

DIVERSITY CONSULTING AND TEACHING FROM A SOCIAL JUSTICE PERSPECTIVE

Debra A. Harkins

Sukanya Ray

Suffolk University

Terri M. Davis

John F. Kennedy University

Abstract

What does consulting and teaching look like from the sociopolitical spaces of privilege, ambivalence and oppression? Giving voice to visible social identities is explored through narrative exploration of teacher and student voices. Who can raise these issues and who cannot? Pedagogically, how can and should we as trainers address these issues? We discuss consulting and teaching about privilege and oppression across race, ethnicity and gender in psychology programs at urban universities in eastern and western United States. The three issues explored include: a) teaching about privilege and oppression from a visibly privileged social identity; b) acknowledging the ambiguities of privilege and oppression of minorities and immigrants from a sociopolitical space of ambivalence; and c) mentoring and modeling on issues of privilege and oppression from a visibly oppressed social identity. Consulting from this postmodernist perspective is different and more effective when members of all level of the organizations embrace readiness, patience and commitment toward organizational change. This approach is more aligned with the current shifts towards globalization and diversification occurring within organizations today.

Keywords: Diversity, Power, Privilege, Ambivalence, Oppression, Consulting and teaching

“Helping situations are intrinsically unbalanced, and role-ambiguous. Emotionally and socially, when you ask for help you are putting yourself “one down.”—Edgar H. Schein, 2009

How does a consultant address the volatile issues of social justice, equity and diversity without alienating their client? Given these issues often revolve around a lack of willingness to hear voices beyond those privileged, the consultant

must be especially wary of not simply perpetuating the existing sociopolitical power dynamics of the organization (Carucci & Tetenbaum, 2000). We propose that diversity consulting focused on process and experience is a more effective strategy for long term systemic social change than problem focused approaches. Given that organizational development consultants focus on process, they are in ideal positions to engage in diversity consulting work. How can this process focus approach be most effectively used when addressing the unconscious dimensions of power and privilege played out within organizational settings? And, how can consultants use their own social positions to model systemic social change? This paper seeks to address these issues.

It is important for consultants to acknowledge they have an opportunity to use their power to provide space to those traditionally silenced in communities, organizations and society. We, the authors, are fortunate to be able to test our ideas about how to address diversity by using process models (Schein, 1987; 2009) in our university classrooms. And, given that we each represent different sociopolitical positions in society we are able to explore here how this process differs in our respective classrooms. The classroom is the place where we explore

and train students to become aware of diversity issues and the social injustices inherent in our society. This training provides students with the foundation needed to engage in social justice and diversity work in organizations, communities and society at large. Then, we apply our learning about diversity in our diversity consulting work.

What does consulting and teaching look like from the sociopolitical spaces of privilege, ambivalence and oppression? Although we each experience privilege, ambivalence and oppression through our many social identities, here we try to identify how our skin color impacts our consulting and teaching. The first author will discuss teaching from the privileged white position, second author will discuss teaching from the ambivalent position of Asian immigrant; and third author will discuss teaching from the oppressed African American position. Working from postmodern theories (Foucault, 1980; Friere', 1981; 1988; Giroux, 2005; hooks, 1994), we agree that knowledge is multi-authored, multi-owned and multi-dimensional. It is for this reason that we strongly believe all voices in the room must be valued and heard and our pedagogical approaches are reflective of this perspective.

We, the authors, are struck by how rarely the voices of the oppressed, the marginalized, and the silent are heard. Unfortunately, these voices are further silenced by teachers instructing in a uni-directional way focused on transferring information from expert/teacher to student. Many educators are modernist in their pedagogy and view themselves as passing information/truth on; rarely considering the subjective nature of their own knowledge. We have found this modernist approach to be quite barren of the rich information of other cultures and people and strike us as incomplete and exclusive. For example, teaching from a modernist position might include reviewing terms and concepts in the text whereas teaching from a postmodern position might include encouraging students to question the terms and concepts in the text including the sociopolitical position of the author and who benefits and who is oppressed by such concepts and terms.

As educational and developmental theorists (Burman, 2000; 2008; Giroux, 2005; Kegan, 1994; Senge, 2005) have stated, many adults still function from a modernist position—believing in truth as singular and objective---while living a postmodern world. When a traditional college student enters the classroom with this singular and objective perspective, we question whether our challenge to hear

other voices can be heard. Of course, not all students are functioning at a modernist level. However, our combined experiences are that many people have been indoctrinated into the positivist scientific method—believing in objective truth-- by their educational experiences making postmodern college teaching and consulting particularly challenging. Our approach is to critically question the modernist position by exposing the power dynamics in and out of the classroom through readings, films, discussion, class activities/field projects and personal experiences.

Similarly, postmodern consulting can be challenging when the client is expecting an expert to tell them what to do. As Schein (1987) has pointed out, expert consulting has its place in the consulting world and we do not disagree. However, we believe diversity consulting in organizations must be process focused especially when one considers that “diversity issues” in organizations are a microcosm of the power differences that exist in society at large. If we acknowledge that there are many social injustices in our country then we must be wary not to perpetuate such injustices in our consulting work. Diversity consulting requires a postmodern approach that includes: a) critical questioning of truth; b) looking beyond stereotypes; c) having

room for exploring within group differences; d) being color conscious; e) being comfortable with ambivalence; and f) engaging in experiential learning.

We, the authors, discuss how we use the classroom as a vehicle to bring about long-term systemic social change through transformational teaching approaches. The classroom provides us with an ideal forum to engage in open dialogue with young, malleable students for a lengthy period of time. We also acknowledge using our privileged position as educators to engage students to address diversity issues through open dialogue and experiential learning that fosters participation in social justice and organizational change. We expect and have witnessed students then “pay it forward” by working with others to create change individually and within organizational settings.

Our shared pedagogy includes the idea that our own sociopolitical position of power impacts who, what and how we teach. We acknowledge that we each hold different positions of power and yet none of us holds the most powerful sociopolitical position of white male. Our privileged academic position provides us with the opportunity and responsibility to challenge the status quo of educational and social practices.

Here we discuss the pedagogical approaches we use to go beyond didactic means as we shift the way knowledge is understood and gained. We have experienced students’ knowledge become deeper and more complete when we engage in a multi-directional and inclusive teaching pedagogy. In addition, going beyond traditional experts for our sources ensures a broad base of knowledge and inclusivity.

We illustrate how these power differences play a role in our classrooms when we teach diversity courses. We do this in all of our courses but we are much more direct about the process when teaching diversity-focused courses. We do this by acknowledging our own social racial identities in the classroom. What the three of us share in our pedagogical approaches are the questions we ask ourselves: how do we and how should we address diversity issues? There are very few road maps in the field for us. Considering our postmodern stance, we would want several maps anyway.

Our teaching is similar to our consulting work and will be particularly useful for those seeking to understand how to address the challenges of diversity consulting and organizational development. We believe acknowledging one’s sociopolitical position is the first step.

In the following, we discuss how we teach about privilege and oppression across race, class and gender in undergraduate and graduate psychology programs in urban universities within the United States. The three issues explored include: a) teaching about privilege and oppression from a visibly privileged social identity; b) acknowledging the ambiguities of privilege and oppression of minorities and immigrants from a sociopolitical space of ambivalence; and c) mentoring and supervising students on issues of privilege and oppression from a visibly oppressed social identity. We will explore our individual perspectives on privilege (DH), ambivalence (SR) and oppression (TD) respectively using personal narratives and experiences in the following sections.

Privileged Position

"The power of resistance is to set an example: ... to empower the one who is watching and whose growth is not yet completed...." –Tim Wise

As a person with significant privilege (white and middle class), I (DH) engage in consulting and teaching about diversity by deeply exploring the unspoken power this position provides me in the university, classroom, and workplace. I focus on the power and

privilege aspects of diversity given that this is the position from which I can speak most strongly. For example, exploring the socio-political history of why individuals at the top rung of organizations, universities, and classrooms are white while those lower on the ladder tend to be persons of color, must guide the work of the privileged trainer and consultant.

Addressing diversity is often viewed as challenging and discussing the more volatile issues of power and privilege is like walking into a minefield. Understandably, the consequence of revealing the social and historical practices that have created unequal dynamics has led to tension with fellow white colleagues, especially those with even greater privilege. Not surprisingly, those who feel most challenged are usually white males. This resistance by privileged individuals, whether white male faculty or students, takes many forms including: denying or challenging information, interrupting/disrupting the conversation, passive participation, changing the subject or claiming reverse discrimination (Bohmer, & Briggs, 1991; Chan & Tracy, 1996; Chavez & O'Donnell, 1998; Goodman, 2007).

Resistance makes it difficult for people to engage with information and more likely that they will dismiss the realities of oppression or inequality

(Friedman & Lipshitz, 1992). Yet, managing resistance is the first and often most difficult step in cultural competency work. Resistance stems from fear and discomfort; hence, it is not surprising, therefore, that those with the most to lose from acknowledging inequities related to gender, sexuality, and race (those who are white, heterosexual males) tend to demonstrate the most resistance (Kreisberg, 1992). Beliefs in meritocracy, hierarchy, competition, and individualism make it more likely that those at the top will use arguments of laziness, incompetence and/or deficiency for those lower than themselves. Such 'just' world arguments allow one to blame the victim for their disadvantaged position thereby reducing the need for any systemic social change (Rubin & Peplau, 1975). These are some of the issues I explore when consulting and teaching about diversity.

When exploring issues of race and ethnicity I include learning the theory, research, history and social construction of racial and ethnic privilege, oppression and power within a personally relevant and experiential framework. This teaching method helps students begin to explore how issues of power and privilege can impact their work with those different from themselves (Frankenberg, 1993).

Teaching provides me with many opportunities to explore and name my

own and others' privileged voice, to determine what is effective for creating change in those most resistant and what activities are futile toward this goal of social change. From many years of teaching on issues of diversity, community and empowerment, I have been able to distill what is effective when engaging in training and consulting in other settings.

What follows is an example of one pedagogical approach used to facilitate transformational changes in views of diversity. I use a narrative analysis of one white male college student's experience (Bob) of privilege and oppression to explore how privilege was deconstructed and a new ally emerged. In this course, students are given \$600 by the university. I use the process of making a decision about what to do with this money (e.g., spend it on themselves, give it to the poor, buy toys for sick children, etc.) as a pedagogical tool to experientially teach about the unconscious processes and assumptions that impact the dynamics of conflict. Fortunately, from a pedagogical perspective, this process often leads to conflict as students often do not agree on what to do. I view my role as one of exploring how and why they are considering decisions including revealing who is talking, who is not, whether decisions are being made by the few and how decisions are being made (Burman,

2000). This deconstruction of decision making is often a revealing and frustrating experience for students as it often reveals the unconscious and subtle processes occurring in the classroom including how females often let males lead the conversation, how people of color are often silent throughout the process and how the few are assuming that everyone is in agreement with their decision. In this way, students experientially learn about power and privilege and learn about their role in the process.

Another pedagogical tool is having students write weekly electronic posts of their experiences in this course. Rather than respond to these posts, I read the posts to establish where students are with the issues being raised. During the first four weeks of the course Bob wrote mainly about how his family and community impacts the way he resolves conflicts. Not surprisingly, by week five, Bob began to question my approach to the conflicts about money: "...*The classroom discussion regarding the 600....turned into such a conflict ...because professor H constantly undermined our decision.*" Bob's frustration continues the following week as he tries to make sense of oppression revealed in two films: "*In Crash the image of the Caucasian American as the 'oppressor' is evident. This coincides*

with what was said in The Color of Fear that whites are the oppressor against all the 'colored' peoples. I personally do not agree with this idea.....Blacks are more f&*ing racist than we are."*

A critical event for Bob occurred in week nine when he shared in his e-posts his experience of getting into a fight on the subway. He continued to explore this incident in Week 10 as he wrote about the gender differences he noticed, with his father "*being glad I fought the guy*" and "*my mother caring and rational (like Gilligan) wanted to sue the kid*" for hurting Bob. Simultaneously, in week nine, students still had not decided what to do with the \$600 designated to their class. Given the students obvious frustration with their inability to negotiate with each other on this issue I chose an exercise I hoped would provide opportunities for more participation from some of the silent students in the room. I asked students to get into small groups of 4-5 and discuss why they thought some students were silent in class and what we as a class could do to change the dynamics in class.

It is important to note that up until this point, Bob sat at the back of the class, baseball cap and hoodie over his head with his head down presumably looking at a laptop computer he brought with him to every class. He spoke with no one in the

class and I noticed students seemed to be sitting further and further away from him.

Bob's group suggested we go around the room and have each person say why students were not talking and other groups agreed with this suggestion. We reconvened into a large circle and each student began to provide some reasons for their quietness. Several students said *"I am shy but I will talk when I am ready."* *"I don't really have anything to say. I tend to be the quiet one in classes."* and so on. Given that these answers seemed short and non-reflective, I interrupted the process and turned to Bob's group and asked: *"Are students answering the question you posed?"* It was at this point, that Bob spoke for the first time in class: *"No!"* I probed further: *What are you and your group looking for? Maybe someone could provide an example to help other students."* Bob began: *"Like, we want to know why you don't talk in class? Why are you shy? Why are you quiet? I will tell you why I am quiet. I am one of those people you have been reading and talking about all semester. See this shiner on my eye (as he pulls his hoodie down and his hat off) I got this in a fight on the train with some blacks. I get into fights all the time with blacks, in my neighborhood we fight blacks, we call them niggers. I don't talk*

in here because I am racist." And then he stopped talking.

The students and I were silent for about 60 seconds. Then, I thanked Bob for sharing with us and two other more vocal white males also thanked Bob for speaking and said they had no idea why Bob had been so quiet. We continued the exercise and students provided deeper and more thoughtful reflections on their silences: *"this stuff is so hard to talk about"*, *"people in my family don't let me talk,"* *"I am afraid I am going to say stupid things."* At the end of class as students were shuffling out, two white males walked over to Bob shook his hand and gave him a hug. These two students later wrote on blackboard that Bob opened the class for genuine conversation that had been lacking until that point.

Although this incredible event happened in class in week 10, I was still amazed to read Bob's electronic post the following week. Two weeks before the end of classes Bob wrote: *"I finally get it!"* He continued: *"Everyone is racist if you take the word literally. Look at it this way: A black man has a choice between a black woman, a white woman, and a yellow woman. He picks the white woman because he is attracted to European features and light skin. He did not pick the yellow woman because yellow isn't his thing, nor did he pick the black woman (for*

whatever reason). The very fact that he is attracted based upon features and skin color is racist. We are all inherently racist. This is why I have now come to recognize that the institution of racism is what the real problem is. Individual acts of racism exist amongst all groups of people and will always exist. It is up to us as conscience, well-educated powerful people to change this. That is what it is all about.”

Bob wrote an email to me on the same day and revealed his initial reactions to the course: “...in the early part of this semester I did not care too much...I thought this is a bunch of bulls#\$t...and I would breeze by and put up with feminist propaganda”. He continued to describe his moments of change: “From the film Color of Fear and our discussion I began to get a glimpse of what you were trying to get across. I began to notice certain things (most notably traveling on the subway). I saw groups of students of Asian descent huddled together avoiding everyone else. I saw how uncomfortable whites became when they were seated next to a black person...The truth of the matter is that individual racism exists from one extreme to the other amongst every single racial group for an innumerable amount of reasons. The problem of racism is actually an institution that is a product of the racism of past generations. The battle

against the systematic institution can and WILL eventually be won. It is up to those (like myself) who are armed with knowledge and understanding of issues from all sides to end this institution.”

In his final paper, Bob poignantly described his transformation: “I first approached the course as a racist, limited in perspective due to my position..... I thought the entire premise was a load of crap; leftist propaganda that I had unwisely decided to subject myself to....Now in everything I do, I notice the social conflicts that exist in my surroundings. I find it most interesting riding the train. Those around me are the ones with the least power. The lower classes of ALL races, and within this lower class I see racial differences blacks, whites, yellow people, brown people, tan people, red people. No wonder that our government does not understand the needs of its people, the government is predominately white, and that’s a problem because they do not know the experience of their people....I now recognize this as the systematic institution of not only racism but of all social conflict.” And his last set of reflections: My mind and story expanded through understanding the stories and experiences of the minority **voice** (although I do not understand all)....there will **never** be social progress

in this country until the establishment recognizes how it is.”

It is interesting to note how and when Bob describes his transformation. He describes stirrings of insight in week six and major transformation by week 11. This also coincided with personal experiences that he was able to reflect upon and a critical event in class discussions. I have noticed that transformations in thinking (if they happen) occur during this critical period (the latter half of a 13 week semester). This suggests that diversity consulting with white males is likely not to be effective in short workshops or over a couple of meetings. Diversity issues are deeply ingrained and often unconscious beliefs and require consistent meetings over a minimum of three month period to have genuine transformational impact. Additionally this case study suggests that discussions, films, and personal experiences must be part of the process of diversity consulting and organizational change.

What brought about Bob's change? There are several events that occurred around the time of his change including multiple student conversations about films, exercises and readings and Bob's participation in volunteerism within a school in his own community that may have helped him realize there was more

than one way to understand the social events around him.

And, what role did my social identity (DH) play in this process? Given our shared whiteness, I believe Bob may have felt more comfortable addressing these issues with me perhaps assuming that I may have gone thru a similar consciousness raising experience—he sent me several rather long emails during this period and came to my office on several occasions. It is interesting to note that one of Bob's postings included sharing how his father was *glad he fought the other guy* while his mother was *caring*. This may have helped Bob understand gender differences in how such events are viewed as well as allowed him to identify me with his mother enough to assume I would *care* about him more than his actions. In addition, unbeknownst to Bob, we both shared working class roots which likely impacted our relationship at an unconscious level. It is important to note that my example here represents my rare experience of a white male being able to hear another perspective. And, this might be related to my ability to exercise some power as teacher along with our shared race and class social positions providing further support of the need for support and challenge when engaged in diversity work. Teachers must have a strong sense of self and be comfortable with strong

emotions, challenge and conflict to be able to handle the defense mechanisms that naturally arise from privileged groups. Related, consulting around diversity issues requires a balance of support and challenge including help through the anxiety, guilt and sadness as well as deep exploration of each person's sociopolitical position in society.

Using my teaching experiences as a woman and a member of several privileged groups (educated, white, and middle class), has informed my consulting work regarding how power and privilege exist in any organization and community setting. My consulting work involves using my power to empower those with less privilege/voice while simultaneously being able to align with members of privileged groups. For example, my attempt is to address the power inequities in the space (e.g., meetings, discussions and decision making activities, etc.) and to give the space needed by less privileged group (minorities, women, children, etc.). If the privileged are unaware and/or unwilling to give space (e.g., continue talking, interrupting others, and/or ignoring), then I will name the process that is happening (e.g., Do you notice that only certain people are talking? Why?).

Given my status as a woman, there are areas that are particularly challenging. It is a significant challenge to

figure out how to address the diversity elephant in the workplace with trainees and clients as this often means speaking with the president, CEO or board chair of an organization—usually a white male. If this person cannot hear the message from the consultant or anyone else in the workplace, it is doubtful whether any substantial long term change can or will take place. It is also important to note that very few people in society feel privileged and powerful often making this work especially challenging. Many privileged individuals have stories about times when they were oppressed and hurt and these stories must be heard before social change will occur.

One of the limitations of this type of diversity work is the recognition that not all students and clients will be able to learn from me, in particular those from the most privileged social positions. Given that diversity consulting often involves working with privileged individuals, this is no small limitation particularly as it relates to creating systemic social change. Fortunately, there are significant social and political changes occurring (e.g., the election of Obama) that are creating windows of opportunities to work with those who are ready to engage in social justice.

Ambivalent Position

“You must be the change you wish to see in the world!” --Mahatma Gandhi

As an Asian immigrant from a previously colonized country (South Asia) with exposure to both privilege and oppression through personal family and sociopolitical history, my identity is one of ambivalence. By ambivalence, I mean holding multiple social identities. Further, being a first generation immigrant who came as an adult to the USA, I have continued to have this ambivalent social identity.

My privilege status in my native country has allowed me to migrate to America. However, Asian immigrants like myself, who had privilege position in terms of family status, educational opportunities and career opportunity experience pain, shock and confusion when there is a loss of social status in the host culture. Moreover, our failure to maintain prior expectation of similar status because of discrimination, lack of recognition of their talent, skills or identity creates greater sense of identity crisis, doubt, confusion and frustration. This is particularly distressing for us who have come to America to pursue the “American Dream”. I am also member of “Model Minority” group. By this I mean those individuals who migrate from Asian countries to

pursue better career achievement and professional opportunities. Desiring recognition from mainstream dominant groups helps model minorities to pursue sociopolitical and economic privileges. However, this position also leads to distancing from minorities deemed to be less ambitious. Unfortunately, this leads to a lack of sense of unity among Asian minorities and ambivalence emerges.

Although individuals, like myself, experience a model minority identity in the host culture, it is also true that we are still minorities. This creates a paradoxical experience for us of holding privilege status and minority status simultaneously continuing a sense of ambivalence. This notion of ambivalence relates to the cognitive dissonance that occurs from the psychological discomfort (Elliot & Devine, 1994) experienced by migrants who left their country of origin with privilege and arrive with an assumption that this privilege will be maintained.

My history as a model minority helps explain why trainers and consultants need a deeper understanding of the experiential journey of immigrants. There are a wide variety of immigrants' experiences within Asian and other communities that needs to be acknowledged when working with these groups. In reality, migrants often experience status loss after arrival in the

US. Thus, the discrepancies of perception of self-image across privileged and oppressed group in the US contribute toward their experience of ambivalence.

In my experience as a member of model minority group requires a different approach to consulting and teaching than working from a position of privilege or oppression. Model minority groups such as individuals of Asian descents have gone through “status loss” experience and a sense of invisibility in their sociopolitical space of the host culture. My decision to use myself during teaching and consulting work is my pedagogical approach to establish credibility or expertise that I fear I do not have.

The challenges of maintaining “model minority” space while teaching about privilege and oppression to a classroom with a mixed classroom (students with more and less privilege) raises issues of “*can they hear me?*” or “*what do they hear*” from my perceived sociopolitical position. I have often observed the presence of privileged and marginalized students differentially impacting the classroom interaction and knowledge sharing profoundly. For example, consulting and teaching across privileged and marginal sociopolitical position requires more than simply transferring knowledge. Often privileged students question me and my approach

when providing knowledge whereas the less privileged students appear uncomfortable when diversity issues are addressed with very few minorities in the classroom. In this case, the use of self becomes a reliable source of knowledge regarding discrimination, ambivalence and privilege.

I have experienced more ambivalence among my Asian mentees regarding my use of self to address social justice issues given the perception of model minority’s expectation of passivity and willingness to compromise. In addition, my credibility as racial and social justice expert is often critically questioned by other minority students.

Being an immigrant, adds another layer to my experience of ambivalence given that I do not share the cultural history of my students and/or clients. Further, it is difficult to address the social justice issues in the culture that I recently joined. This poses some questions relating to the expectations of some behavior parameters such as ‘being polite, passive, less confrontational, hard working, about some of the Asian immigrants in this culture and the pressure to conform to roles. I feel it is relevant to examine the ongoing tensions among non-white ethnic groups which indicate power dynamics and need for maintaining status quo and social

proximity within mainstream system. Moreover, I have consistently observed how these dynamics often recreate and strengthen the socio-cultural barriers among various ethnic minority groups.

Another pedagogical approach that I use is to address the concept of micro-aggression (Sue and Sue, 2007) experiences among “model minority” Asian immigrants (across generations) across social and professional fields. I often share my personal anecdotes to illustrate the micro-aggressions that have occurred to me in this culture. Voicing the many linguistic micro-aggressions that occur from this ambivalent position includes deconstructing phrases such as *“You are so articulate. When did you come to this country? I love Asian cuisine. Thank God you are not showing anger. Asians are so easy to get along with. My Asian roommate is still in touch with me. I have never experienced racism. Asians are not minority. They are smart. You don’t share our history.”* I use case studies, personal anecdotes and research literature to illustrate this construct in the classroom. Then I pair students up to explore these issues through field studies, classroom presentation, reflection and discussion.

When I use case vignettes to highlight different communication styles (e.g., avoidance of conflict, less

interruptive conversational modes, and harmonious decision making process) this generates different responses among groups of students. For example, students from privileged positions often say: *“it is not our fault that they did get what they want”*; students from model minority positions often become even more quiet and if they speak they will suggest: *“Let’s just move on...”*; and students from other minority groups often say: *“Why are we beating around the bush? Why cannot you [referring to myself and other Asians minorities] just say: Blacks and Hispanics do not have same privileges as whites?”*

In recent years researchers have attempted to assess the impact of ambivalence on the health and well-being of Asian immigrants. This could be categorized as a form of race related trauma as manifested in the form of self doubt, confusion, fear, shock, and passivity among Asian immigrants. It is relevant for acknowledging Asian immigrants’ dilemma during consulting and training with clients from privileged and marginalized backgrounds. I often use my personal experience, case scenarios and reflective strategies as tools to inform my clients about the complexity of this diversity work.

My consultation work includes working with agencies providing services for immigrants particularly of Asian

origins. This involves meetings by invitation only with administrators and service providers working with immigrants and international clients. In addition, I provide cultural sensitive training for health care professionals and trainees on issues concerning immigration, adjustment, stresses, and interpersonal dynamics that impact their ability to understand the complexity of these processes. My focus is to facilitate critical self-reflective process among trainers while working with Asian immigrants.

As an Asian immigrant consultant, the challenge is to be able to acknowledge my vulnerability (loss of face) and fear of intimidation. In addition, I am constantly reflecting on the power differential that exists among self and students and clients. It is a constant challenge to tolerate my own dilemma and the inevitable psychological discomfort as a model minority I often experience doing diversity work.

The limitations of this approach include: a) consultant's willingness to acknowledge his/her awareness of the ambivalence that exists among model minorities; b) the consultant's readiness to face the challenge and tension that is inevitable while addressing the power dynamics and barriers in our sociopolitical world; and c) the potential to reenact the tension that exists among minorities (e.g.,

Asians, African American, Hispanics, etc.) with different sociopolitical positions.

Oppressed Position

"If I am not what I've been told I am, then it means that *you're* not what *you* thought you were *either!* And that is the crisis." --
James Baldwin

My consultation work focuses largely on mental health agencies seeking to deepen their commitment and competence regarding diversity. Consultations have involved multiple meetings with various leaders within a department—providing support and insights into how to enhance comfort within and between individuals and levels of leadership regarding diversity. One example of consultation included cultural considerations within the supervisory relationship—involving supervisors of practicum students, supervisors of pre-doctoral interns, and the student trainees. Another consultation involved learning the cultural diversity and sensitivities of one college campus and facilitating multiple training for the residence life staff conducting diversity trainings for students. As an adjunct and now associate professor, every course has been taught with diversity, systems and organizational frameworks, and social justice as context and motivation for providing effective

clinical interventions.

An African American professor, male or female, remains a rare event for most graduate students in the classroom. Students express surprise, excitement, disbelief, skepticism, and curiosity in my presence. Sometimes being self-protective is more expedient and the only option for me. Not every moment is “teachable” (Shor, 1992; 2007). On the other hand, I acknowledge a privileged status, at times, given that I have earned a doctorate and granted access to institutions of higher learning. Given my orientation to education and social justice, this writer believes in taking time for dialogues that initially may be filled with distrust, fear, hurt, and misunderstandings. By learning the expectations, and even demands of a racist society, I deliberately challenge these assumptions with my presence, demeanor, and actions. I am a professional rule breaker (hooks, 1994). My female gender appears to validate the majority female student population and encourage trust. Shifts in cultural practices occur when individuals, whether in power positions or not, are supported and challenged to examine beliefs about themselves and other individuals. For example, most students in my program are providing clinical work to underserved populations. As a professional of color

with years of clinical experience, this faculty member challenges their assumptions about what are best practices for their clients. For example, whether or not to acknowledge and challenge racist behaviors of teachers, whose behaviors and words impact clients. Whether or not to examine deeply held beliefs and values of clients that can make the clinician uncomfortable. Another struggle tends to be how to receive effective supervision when the graduate students’ multicultural training can be more substantial than the supervisors’ training. This professor is able to provide professional examples of developing and maintaining relationships, accepting clients’ for who they are in the present moment, and decisions regarding challenging clients and organizational cultural belief systems.

The graduate classroom can provide academic content and facilitate pertinent professional growth for clinicians-in-training. Assertive classroom management skills, developed over time and programs provide this instructor self-confidence and focus. At the start of a class, this professor provides students transparency about my intentions, expectations about their interactions, and also information about the scope of material to be covered. Students appreciate the translation of formal goals

and objectives into clear topic areas, activities, and break times. They can get some sense of how far the experience may “stretch” them. After setting up the parameters, I share some family history, personal struggles and triumphs, and the worldviews that shape my particular teaching and facilitation style. Personal and social history provides contextual understanding of consulting, teaching, and clinical work. Students can see and hear how my life connects to the content of the course or lecture. Providing my own personal narrative sets the stage for participants’ self-exploration and curiosity about others regarding diversity. After modeling this type and level of personal sharing, there is time for students to share their stories.

Sharing aspects of one’s family history, multiple social identities, changing social identities, beliefs about politics, religion, and race/ethnicity are still taboo for many individuals. Explaining personal philosophies about life, human behavior, social justice, and diversity can be met with discomfort, underwhelming response, or unsettling debates. There has been strong socialization to not ask questions or make comments—for fear of offending individuals and/or being shunned as an intolerant, stupid person. I take time to explain how the presentation, class, or consultation is set up to avoid getting

stuck in these places. Students have permission to ask me anything they want. Most questions have been respectful, brimming with curiosity and relief. Frequent questions asked include: “How do you deal with racism?” “Do you get tired of being the only one?” “What can I (student) do in my everyday life to reduce the chances of overt racism?” “How can explore my cultural background when my family does not talk about these things?” “I am afraid to offend my clients or coworkers, should I even bother trying to ask them questions?” This is an example of careful and practiced self-disclosure that create open inquiry and curiosity of one another’s cultural background. The hope being this can be done with individual clients, families, coworkers, departments, and small institutions, which, in turn, can impact larger work and social organizations. Participants are strongly encouraged to complete an evaluation, comprised of brief open-ended questions. The comments written on these evaluations reflect participants’ new self-discoveries, realizations about classmates, new or deepening knowledge about the impact of diversity on the quality of life for everybody, how social justice is and/or can be part of their work. One orientation toward self-awareness, self-acceptance, and excitement for social justice work that had not helped was the

shame, blame, and anger generated by getting White participants to simply see and own their racism. Given the history of slavery in this country, discussions and arguments centers on White versus Black Americans—keep other American groups of color, immigrants and the numerous social identities that are represented in nearly every classroom invisible. Afterwards, participants generally highlight how little they had known about one another's background—even having spent several months to years with one another. The ultimate purpose of this activity is deepening participants' intimate understanding of how personal history is connected to current questions and commitment to social justice and equity in the places they live, work, and practice.

Limitations to the approach described above include the vulnerability and risk of sharing more than intellectual aspects of self, with no promise the group will open up. More often than not, I plant emotional and cognitive seeds, but do not enjoy the harvest of new ideas, goals, and behaviors that shift work cultures and social cultures. Social psychology upholds the reality that I may be experienced as just an exception to the well-worn stereotypes of African Americans and/or females, providing little impetus for long-lasting and meaningful transformation of participants or the systems they

represent. Lastly, the grind of having to explain emotional and social experiences to those individuals with the privilege of reducing my experiences to interesting academic concepts, which then may need to be justified in the language of the privileged, can be simply frustrating and exhausting at times.

Discussion

"Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"— Emma Lazarus

No one is free when others are oppressed. ~Author Unknown

As consultants, we must remember that the United States was founded on the premises of equality and justice for all. This means that no one including organizations is exempt from the democratic principles of protection and empowerment. And, individuals, communities and organizations should and cannot engage in practices that are detrimental to individual freedom and organizational well being. Consultants who choose to engage in process oriented social justice work are agents of change beginning at a micro level that ultimately

creates long term social change and justice at a macro level. Why consultants? Because organizations are static, it makes it difficult for those inside the system to create change. Those, by definition, outside the system cannot create change because they have not been invited in. Consultants, who have been invited into the system to address diversity issues, have an unique opportunity and a special role (translator) to implement strategies that restore social justice for long-term systemic change. This step is morally, ethically and practically beneficial for individuals, communities and organizations at large. Our postmodernist approach when applied to consulting includes; critical evaluation of all levels of an organization; existing roles and power therein; and how these power dynamics impact the organizational mission and goals. This approach is necessary to meet the current demands of globalization that impact most organizations and community settings today.

Our approach to consulting is to explore systemic relations that exist across roles and social identities within organizations and/or communities. This allows us to identify the subtle cultural power dynamics that may be influencing the issues within an organization. In addition, organizations that seek to

operate in the global markets must acknowledge their perceived levels of privilege when engaged with organizations different from their own. In order to examine the power dynamics that exist at a societal level, we use experiential exercises, modeling and sharing our own sociopolitical positions. This allows us to illustrate how these dynamics work at an individual level. For example, we challenge the traditional hierarchical dynamics by encouraging those with less power to speak and those with power to listen more. We model this approach by encouraging members of the organizations to express their needs and how those needs could be fulfilled.

As consultants, we engage our clients in dialogue to facilitate multiple perspectives, creative solutions, foster respect and trust to work as an effective team and make the organization an exemplary one. For example, we find ways to reveal similarities and connections among members of an organization before addressing differences. Next, we acknowledge our own sociopolitical identities that are similar and different from other members and how our identity may impact the relationship dynamics in our consulting work. In addition, we bring non-verbal communication cues of members to members' conscious awareness. Finally,

we as consultants are cognizant of the need to take risks in naming and addressing the individual and group dynamics and emotions (e.g., anger, frustration, and denial) that arise when engaged in diversity work.

Empowerment of all individuals within an organizational system is integral to our work as process consultants. By empowerment, we mean the need for acknowledgement and awareness of existing sociopolitical power dynamics both at the organizational and societal levels. This approach levels the playing field amongst members with differential social positions.

In addition, major stakeholders must be ready to embrace this approach given the challenges members of the organization will encounter related to the level of dysfunction within the organization. As consultants we must ensure readiness, commitment and patience among organizational members as crucial components towards implementation of any desired systemic change.

It must be acknowledged that systems are generally rigid and static and do not like to change. The goal is to determine the leverage point in the system to create the systemic change desired by the organization (Senge, 2005). This leverage point is often the

person who requested the consultant and/or there may be others that could function as an ally. This work is next to impossible if someone in the upper administration is not on board. Consultants must be open, flexible, and have critical self-reflective abilities to do this difficult work.

Consulting in our postmodern world require skills of bravery, vulnerability, openness, and alliance building. Formal and informal mentoring relationships, conversations with like-minded and spirited people, follow-up discussions with individuals outside the learning room, reading inspiring and challenging books and articles can (re)fuel the work. The details and the process of the consultant's sociopolitical space guide the self-discovery process of the audience. Conflicts, fears, lack of knowledge, privilege, ambivalence, and oppression can be more safely explored among like-minded consultants. The efforts can be exhausting, heart-breaking, mind-blowing, yet fulfilling, hopeful, humorous, and never boring.

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