Psychology of Oppression

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Defining Terms
Culture vs Race vs Ethnicity

- Race – a social category that distinguishes individual by physical characteristics

- Ethnicity – social category based on unique social & cultural heritage passed from one generation to the next
Identity

- Ethnic Identity – degree & sentiment of the attachment to a group based on ethnicity. It can be the result of self-motivation and/or forced psychological attachment due to discrimination.

- Racial Identity – degree & sentiment of the attachment to group defined by socially constructed categories of race. Attachment due to self-motivation and/or forced due to discrimination.
Levels Isms

- Individual - attitudes, beliefs, behaviors of a person with respect to isms

- Institutional – social policies, laws, and regulations whose purpose it is to maintain economic and social advantage of group power

- Cultural Racism – beliefs and customs that promote the assumptions that dominant culture(s) superior
Definitions of Oppressions
Marilyn Frye

- Lives confined and shaped by forces & barriers that are systematically related to each other – ideology, politics, economics, social system; suffering insufficient.

- System that serves to restrict & limit one group to benefit of another group; single barrier insufficient
Definitions of Oppressions
Patricia Hill

- Oppression is an issue of subordinate and dominant relationships
- Structured through institutions (purposively, accident, incidental)
- Institutional Oppression
  - Non-additive, but interlocking system
  - Not a matter of whose oppression 1st or worst
Definitions of Oppression

- **Symbolic Oppression** – Widespread, societally sanctioned ideologies used to justify relationships of domination & subordination
  - Stereotypical or controlling images of diverse groups – race, ethnicity, class, gender central to this process

- **Individual Dimension**
  - Personal experience of diversity; meanings attached to classifications
  - Differences in power & privilege constrain interactions and relationships.
Definitions of Oppression
Goldenberg

- Encompasses all of the isms

- Hallmarks
  - Hopelessness
  - Helplessness
  - Survival (no forward progress)

- Experience of Marginality
  - See selves as static, limited, & expendable; spatially linked, psychologically separate
Definitions of Oppression
Goldenberg

- Symptoms
  - Societal Withdrawal (substances)
  - Violence (similarly or those symbolic of the oppression)
  - Alienation
  - Despair (meaninglessness of life)

- Oppressed are exploited, taken advantage of; primarily survive – not succeed or fail.
Definitions of Oppression

Goldenberg

• Conditions

  ○ Containment: limits range of free movement available; psychological, physical or both

  ○ Expendability: Can be eliminated or replaced with no loss
Definitions of Oppression
Goldenberg

- Compartmentalization: Define narrow roles, models, & images that define the group; interference with efforts to define self, express self, be self.

- Ideology: shapes & controls or responses to people & events.
Historical Oppression

- Indian Removal Act of 1830

- 1871 Government made all native people wards of the federal government. Not recognized as independent and forced on to reservations.

- 1887 Dawes Act
Historical Oppression

- 1924 American Citizenship Act – Made native people American citizens.

- 1934 Indian Reorganization Act – Attempted to move away from assimilation.

- Termination Act, 1953 – 100 tribes marked for termination.

- 1975 Self-Determination & Educational Asst. Act – allocate funds from the federal government based on needs determined by the tribe.
Historical Oppression

- 1848 Treaty of Guadeloupe Hildago – Mexico lost the southwest territory in the Mexican American War. Mexicans could go to Mexico or stay in US as citizens.

- 1862 Homestead Act – squatters claim vacant land often owned by Mexicans.

- 1917 Puerto Rico becomes a part of the US as a territorial possession.

- 1921 limits placed on immigration & Mexican Americans included.
Historical Oppression

- **1943 Zoot Suit Riots** - Southern CA, barrios raided by law enforcement.

Historical Oppression

- **1849 Gold Rush** - many Chinese come to CA. As they became successful anti-Chinese sentiment grew.

- **1882 Chinese Exclusion Act** barred their immigration. Labeled “Yellow Peril”.

- **1907** US & Japan signed the *Gentleman’s Agreement* set self-imposed quotas on Japanese immigration.

- **1913** CA imposed the *Alien Land Bill* to prevent Japanese Land purchase.
Historical Oppression

- **Immigration Act of 1924** designed to stop Chinese & Japanese immigration.

- **Dec. 7, 1941** Pearl Harbor bombed.

- Roosevelt issues **Order 9066** interning the Japanese.

- **1944** Supreme Court ruled the internment unconstitutional.

- After WWII anti-Japanese sentiment, but Chinese allowed because they were allies.
Historical Oppression

- **Slavery** became a way of life in the late 17th century.

- The 1863 **Emancipation** of slaves.

- Late 1800's **Jim Crow** laws created;

- 1883 the US Supreme Court declared the **Sumner Act of 1875**, which had given African Americans equal rights to public accommodations & transportation, unconstitutional.
Historical Oppression

- Southern states ignored the 14th & 15th amendments that gave African Americans citizenship & the right to vote.

- 1896 **Plessey vs. Ferguson** made separate but equal the law.

- **Executive Order 8802**, fair unemployment practices under Roosevelt.

- **Executive Order 9981** integrated the armed forces under Truman.

- 1954 **Brown vs. Board of Education Topeka, KA**
• **First-Dimension** – direct force or competition, typically with a winner-take-all perspective.

• **Second-Dimension** – indirect manipulation of rules to shape the outcome of competition – the power to design the rules.

• **Third-Dimension** – the ability to mobilize, often through psychological means, biases, or tacit understandings, “to sell” the underlying rules and structures to the powerless; power to define the discourse about lifestyle, resources, etc.

(Guinier & Torres, 2002)
Mental Health Service Use

African Americans have been found to:

- Average fewer therapy sessions,
- Terminate from outpatient mental health services earlier *(Sue, et al., 1994; Takeuchi, et al., 1995)*,
- More likely to report negative attitudes toward help seeking, and
- Less likely to use mental health services after professional contact *(Diala, et al., 2000)*.
- Most African Americans reportedly contacted physicians, ministers, and hospitals, while only 9% reported using psychologists, psychiatrists, or community mental health facilities *(Jackson, Neighbors, & Gurin, 1986)*.
Barriers To Service Use

- Cultural Sensitivity
  - Participants believed therapists lacked sensitivity to the community, and knowledge of African American life & struggles
  - Believed many treatment professionals held stereotypes of the community
Final Thoughts

- Power & discrimination permit constraint of access to vital resources necessary for income and wealth production.

- Absence of income production & wealth produces educational, occupational, social and health disparity.

- It is in this context that we ask people to live healthy lives.

- Following guidelines that assume equal access and opportunity.