to help us all practice what we teach.

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