

## **Definitions of Oppression, Dehumanization and Exploitation**

### **Oppression**

The dictionary definition ((Webster's Third International Dictionary): "Unjust or cruel exercise of authority or power especially by the imposition of burdens; the condition of being weighed down; an act of pressing down; a sense of heaviness or obstruction in the body or mind." The Latin origin has *oppressus* as the past participle of *opprimere*, or to press down. Amongst the synonyms: the word subjugation.

The Social Work Dictionary, ed. Robert L. Barker defines oppression as: "The social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group or institution. Typically, a government or political organization that is in power places these restrictions formally or covertly on oppressed groups so that they may be exploited and less able to compete with other social groups. The oppressed individual or group is devalued, exploited and deprived of privileges by the individual or group which has more power." (Barker, 2003)

The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology has an excellent definition of social oppression: "Social oppression is a concept that describes a relationship between groups or categories of people in which a dominant group benefits from the systematic abuse, exploitation, and injustice directed toward a subordinate group. The relationship between whites and blacks in the United States and South Africa, between social classes in many industrial societies, between men and women in most societies, between Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland - all have elements of social oppression in that the organization of social life enables those who dominate to oppress others. Relationships between groups and relationships between groups and social categories, it should not be confused with the oppressive behavior of individuals. A white man may not himself actively participate in oppressive behavior directed at blacks or women, for example, but he nonetheless benefits from the general oppression of blacks and women simply because he is a white man. In this sense, all members of dominant and subordinate categories participate in social oppression regardless of their individual attitudes or behavior. Social oppression becomes institutionalized when its enforcement is so of social life that it is not easily identified as oppression and does not require conscious prejudice or overt acts of discrimination." One of the purposes of the exercise we'll do is to help use better identify the feelings that oppression produces in us and in our clients. (Johnson, 2000b)

Oppression: Charlton (1998: 8) states, "oppression occurs when individuals are systematically subjected to political, economic, cultural, or social degradation because they belong to a social group...results from structures of domination and subordination and, correspondingly, ideologies of superiority and inferiority." (Charlton, 1998)

Oppression: Johnson (2000: 39) recognizes that "for every social category that is privileged, one or more other categories are oppressed in relation to it. The concept of oppression points to social forces that tend to press upon people and hold them down, to hem them in and block their pursuits of a good life. Just as privilege tends to open doors of opportunity, oppression tends to slam them shut." (Johnson, 2000a)

Oppression (Deutsch 2006: 10): "Oppression is the experience of repeated, widespread, systemic injustice. It need not be extreme and involve the legal system (as in slavery, apartheid, or the lack of a right to vote) nor violent (as in tyrannical societies). Harvey (1999) has used the term "civilized oppression" to characterize the everyday processes of oppression in normal life. Civilized oppression "is embedded in unquestioned norms, habits, and symbols, in the assumptions underlying institutions and rules, and the collective consequences of following those rules. It refers to the vast and deep injustices some groups suffer as a consequence of often unconscious assumptions and reactions of well-meaning people in ordinary interactions that are supported by the media and cultural stereotypes as well as by the structural features of bureaucratic hierarchies and market mechanisms" (Young, 1990, p. 41). We cannot eliminate this structural oppression by getting rid of the rulers or by making some new laws, because oppressions are systematically reproduced in the major economic, political, and cultural institutions. While specific privileged groups are the beneficiaries of the oppression of other groups, and thus have an interest in the continuation of the status quo, they do not typically understand themselves to be agents of oppression." (Deutsch, 2006)

Oppression: "Oppression refers to relations of domination and exploitation - economic, social and psychologic - between individuals; between social groups and classes within and beyond societies; and, globally, between entire societies. Injustice refers to discriminatory, dehumanizing, and development-inhibiting conditions of living (e.g., unemployment, poverty, homelessness, and lack of health care), imposed by oppressors upon dominated and exploited individuals, social groups, classes and peoples. These conditions will often cause people to turn to social services for help. Oppression seems motivated by an intent to exploit (i.e., benefit disproportionately from the resources, capacities, and productivity of others) and it results typically in disadvantageous, unjust conditions of living for its victims. It serves as a *means* to enforce exploitation toward the *goal* of securing advantageous conditions of living for its perpetrators. Justice reflects the absence of exploitation-enforcing oppression." (Gil, 1994, p. 233).

Oppression (Turner, Singleton and Musick, 1984, cited by Davis (2002): "a situation in which one or more identifiable segments of the population in a social system systematically and successfully act over a prolonged period of time to prevent another identifiable segment, or segments of the population from attaining access to the scarce and valued resources of that system." (Davis, 2002; Turner, Singleton Jr, & Musick, 1984)

"Oppression, oppression of a whole people": Cox (1948(1970)) "Although race relations and the struggle of the white proletariat with the bourgeoisie are parts of a single social phenomenon, race relations involve a significant variation. In the case of race relations the tendency of the bourgeoisie is to proletarianize a WHOLE PEOPLE - that is to say, the whole people is looked upon as a class - whereas white proletarianization involves only a section of the white people." (P344) "It is this need to impersonalize whole peoples which introduces into the class struggle the complicating factors known as race problems." (p. 344) MD: This concept of oppression of a whole people is related to the concept of national oppression. (Cox, 1970)

"Oppression, hierarchies of": Collins (1993). Argues against hierarchies of oppression. Sees race, class and gender as "interlocking categories of analysis" and as also potentially "categories

of connection". Opposes "additional analyses of oppression", (she means additive, perhaps the spell checker zapped this wrong, fact check), which she sees as characterized by either/or, dichotomous thinking, and by the ranking of relationships in order to know where one stands. Race, class and gender may all structure a situation, but this may not be apparent, as only one may be most visible depending on the place. One may well have "salience" over another at one time, however. Race, class and gender function as parallel and interlocking systems that shape the basic relationships of domination and subordination. (Collins, 1993)

"Oppression, dimensions of": Collins (1993). Collins uses Harding's concepts of the institutional, symbolic and individual dimensions of oppression. (Collins, 1993)

## **Dehumanization**

The dictionary defines dehumanization as: "the act or process or an instance of dehumanizing." and defines dehumanize as: "to divest of human qualities or personality; make machinelike; make impersonal or unconcerned with human values" (Webster's Third International Dictionary).

Paulo Freire, in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, defined dehumanization this way:

"Dehumanization, which marks not only those whose humanity has been stolen, but also (though in a different way) those who have stolen it, is a distortion of the vocation of becoming more fully human.....Th[e] struggle [for humanization] is possible only because dehumanization, although a concrete historical fact, is not a given destiny but the result of an unjust order that engenders violence in the oppressors, which in turn dehumanizes the oppressed." Freire, in other words, links dehumanization to oppression. (Freire, 1981)

Animalistic dehumanization: Involves one social group denying that another social group has the same set of uniquely human (UH) attributes (Haslam, 2006). This form of dehumanization is called animalistic dehumanization because it is often characterized by the explicit application to the other social group of animalistic characteristics. Animalistic dehumanization takes place primarily in an intergroup context, especially in the context of interethnic relations and with respect to groups of persons with disabilities. Animalistic dehumanization is typically accompanied by the holding of emotions such as disgust and contempt for the members of the other social group. This form of dehumanization is consistent with the attitudes expressed towards the dehumanized group in earlier social psychological research (Bandura, Underwood, & Fromson, 1975). To apply the French philosopher Robert Redeker's distinctions between forms of dehumanization, this involves the denial that those in the other group have a soul (Redeker, 2007). Animalistic dehumanization as a process is fully consistent with the mechanisms spelled out in Cudd's theory of group-based oppression (Cudd, 2006). So far, there would be little need to include a separate examination of the nature of dehumanization, outside the theory of oppression.

Mechanistic Dehumanization: Mechanistic dehumanization involves the treatment of others as not possessing the core features of human nature (HN). Rather than being a matter of comparing one's own group to another group on the basis of which set of uniquely human attributes is salient, this involves, according to Haslam, a view of the dehumanized individuals or groups as being not animals but automata. This form of dehumanization is called mechanistic

dehumanization because it is often seen as a characteristic of the application to human beings of “standardization, instrumental efficiency, impersonal technique, causal determinism, and enforced passivity” (Haslam, 2006, p. 260). In Redeker’s terms, while animalistic dehumanization would represent the retreat from viewing the internal human as having a soul, mechanistic dehumanization would view the external human as machine (Redeker, 2007), disconnected from the duality identified by Descartes. Haslam saw mechanistic dehumanization as taking place both in intergroup and in interpersonal contexts, but I will argue the concept has wider implications for large scale social processes, as his own work implies. Mechanistic dehumanization is typically accompanied by emotions such as disregard and indifference towards dehumanized persons. Mechanistic dehumanization is a product of asocial thinking, while animalistic dehumanization involves communal sharing within the in-group. Its cognitive modality is technical rather than being based upon some type of ideologically reinforced folk biology.

## **Exploitation**

Exploitation: Tilly defines exploitation as powerful, connected people deploying resources from which they draw significantly increased returns by coordinating the effort of outsiders, whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort- any search for exploitation in real life must keep alert for seven elements: power holders, their coordinated efforts, deployable resources, command over those resources, returns from those resources, categorical exclusion, and skewed division of returns as compared with effort. He saw exploitation as involving “powerful, connected people deploying resources from which they draw significantly increased returns by coordinating the effort of outsiders, whom they exclude from the full value added by that effort” (Tilly, 1998, p. 98)

A standard Marxist definition of exploitation (A Dictionary of Marxist Thought): "Exploitation occurs when one section of the population produces a surplus whose use is controlled by another section...Under capitalism, exploitation takes the form of the extraction of surplus value by the class of industrial capitalists from the working class, but other exploiting classes or class fractions share in the distribution of surplus value...Capitalism differs from non-capitalist modes of production [such as feudalism or slavery] in that exploitation normally takes place without the direct intervention of force or non-economic processes." (Bottomore, 1991)

Charles Tilly in his article Tilly, Charles. (2000). Relational Studies of Inequality. *Contemporary Sociology*, 29(6, November), 782-785, defines exploitation this way: "An inequality-generating mechanism we may call exploitation occurs when persons who control a resource a) enlist the effort of others in production of value by means of that resource, but b) exclude the others from the full value added by their effort." (Tilly, 2000)

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*Required pages: Preface ix-xvii; xxvii-xxxviii; 3-5; 113-118; 121-22; 298-313; caste + class: 317-20, 321-352, 423-453; race and caste: 489-508; modern caste school: 545-600.*
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