6

"But Society is Beyond ___ism" (?)

Teaching How Differences are "Organized" via Institutional Privilege↔Oppression

Erika Kirby

❖   ❖   ❖

Systems, structures, institutions are in place throughout society that maintain inequality. Their greatest force may lie in their "everydayness," their normal taken-for-granted place . . . Rather than enacting visible oppression, they operate for the most part by continuing to define, produce, study, and adjudicate, over and over, groups of people targeted for "one-down-ness." (Creighton, 2003a, p. 4)

My chapter explores the ways I encourage students to recognize how differences based on social identity (social identity differences: SIDs) are often organized in ways that are oppressive to some and to be reflective about their privilege in order to transform the ways they think about and act upon difference. I have found such teaching and learning to be hard work as I try to get students "to question their underlying assumptions, to capture their attention without alienating them, *to compel students who are privileged to understand the benefits of privilege without blaming those who are*

disadvantaged . . . to inspire not offend, and to interest not anger"
(Johnson & Bhatt, 2003, p. 107).

I have been (literally) frowned at by my students when talking
about issues of privilege↔oppression, such as when I explain the fol-
lowing: how I refuse to open mail to "Mrs. Robert Kirby" because no
such person exists in my mind; how I change *God as father* to *God as cre-
ator* in my prayers; and how I have eliminated (and want them to elim-
inate) phrases like *that's lame*, *that's so gay* or *that's so retarded* from their
speech. I have been told that U.S. society is beyond sexism and racism.
I was asked by a student if I was "stretching it a bit to find another form
of oppression" when I introduced the notion of socioeconomic classism.
Underlying much of this resistance is the fact that students from privi-
leged backgrounds "are frequently hostile, or at best neutral" to dis-
cussing stratification based on differences in social identity (Bohmer &
Briggs, 1991, p. 154).

In Chapter 5 of this volume, Allen defines the utility of critical com-
munication pedagogy for increasing students' understanding of differ-
ence and organizations. My contribution follows suit, weaving together
(a) writings in communication, education, sociology, and psychology;
(b) my experiences; and (c) outside teaching resources to explain both
how I have applied critical communication pedagogy in my senior
undergraduate capstone class on *Communication and Community* (see
Kirby, 2009 for syllabus) and what modifications I would make if con-
centrating more centrally on organizing difference.

I encourage students to examine the multiplicity of ways in which
all SIDs entwine with degrees of privilege↔oppression, as well as how
these differences function in intersection since we are all comprised of
multiple SIDs (Ashcraft & Mumby, 2004). The analogy I utilize (fol-
lowing Audre Lorde's 1984 metaphor of "ingredients") is to have stu-
dents think of the multiple facets of their social identity as colored
pencils. Imagine they (stereotypically) start by coloring their sex as
pink or blue, then color over that with their gender (perhaps in purple),
then color over that with a shade near their skin tone, then color yellow
over that to illustrate their social class, and so forth. Then, if they "want
to just concentrate on showing the purple-ness of . . . gender . . . purple
has been combined with pink/blue, a shade of brown, and yellow—
and so ..[they] cannot just take it back without erasing every-
thing . . . the ingredients intersect and are inextricably linked" (Kirby &
McBride, 2009, p. xix).

But in practice, it is not quite so straightforward to teach about
the ways that difference (including privilege↔oppression) is (re)con-
structed in everyday life. Numerous theorists (e.g., Bohmer & Briggs,

1991; Johnson & Bhatt, 2003; Millstein, 1997) have illustrated that students are often resistant to having their worldviews challenged. Davis (1992) identified three typical student responses to teaching about difference and inequality—resistance, paralysis, and rage. Resistant students often deny that inequality exists or "argue that conditions are improving so rapidly that no intervention is needed" (p. 232) and insist that discussions of inequality remain on an abstract, intellectual level (see also Griffin, 1997b). Students may also become "paralyzed" to the point where they no longer want to talk about inequality. Finally, discussing difference can make students on both sides angry: students from oppressed groups feel anger from injustice, while students from privileged groups may get angry when they are made aware of their privilege because many are unaware of how their greater resources increase their life chances (Johnson & Bhatt, 2003; Misra, 1997). The challenge thus becomes how to artfully frame dialogue about difference in organizations so that students are receptive to conceptualizing difference as both privilege and oppression.

❖ PREPARING TO DIALOGUE ABOUT DIFFERENCE AND PRIVILEGE↔OPPRESSION IN ORGANIZATIONS

Allen (Chapter 5 of this volume) suggests that instructors should ease into teaching with critical communication pedagogy. I second this advice; the first time I taught racial privilege↔oppression, I (naively) assumed students would possess the basic vocabulary and, therefore, we could just jump right in to talking about difference and breaking down stereotypes—which proved to be a colossal mistake. Without common language/vocabulary to frame students' experiences, class discussion seemed to reify individual stereotypes rather than question organizational practices and institutional isms. I immediately revised my course prep, rooting subsequent discussions of difference in a "systems of oppression" approach (a relational way to think about difference in terms of privilege↔oppression, see Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997; Hill Collins, 1990; Lucal, 1996). And now, after teaching this course four times—the first time feeling some regret, three times feeling mostly success—I have gathered numerous strategies for teaching about SIDs and privilege↔oppression in organizations.

Griffin (1997a) asserted that instructors should determine "personal readiness" for critical pedagogy in five areas: (a) the availability of professional and personal support for teaching about inequality; (b) passion for educating about oppression; (c) self-awareness; (d) knowledge

about different manifestations of social oppression; and (e) having multiple teaching strategies to help create a learning environment in which students can productively engage with each other and the instructor (pp. 279–281). For me, self-awareness has been crucial because "we struggle alongside our students with our own social identities, biases, fears, and prejudices. We, too, need to be willing to examine and deal honestly with our values, assumptions, and emotional reactions to oppression issues" (Bell, Washington, Weinstein, & Love, 1997, p. 299). My (gradually emerging) confidence in teaching about difference as a largely privileged person—female, White, upper-middle class, heterosexual, able-bodied, and thirty-something—comes from reflecting often on this positionality.

There is debate as to whether or not instructors should reveal aspects of their own social identity that may not be readily apparent (e.g., sexuality, ability). I have chosen disclosure, offering my experiences with dominant and targeted identities as a text for my students. For example, when discussing classism, students are asked to speculate as to my social class background given that this identity can be invisible. Since I am now a highly educated college professor, they almost always assume an upper-middle class background and are somewhat shocked to hear that I was raised in a single parent home hovering around the poverty line and, consequently, have had consistent paid employment since I was 14 (holding three jobs in college).

I have also benefited from Simpson, Causey, and Williams's (2007) multiple instructional strategies for having discussions that tackle SIDs and privilege↔oppression. After researching student and teacher attitudes and practices in addressing race in the classroom, they found that students appreciate instructors who provide them with clear guidelines for class content and discussion, including using existing pedagogical structures (e.g., the syllabus, comments about what is to come) to communicate that the class will offer attention to difference, the possible difficulties that may emerge, and what instructors hope for related to these discussions. (See Allen, this volume, for more ideas.) Students want instructors to clearly guide discussion using a variety of formats and pedagogical strategies and to encourage a range of opinions on issues—even if that invites disagreement. Concomitantly, when uninformed perspectives about issues of difference are articulated, students want instructors to challenge those ideas by asking where the student got her or his information or by countering them with a more informed perspective (Simpson et al., 2007).

Grading is also a concern for students when they are talking about potentially volatile issues such as SIDs, and so Simpson et al. (2007)

suggested that instructors link grades to learning objectives, "which might include the ability to apply course concepts to issues of [difference] in and outside of the classroom" (p. 46). My adaptation of this is that when I grade student activities (typically in the form of exploratory writing), the *grade* is based on the completeness of and the amount of reflection in the activity—but in my *comments,* I tackle any ideas that are misinformed or prejudiced. This leads to perhaps the most important lesson I have learned when teaching about privilege↔oppression: to worry less about learner approval and to not be afraid to make students frustrated, frightened, or angry (Bell et al., 1997). I recently had a student say he felt like "an angry tiger" because he had so much cognitive dissonance related to my class—and I took that as evidence of accomplishing my objectives.

Of course, students also need to be prepared for this type of learning; trust needs to be established to productively discuss elements of difference and privilege↔oppression in the classroom. To encourage useful instructor-student interaction, I try to get to know students by having them write a note after the first class that shares whatever they want me to know about them, and of course I learn a lot about them though reading their exploratory writing (discussed later in this chapter). To encourage productive student-student interaction, my class shares a meal together on the first night of class in order to build trust. Because of the tension and emotion surrounding aspects of difference (Simpson et al., 2007), it is also beneficial to establish ground rules for class discussion to provide a cooperative atmosphere and encourage equal status for all class members (see also Harris, 2003; Neville Miller & Harris, 2005). While our ground rules evolve during the class, I do take along a set of assumptions for class interaction (Mongan-Rallis & Higgins, 2004—included in this volume as Allen's appendix; see also Creighton, 2003a).

Hubbard and DeWelde (2003) illustrated that a danger of a trusting and "candid classroom environment was that students with oppressive and prejudiced views assumed that they could freely indulge those views," and they "found it difficult, yet absolutely imperative, not to reject or punish students who asserted their [prejudices]"; instead, they "pointed out to them how potentially destructive or debilitating such emotions could be to themselves as well as to others" (p. 82). Yet it is also possible that privileged students may stay silent and feel vulnerable about expressing their beliefs in class because they think their experiences are not as well received or legitimate as those of traditionally marginalized groups (Johnson & Bhatt, 2003; Neville Miller & Harris, 2005). This is where introducing a systems of oppression framework becomes

important for students. Since no one person is entirely privileged, nor entirely disadvantaged (Lucal, 1996), "examining intersections of identity provides a way to address how [people] can experience both privilege and oppression simultaneously" (Johnson & Bhatt, 2003, p. 234).

❖ SYSTEMS OF PRIVILEGE↔OPPRESSION: A FRAMEWORK FOR EXAMINING DIFFERENCE

A systems of oppression framework embraces the dialectics of privilege/advantage and penalty/disadvantage (Johnson & Bhatt, 2003; Martin & Nakayama, 1999). As articulated by Hill Collins (1990), the social world can be conceptualized as a matrix containing multiple, interlocking oppressions—every SID has both opportunity and oppression associated with it—and individuals derive varying amounts of penalty or privilege from these systems of oppression (also see Moremen, 1997). Thus, while we *study* forms of social identity in isolation in order to understand each, to understand the system of oppression we must also study how each and all of these intersect and inform each other. To help elucidate the systems of oppression framework, I assign students "Difference matters" (Allen, 2004, Chapter 1), "Power matters" (Allen, 2004, Chapter 2), and Lorde's (1984) "There is no hierarchy of oppressions."[1]

Students should be familiarized with *oppression,* or "those attitudes, behaviors, and pervasive and systematic social arrangements by which members of one group [nondominant/target groups] are exploited and subordinated while members of another group [dominant/agent] are granted privileges" (Bohmer & Briggs, 1991, p. 155). Oppression implies a relationship of unequal power between at least two groups (see also Lucal, 1996). *Individual oppression* includes individual beliefs, attitudes, and actions that reflect prejudice against a social group; this can occur at both an unconscious and conscious level, and it can be both active and passive. Many students equate isms with prejudice and discrimination on this individual level, and so oppression serves as a less familiar construct that also includes *societal/cultural* (sociocultural) *dimensions*—the multiplicity of ways in which social norms, roles, rituals, language, music, and art reflect and reinforce the belief that one social group is superior to another—and *institutional dimensions* (Bohmer & Briggs, 1991; Goldsmith, 2006).

Institutional oppression is structured into organizations as well as political and social institutions; since "organizations are rooted in the same systematic inequalities as the rest of U.S. societal institutions . . .

organizations, often unintentionally, function as tools of oppression" (Griffith, Childs, Eng, & Jeffries, 2008, p. 288). Examples of institutions include (a) family, (b) school/education system, (c) religion, (d) real estate/housing, (e) business/jobs/corporations, (f) criminal justice/prison system, (g) organized sports, (h) military, (i) banks/financial institutions, (j) health care/medical, (k) media (TV/cable, Internet, music, books, video games, newspapers, magazines, etc.), (l) government/laws, and (m) history books (Creighton, 2003a).

Institutional oppression encapsulates the policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that organize difference—creating differential access to goods, services, and opportunities—by disadvantaging some social groups and advantaging others, whether or not such discrimination is intentional. Such differential access eventually becomes common practice—"the way things are"—and so the people in power in institutions may oppress simply as part of carrying out their jobs. Consequently, disparities are often tolerated as normal rather than investigated and challenged. Adams and Balfour (2004) referred to such practices of organizing difference that contribute to institutional oppression as *administrative evil.* They asserted that because of the diffuse and hierarchical nature of organizational systems, people can act in ways that are harmful (and oppressive) to others without being aware of their negative effect: "it is entirely possible to adhere to the tenets of public service and professional ethics and participate in even a great evil and not be aware of it until it is too late (or perhaps not at all)" (p. 11).

Oppression can occur based on a multiplicity of SIDs in each of these institutions, and organizational communication constructs are relevant to many (all?) of these institutions. Discussing institutional racism, Griffith et al. (2008) explained how oppression can permeate different organizational characteristics and dimensions:

> At the individual level, [rac]ism operates through staff members' attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. At the intraorganizational level, institutional [rac]ism operates through an organization's internal climate, policies, and procedures. These include the relationships among staff, which are rooted in formal and informal hierarchies and power relationships. At the extraorganizational level, institutional [rac]ism explains how organizations influence communities, public policies, and institutions. Also, institutional [rac]ism describes how organizations are affected by larger institutions (i.e., regulatory, economic, political, professional) and are shaped by the sociopolitical and economic contexts that frame an organization's policies, procedures, and functioning. (p. 289)

Thus, to understand how difference is organized, students need to understand oppression *and* privilege, which is an advantaged status based on social identity that tends to "make life easier" to get around, to get what one wants, and to be treated in an acceptable manner (Griffin, 1997b; McIntosh, 1993). Disadvantages faced by members of oppressed groups are often linked directly to advantages enjoyed by the privileged (Bohmer & Briggs, 1991). Frankenberg (1993) illustrated that "the self, where it is part of a dominant cultural group, does not have to name itself" (p. 196); race does not automatically infer Whiteness, gender issues are thought of as women's issues, class is invisible for middle-class people, and so forth. Thus, privilege is typically invisible for those who have it—an "invisible knapsack" of sorts (McIntosh, 1993).

My goal is to enable students of privilege to recognize the "invisible knapsacks" (McIntosh, 1993) of privilege they carry into organizational life so they can more readily recognize institutional oppression. I find that students often resist admitting privilege and instead fall back on scripts of reverse oppression, arguing that "other racial groups sometimes exclude Whites" or policies such as affirmative action discriminate against them. In the remainder of this chapter, I concentrate on ways to dialogue about *institutional* (and organizational) *oppression,* and in order to explore a few SIDs in depth, I include privilege↔oppression based on sex, race, and social class.[2]

❖ TEACHING ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGE↔OPPRESSION

In teaching about privilege↔oppression in organizational and institutional life, I want students to explore if and how people are discriminated against or marginalized institutionally based on an aspect of their social identity—and conversely, how those of privilege escape (and sometimes perpetuate) such treatment. A pedagogical strategy I continually utilize in pushing students to recognize privilege↔oppression is reflective writing because the act of writing about such issues (in and of itself) is thought to create learning (see Goldsmith, 2006). Thus, prior to discussing any given SID in class, I have students write about their thoughts. Allen (2004) created an "ID Check" of 12 questions at the end of each chapter in her book, *Difference Matters,* for students to reflect upon in discerning their social identities, and I utilize these as one form of journaling/exploratory writing. Many of these questions begin at the (intra)individual level, such as the following: How important is your [SID] to you? What advantages (privilege) do you enjoy based upon your [SID]? Are you ever aware of stereotypes about your [SID] as you

interact with others? Following Allen, I have asked students to respond to sources of pride in their SIDs, when they have been discriminated against because of their SIDs, and when/if they have discriminated against others because of their SIDs.

I then try to get students to think beyond the individual level through organizational/institutional questions such as, "What structures, norms, and practices contribute to [SID] oppression on campus (in the local community, etc.)?" (see Moremen, 1997). At the individual reflection stage, I have also found it useful to assign students different Implicit Association Tests (IATs) on the Harvard websites (https://implicit.harvard.edu/) to test their invisible biases and stereotypes about social groups that may translate to their organizational behaviors (e.g., for sexism: gender↔career; for racism: light skin↔dark skin, African American↔White, Native American↔White, and Asian American↔White; see Morgan, 2008, for a related *Communication Teacher* activity).

Then, once we are together in the classroom, the (even) harder work begins. In discussing how institutional oppression operates, I have found two websites to be invaluable resources. First, the Southern Poverty Law Center has multiple classroom activities as part of its Teaching Tolerance Project (see http://www.tolerance.org/index.jsp), and I utilize their volume, *Speak Up! Responding to Everyday Bigotry,* as one of my course texts. Second, Allan Creighton (2003) has an entire curriculum for social justice (i.e., a facilitator guide, 2003a; a foundational unit, 2003b; and multiple curricula for individual SIDs—classism, 2003c; racism, 2003d; and sexism, 2003e) that can be accessed online (http://www.socialjusticeeducation.org/social_justice/creighton/curriculum).

Based on advice I have taken from these curricula, when we gather as a class for discussion, I encourage students to "just suppose that it's true" that institutional oppression *does exist* for the SID we are studying (i.e., institutional sexism, racism, classism, etc.; the same can be done for individual oppression and sociocultural oppression). The point of "just supposing that" is to enable dialogue about what the form of institutional oppression might look like, rather than preemptively denying the possibility of its existence. For any given SID, I have found it useful to explore organizing difference by separating students into groups that are given different institutions and organizations in order to explore questions related to institutional privilege↔oppression, such as the following:

1. How is difference based on sex, race, class, and so on organized in this institution? What group(s) is privileged and what group(s) is oppressed?

2. What are examples of advantages the privileged group receives in this institution, even if they do not realize it, and even if they do not want inequality to exist?

3. What are examples of disadvantages the oppressed group receives in this social institution, even if they do not realize it, and even if they do not want it to exist?

4. What (if any) costs does the system of institutionalized oppression have for the privileged group?

5. How does the institution work to hide or cover up SIDs or distract people from seeing differences in how people are treated based on sex, race, class, and so on? (For example, to cover class differences, management urges workers to "work for the company team.")

6. What are possible ways this institution could (and sometimes does) work *against* oppression to promote equality? (See Creighton, 2003, for more information.)

Given this overall frame for how I approach reflecting and discussing organizing difference via SIDs, I now offer some specified definitions and areas of discussion for three SIDs: sex, race, and class.

❖ DIALOGUING ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGE↔OPPRESSION RELATED TO SEX/GENDER[3]

As a form of oppression, *sexism* is a set of beliefs and practices that privileges one sex and subordinates another; *institutional sexism* includes the policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that disadvantage one sex and advantage another. This system is partially upheld by patriarchy and *male privilege,* which is the unearned, (typically) unacknowledged entitlement men receive simply because of being a male in a sexist society. The challenge I have found in teaching about institutional sexism is that both male and female students would like to believe that sexism in U.S. society is a thing of the past—that women no longer face discrimination in organized institutions and that women can be and do anything. (Students also argue that men are readily willing to take on what is traditionally "women's work," such as staying home with children full time.)

To move toward "just supposing it does exist" in institutional sexism, I begin with pregnancy discrimination. Obviously, there *is* legislation to (ostensibly) prevent the advantaging of men and disadvantaging of women based on the Pregnancy Discrimination Act of 1978, which was enacted more than 30 years ago to make clear that employers could not use pregnancy as an excuse to deny women job opportunities. Yet as the 2008 Pregnancy Discrimination Report (National Partnership for Women and Families, 2008) noted and the movie *The Right Focus on: Pregnancy and Discrimination* showed (Minnesota Department of Human Rights, 2008), pregnancy discrimination remains a real barrier to women's employment. Such discrimination includes women being fired, forced to take leave, and denied a promotion or even a job opportunity due to pregnancy or *a fear that she might become pregnant*—a barrier (privileged) men never face. After these examples, students may be more willing to grant that institutional sexism exists; a suggested reading is Buzzanell (1995) who advocates rethinking the glass ceiling from a lens of language and everyday practices to see how sex inequality is (re)constructed in daily organizational life.

Of course, multiple institutions organize difference in ways that are sexist. In the family, the organization of domestic labor based on sex and the amount of domestic work that women perform even when both partners work can be discussed. There are numerous conversations that can be held surrounding sexism in religion and who is allowed to lead; certainly, my own religion (Roman Catholicism) provides an interesting exemplar of institutional sexism. In government and politics, Hilary Clinton's 2008 presidential campaign, where sexist norms and roles were consistently reiterated—including signs of "Iron my shirt!" at a town hall meeting—clearly suggested a woman's place is not as President. In education, students could research the ratio of male to female faculty members at different levels on campus (and if possible, find corresponding salaries), and then compare those numbers to the local K-12 system. In the media, both Norander (2008) and Shuler (2003) examined how the glass ceiling is perpetuated through imagery and news surrounding the feminized representation of (high-powered) women executives, particularly former Hewlett-Packard CEO Carly Fiorina. And in thinking about health care as an institution, practices that make reproductive health mainly the woman's responsibility (e.g., Gardisil vaccination) could be discussed.

Then, to introduce the role of male privilege in institutional sexism, I address some of the questions previously introduced. For example,

some of the benefits to men of an institutionally sexist system are as fol-
lows: earning more money; having better jobs; receiving more power
and recognition; getting taken care of by women and having their chil-
dren taken care of; participating in better-funded sports; being able to
expect better, more respectful, treatment from salespeople, car mechan-
ics, bank officials, and so on; and of course, that history is mostly about
men. At the same time, there are costs to men that can be discussed,
such as working in high-pressure jobs, increased feelings of isolation
and stress, and increased chance of injuries on the job or in the military.
Students often introduce that (of course) men can be hurt and
oppressed by women; I remind them that institutional oppression is
"not about individual mistreatment, but much larger inequality—how
on a society-wide scale women earn less, have fewer jobs, have fewer
leadership positions, and suffer more extreme violence from men"
(Creighton, 2003e, p. 14).

❖ DIALOGUING ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGE↔OPPRESSION RELATED TO RACE[4]

Discussions of racism are difficult and distressing for most college stu-
dents, so the challenges to teaching racism are numerous. (For longer
explanations, see Neville Miller & Harris, 2005; Simpson et al., 2007.)
White (privileged) students may perceive discussions of racism as per-
sonal attacks on themselves or their family members and may feel they
cannot honestly discuss issues of race oppression without being
labeled as racist (Neville Miller & Harris, 2005). Conversely, students of
targeted racial groups may feel uncomfortable and self-conscious dur-
ing these discussions due to concerns that their White classmates are
looking for their reactions (Neville Miller & Harris). In these discus-
sions, students may proffer a color-blind approach to race (Goldsmith,
2006; Simpson et al., 2007).

Racism is the systematic subordination of members of targeted
racial groups who have relatively little power (in the United States,
African Americans/Blacks, Hispanic Americans/Latino/Latinas,
Native Americans, Arab Americans, and Asian Americans) by the
members of the agent racial group who have relatively more power
(in the United States, Euro-Americans/Whites). *Institutional racism*
includes the policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by
organizations and social institutions that disadvantage targeted
racial groups and advantage others. In the United States, this sys-
tem is partially upheld by *White privilege,* which is the unearned,

(typically) unacknowledged entitlement Euro-Americans receive simply because of having white skin in a racist society (see McIntosh, 1993). The recognition of White privilege is a challenge in and of itself; it is easier for White students to know about the characterizations of other racial and ethnic groups, yet to know only what Whites are not (Frankenberg, 1993). Simply put, "Racially speaking, White is not a color" (Neville Miller & Harris, 2005, p. 224).

Consequently, this discussion of organizing difference needs to concentrate on the invisibility (and simultaneous ubiquity) of Whiteness as a racialized position in society. This can be instigated by having students read Ashcraft and Allen's (2003) analysis of the field of organizational communication's institutional racism as they articulate the multiple ways that our texts and scholarship are centered in Whiteness. A dialogue of institutional racism can be further facilitated by asking students to generate and discuss examples of institutional racism within their everyday lives: In what ways are organizations, the media, the healthcare system, the government, the educational system, and so forth, racist?

I have used the lack of adequate health care across racial and ethnic groups—that has been attributed to bias, cultural ignorance, and/or the limited language capacity of health care providers—as an extended example of institutionalized racism. (I avoid beginning the discussion with employment discrimination to increase the likelihood of students being able to just suppose that institutional racism exists before the inevitable questions about affirmative action and reverse discrimination are introduced.) The recent emphasis on health care reform in the Obama administration has created many such conversations in the media; a recent segment with Dr. Elizabeth Cohen on CNN argued that there are disparities in health care between Whites and African Americans—beyond just not having similar insurance. (The webpage http://blog.case.edu/ccrhd/2009/06/23/racial_disparities_in_health_care_cnn_video is a good source for in-class viewing). In 2003, the U.S. Institute of Medicine published *Unequal Treatment: Confronting Racial and Ethnic Disparities in Healthcare* that could be highlighted. Sack (2008) summarized a study in *The Archives of Internal Medicine* (Sequist et al., 2008) that attributed differences in health outcomes in White and African American diabetic patients who had the same doctors to a systemic failure to tailor treatments to patients' cultural norms. The researchers "recommended that doctors and other members of the health care system learn more about minority communities" and found "the problem of racial disparities is not characterized by only a few physicians providing markedly unequal care, but that such differences

in care are spread across the entire system, requiring the implementation of system-wide solutions (¶ 10–11)." Finally, Griffith et al. (2008) described the efforts of one county public health department in the rural South to examine how racism was manifested in its organizational practices and in the services it provided—and then how it took steps to correct institutional racism.

There are numerous contexts of institutionalized racism that can be explored with students. (And these differ across racial groups; see Kivel, 1995.) In finance and banking, an example of institutional racism is the redlining of communities, resulting in differential development based on their racial composition. In the criminal justice system, students can discuss racial profiling (and sometimes police brutality) by security and law enforcement workers. In organized sports, discussion can address the use of stereotyped racial caricatures by institutions (e.g., "Indian" mascots) and how this is increasingly coming under fire. In the media, all targeted racial groups have examples of underrepresentation and misrepresentation. Other areas for discussion might include job, educational, and housing discrimination and barriers to employment or professional advancement based on race. Institutional racism emerges in unequal pay for equal work; unequal funding for education; anti-immigrant legislation and law-enforcement; "English-only" language legislation; forced abandonment of Native-based spiritual practices; and a lack of "minority" representation in social, political, economic, and legal institutions. And the recent movement by several states to abolish affirmative action can start a dialogue as to whether this policy is still needed—or if White privilege is a thing of the past.

Dialogue should ultimately address how White privilege accompanies institutional racism. The "knapsack of (White) privilege" (McIntosh, 1993) ensures most Whites the security of not being pulled over by the police as a suspicious person and the ability to have a job hire or promotion attributed to skills and background rather than affirmative action. Some of the benefits to Whites in a system of institutionalized racism are that in comparison to other racial groups, they have better, safer, and securer housing; better jobs and education; and that candidates for public office typically look like them. In these discussions, White students may raise concerns about how they feel discriminated against when people of oppressed racial groups "stick to their own," as well as express anger at what they perceive as "reverse discrimination" with affirmative action. When such perspectives are expressed, it is important to again direct discussion back to the bigger picture—that institutionalized racism

is not about individual mistreatment but much larger (and pat-terned) inequalities in U.S. society.

❖ **DIALOGUING ABOUT INSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGE↔OPPRESSION RELATED TO SOCIAL CLASS[5]**

A challenge in teaching classism is that it is a newer form of privilege to be confronted in the United States; as noted, a student recently asked me if classism as a construct was "stretching it a bit" to find something to talk about. As Hattery (2003) asserted, few college students grew up on welfare; so the lessons of social inequality need to be somehow made more real. Because of the individualistic belief in meritocracy in U.S. society and the myth of a classless society, social class is a sensitive topic—those who are privileged want to believe they have *earned* all the privileges they enjoy. Further, people have not been questioned on epithets such as *trailer trash* or *poor White trash* in the same ways that other SIDs have had language issues called to question. Consequently, I have come to expect student resistance in dialoguing about how social class organizes difference.

Social class is a relative social ranking of individuals or families by power based on economic capital (financial), cultural capital, and social capital (esteem or social status). It is a system of stratification that is asso-ciated with a systematically unequal allocation of resources and con-straints (e.g., money, savoir-faire or know how, social skills, authority, experience, clout). *Classism* is the set of practices and beliefs that assign dif-ferential value to people according to their social class and an economic system that creates excessive inequality and causes basic human needs to go unmet. *Institutional classism* includes the policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that disad-vantage people of "lower" class and advantage people of "higher" class.

Class-based privilege is one of the many tangible or intangible unearned advantages of higher-class status, such as personal contacts with employers, good childhood health care, inherited money, and speaking the same dialect and accent as people with institutional power (see http://www.classism.org/home_definition.html). Social class is typically conceptualized on a continuum where targets are the lower class/poor (i.e., poor, unemployed, imprisoned, welfare recipi-ents, homeless, elderly/fixed-income), the working class is mostly a target group, the middle class is mostly an agent group, and the own-ing or ruling class is always an agent group.

To begin a dialogue about institutional classism, I facilitate the "10 chairs" exercise with students (taken from United for a Fair Economy, 2004). The activity starts with 10 chairs and 10 volunteers, where each person represents one-tenth of the U.S. population and each chair represents one-tenth of all the private material wealth in the United States (and thus one person is the top 10%). Instructors should note to students that if wealth were evenly distributed, this is what society would look like—one person, one chair—but then reiterate that this picture of equal wealth distribution has never existed in the United States. Next, the volunteer representing the top 10% should be asked to take over seven chairs, evicting the current occupants because, as of 2004, the top 10% owned 71% of all private wealth. The rest of the volunteers (representing 90% of the U.S. population) must then share three chairs (or about 30% of the wealth). Instructors should emphasize that while one person has seven chairs, even within the top 10% there is actually great disparity; the top one percent owns 34% of all wealth (or three and a half chairs)—as much wealth as the bottom 90% have combined. Yet while perhaps we "should" be angry about one person having all that wealth, in reality this group remains largely invisible, while the divisiveness emerges between people in the bottom 90% based on differences in social identity as we all vie for space on the few remaining chairs.

Institutional classism organizes difference in a multitude of ways. Related to government, students can plan a budget for a family whose only sources of income are Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) and food stamps. Working with actual figures provided by the local welfare office, students realize that these families have very little money, even for basic necessities, and that the reality of "living off welfare" does not match its discursive construction. In healthcare, there is little doubt that the system is stratified and that those who are uninsured receive lower quality health care than those who can afford insurance. In education, exploring how the local public school system in many areas is districted based on social class (and race), with schools receiving more (or less) money based on the property taxes paid by those in the district, can facilitate productive discussion about oppression in our educational system. In the media, imagery of who is portrayed as doing certain types of work and resulting ways of organizing illustrates class-based privilege. The series *Dirty Jobs* is illustrative of what work is considered dirty in U.S. society, and the NBC sitcom *My Name is Earl* centers in a lower-class set of characters and plays on trailer park stereotypes; the only work Earl is shown doing is stealing. At my institution, I have actually heard of students having "trailer

trash parties"—certainly such events are worthy of discussion as to how students are (re)producing classism.

Institutional classism cannot be confronted without dealing with its accompanying myth of meritocracy, which suggests that if a person has a lower social class than they would like, they can "pull themselves up by their bootstraps," because "anybody can get ahead if they try." This mentality leads to faulty assumptions that people who have a lot earned it and people who don't have a lot haven't tried enough. Debunking this myth presents a challenging dialogue in that it inter-sects with class privilege, and so those who do have wealth may get defensive that they deserve what they have and have "earned it."

I typically discuss institutional classism after sex and race because "classism works through and backs up all the other 'isms'" (Creighton, 2003e, p. 17). Consequently, readings about social class in organiza-tional communication also seem to emphasize intersectionality with other SIDs (rather than being centered on social class); some sources for students to read include Parker's (2003) exploration of African American women in "raced, gendered, and classed" work contexts, and Cheney and Ashcraft's (2007) (re)consideration of the ways that *professional* is utilized in communication studies.

❖ FINAL REFLECTIONS ON DIFFERENCE AND INSTITUTIONAL PRIVILEGE↔OPPRESSION

Allen (2004) illustrated how difference makes a difference when humans perceive and treat one another differently based on the social identity categories they embody—when difference becomes orga-nized in ways that are oppressive. I therefore conclude each unit of organizing difference by trying to empower students to be allies and take action or speak up when treatment based on SIDs becomes oppressive. This helps to bring them full circle in reflecting on insti-tutional privilege↔oppression. In their exploratory writing, students always answer the same final two questions: (a) After your readings and reflections, what are three to five things you learned about your own privilege↔oppression based on SID? (b) What are three ways you can interrupt ___ism in your daily life?

Notably, in my capstone class as I currently teach it (across indi-vidual, institutional, and sociocultural oppressions), students almost never suggest ways to interrupt forms of oppression at the institu-tional level. While this is likely a product of having the individual level to fall back on, writing this chapter has motivated me to push

them to think of ways to interrupt oppression at *all* levels and to ask, "What is one way you can interrupt institutional ___ism on campus?" to push them toward considering how they might have an effect on organizational and institutional practices that are oppressive. Of course, being an ally in terms of individual behaviors (such as listening to targeted groups and taking action when you hear oppressive language) is easier to comprehend than at the institutional level where being an ally against institutional oppression means dismantling oppressive structures and transforming them into institutions that work to benefit all people. It involves "re-structuring a system that is based on privilege for some into one that provides opportunities for all members of the society to participate to the extent of their desire, need, and potential" (Creighton, 2003a, p. 4).

Yet social movements start with individuals who engage in grassroots organizing, and history has many examples of what this can look like. Sexism as a form of oppression has been resisted through the various waves of feminism—from the first wave of suffrage to the second wave of civil rights to the emerging third wave of feminism. Racism as a form of oppression has been resisted throughout history, in civil rights movements (for multiple racial groups), anti-slavery movements, anti-apartheid movements, ongoing organizing to prevent hate crimes and against the racial profiling of multiple racial groups, immigrant cultures organizing to preserve their cultural practices, immigrants' rights and legal advocacy movements, and over 150 years of legal contest for land rights and the upholding of U.S. treaties by Native Americans. Classism as a form of oppression has been resisted through the formation of unions; public organizing to make corporations more responsible to their local communities; informal and formal work slowdowns, stoppages, and strikes to secure better working conditions; worker organizing at shareholder meetings; and public campaigns against corporate chain domination (see Creighton, 2003c). Organizing and resistance efforts have resulted in the Living Wage Movement.

Sharing with students examples of how grassroots organizing (started by individual action) ultimately had collective impact can help them understand how their participation in organizations can (re)produce or challenge institutional forms of oppression. *Organizations* are collectives of individuals, so while institutional racism appears in policies and practices, such policies and practices cannot be changed without individual action. In moving toward transformative change, the National Association of Social Workers (2008) asserted that the following steps are necessary in organizations: (a) recognizing and creating awareness of institutional oppression (including how it is ignored

through denial); (b) developing educational and training opportunities for individuals to learn more about the multiple forms of institutionalized oppression; (c) creating opportunities for members of privileged and target status to dialogue in groups; and (d) "developing official goals, policies, and procedures that will enable the organization to evolve" and analyzing how such oppression "can be ameliorated or reversed through programming, hiring, training, supervision, and other forms of institutional processes" (NASW, 2008, p. 18).

For me, the goal of studying institutional oppression is for students who are targeted based on a given SID to become *empowered* and for students who are privileged/agents to recognize their privilege and become *allies* against oppression. I aspire to Harris's (2003) vision: "Instead of perceiving themselves as victims or innocent bystanders, students [will] self-identify as 'activists'" (p. 316). Thus, for all SIDs, I ask students about their various forms of privilege and how to interrupt __ism in daily life. As a final motivation toward alliance, I ask this question: "How is remaining passive when you observe institutional __ism a form of collusion in its (re)production?" Closing class in this way sets up an expectation for action among the students. Certainly, I am not so naïve as to think that all students are forever changed by these discussions, but I take comfort in knowing they have at least been exposed to dialoguing about how difference is organized based on SIDs in ways that create privilege↔oppression and in knowing that I have encouraged them to combat institutional oppression.

❖ NOTES

1. As an instructor, resources I have found valuable include Bohmer and Briggs's (1991) "Teaching privileged students about gender, race, and class oppression," Kimmel and Ferber's (2004) *Privilege: A reader*, and Griffin's (1997a) "Introductory module for the single issue courses" (Adams, Bell, & Griffin, 1997, Chapter 5).

2. In my class, I also discuss (individual, sociocultural, and institutional) heterosexism, ableism, and ageism.

3. When examining the SID of "sex/gender," student reading might include Allen's (2004, Chapter 3) "Gender matters," while instructors can utilize Goodman and Schapiro's (1997) "Sexism curriculum design" (Adams et al., 1997, Chapter 7; unless otherwise noted, all definitions of sexism are derived from this chapter).

4. When examining the SID of "race," student reading might include Allen's (2004, Chapter 4) "Race matters," while instructors can utilize Wijeyesinghe, Griffin, and Love's (1997) "Racism curriculum design" (Adams

et al., 1997, Chapter 6; unless otherwise noted, all definitions surrounding racism come from this chapter).

5. When examining the SID of "social class," student reading might include Allen's (2004, Chapter 5) "Social class matters," while instructors can utilize Yeskel and Leondar-Wright's (1997) "Classism curriculum design" (Adams et al., 1997, Chapter 11; unless otherwise noted, all definitions surrounding classism come from this chapter).

❖ REFERENCES

Adams, G. B., & Balfour, D. L. (2004). *Unmasking administrative evil* (rev. ed.). Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.

Adams, M., Bell, L. A., & Griffin, P. (1997). *Teaching diversity and social justice: A sourcebook.* New York: Routledge.

Allen, B. J. (2004). *Difference matters: Communicating social identity.* Long Grove, IL: Waveland Press.

Ashcraft, K. L., & Allen, B. J. (2003). The racial foundation of organizational communication. *Communication Theory, 13,* 3–39.

Ashcraft, K. L., & Mumby, D. K. (2004). *Reworking gender: A feminist communicology of organization.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Bell, L. A., Washington, S., Weinstein, G., & Love, B. (1997). Knowing ourselves as instructors. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, & P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (pp. 299–310). New York: Routledge.

Bohmer, S., & Briggs, J. L. (1991). Teaching privileged students about gender, race, and class oppression. *Teaching Sociology, 19,* 154–163.

Buzzanell, P. M. (1995). Reframing the glass ceiling as a socially constructed process: Implications for understanding and change. *Communication Monographs, 62,* 327–354.

Cheney, G., & Ashcraft, K. L. (2007). Considering "the professional" in communication studies: Implications for theory and research within and beyond the boundaries of organizational communication. *Communication Theory, 17,* 146–175.

Creighton, A. (2003a). *Tools for building justice: Facilitator guide.* Retrieved June 15, 2009, from http://www.socialjusticeeducation.org/social_justice/creighton/downloads/crieghton_PDF/facilitatorguide.pdf

Creighton, A. (2003b). *Tools for building justice: Foundation unit.* Available from http://www.socialjusticeeducation.org/social_justice/creighton/downloads/crieghton_PDF/foundationsessions.pdf

Creighton, A. (2003c). *Tools for building justice: Unit on classism.* Available from http://www.socialjusticeeducation.org/social_justice/creighton/downloads/crieghton_PDF/classism.pdf

Creighton, A. (2003d). *Tools for building justice: Unit on racism.* Available from http://www.socialjusticeeducation.org/social_justice/creighton/downloads/crieghton_PDF/racism,finaldraft,12,18,02.pdf

Creighton, A. (2003e). *Tools for building justice: Unit on sexism.* Available from http://www.socialjusticeeducation.org/social_justice/creighton/downloads/creighton_PDF/sexism,final,12,20,02.pdf

Davis, N. (1992). Teaching about inequality: Student resistance, paralysis, and rage. *Teaching Sociology, 20,* 232–238.

Frankenberg, R. (1993). *White women, race matters: The social construction of whiteness.* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Goldsmith, A. (2006). Learning to understand inequality and diversity: Getting students past ideologies. *Teaching Sociology, 34,* 263–277.

Goodman, D., & Schapiro, S. (1997). Sexism curriculum design. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, & P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching diversity and social justice: A sourcebook* (pp. 110–140). New York: Routledge.

Griffin, P. (1997a). Facilitating social justice education courses. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, & P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (pp. 279–298). New York: Routledge.

Griffin, P. (1997b). Introductory module for single-issues courses. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, & P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice* (pp. 61–81). New York: Routledge.

Griffith, D. M., Childs, E. L., Eng, E., & Jeffries, V. (2008). Racism in organizations: The case of a public county health department. *Journal of Community Psychology, 35,* 287–302.

Harris, T. M. (2003). Impacting student perceptions of and attitudes toward race in the interracial communication course. *Communication Education, 52,* 311–317.

Hattery, H. J. (2003). Sleeping in the box, thinking outside the box: Student reflections on innovative pedagogical tools for teaching about and promoting a greater understanding of social class inequality among undergraduates. *Teaching Sociology, 31,* 412–427.

Hill Collins, P. (1990). *Black feminist thought: Knowledge, consciousness, and the politics of empowerment.* Boston: Unwin Hyman.

Hubbard, E. A., & De Welde, K. (2003). "I'm glad I'm not gay!": Heterosexual students' emotional experience in the college classroom with a "coming out" assignment. *Teaching Sociology, 31,* 73–84.

Institute of Medicine (U.S.). (2003). *Unequal treatment: Confronting racial and ethnic disparities in healthcare.* Washington, DC: The National Academies Press.

Johnson, J. R., & Bhatt, A. J. (2003). Gendered and racialized identities and alliances in the classroom: Formations in/of resistive space. *Communication Education, 52,* 230–244.

Kimmel, M. S., & Ferber, A. L. (Eds.). (2004). *Privilege: A reader.* Boulder, CO: Westview Press.

Kirby, E. L. (2009). Communication and community syllabus. Available from http://www.creighton.edu/ccas/communicationstudies/facultystaff/fulltime/kirby/index

Kirby, E. L., & McBride, M. C. (2009). *Gender actualized: Cases in communicatively constructing realities.* Dubuque, IA: Kendall Hunt.

Kivel, P. (1995). *Uprooting racism: How white people can work for racial justice.* Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada: New Society Publishers.

Lorde, A. (1984). *Sister outsider.* Trumansberg, NY: The Crossing Press.

Lucal, B. (1996). Oppression and privilege: Toward a relational conceptualization of race. *Teaching Sociology, 24,* 245–255.

Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (1999). Thinking dialectically about culture and communication. *Communication Theory, 9,* 1–25.

McIntosh, P. (1993). White privilege and male privilege: A personal account of coming to see correspondence through work in women's studies. In A. Minas (Ed.), *Gender basics* (pp. 30–38). Belmont, CA: Wadsworth.

Millstein, K. H. (1997). The taping project: A method for self-evaluation and information consciousness in racism courses. *Journal of Social Work Education, 33,* 491–506.

Minnesota Department of Human Rights. (2008). *The right focus on: Pregnancy and discrimination.* Retrieved July, 6, 2009, from http://www.humanrights.state.mn.us/quicktimeDec08/qt_pregnancy.html

Misra, J. (1997). Teaching stratification: Stimulating interest and critical thinking through research projects. *Teaching Sociology, 25,* 278–291.

Mongan-Rallis, H., & Higgins, H. (2004). Working assumptions for class interaction. Syllabus for Education 1100: Human Diversity. Retrieved March 15, 2009, from http://www.d.umn.edu/~hrallis/courses/1100sp04/index.html

Moremen, R. D. (1997). A multicultural framework: Transforming curriculum, transforming students. *Teaching Sociology, 25,* 107–119.

Morgan, M. (2008). Explicit versus implicit stereotypes: "What biases do I really hold?" *Communication Teacher, 22*(3), 84–88.

National Association of Social Workers. (2008). *Institutional racism and the social work profession: A call to action.* Washington, DC: Author. Available online at http://www.socialworkers.org/diversity/InstitutionalRacism.pdf

National Partnership for Women and Families. (2008). *2008 Pregnancy Discrimination Report.* Washington, DC: Author. Available online at http://www.nationalpartnership.org/site/DocServer/Pregnancy_Discrimination_Act_-_Where_We_Stand_30_Years_L.pdf?docID=4281

Neville Miller, A., & Harris, T. M. (2005). Communicating to develop white racial identity in an interracial communication class. *Communication Education, 54,* 223–242.

Norander, S. (2008). Surveillance/discipline/resistance: Carly Fiorina under the gaze of *The Wall Street Journal. Communication Studies, 59,* 99–113.

Parker, P. S. (2003). Control, resistance, and empowerment in raced, gendered, and classed work contexts: The case of African American women. *Communication Yearbook, 27,* 257–291.

Sack, K. (2008, June 10). Doctors miss cultural needs, study says. *The New York Times* [online]. Retrieved July 9, 2009, from http://www.nytimes.com/2008/06/10/health/10study.html

Sequist, T. D., Fitzmaurice, G. M., Marshall, R., Shaykevich, S., Safran, D. G., & Ayanian, J. Z. (2008). Physician performance and racial disparities in diabetes mellitus care. *The Archives of Internal Medicine, 168*(11), 1145–1151.

Shuler, S. (2003). Breaking through the glass ceiling without breaking a nail: Women executives in *Fortune* Magazine's "Power 50" List. *American Communication Journal, 6*(2).

Simpson, J. S., Causey, A., & Williams, L. (2007). "I would want you to understand it": Students' perspectives on addressing race in the classroom. *Journal of Intercultural Communication Research, 36*, 33–50.

Southern Poverty Law Center. (n.d.). *Speak up! Responding to everyday bigotry.* Retrieved March 30, 2007, from http://www.tolerance.org/speakup/pdf/speak_up_full_document.pdf

United for a Fair Economy (2004). 10 Chairs activity. Available from http://www.faireconomy.org/files/GD_10_Chairs_and_Charts.pdf

Wijeyesinghe, C. L., Griffin, P., & Love, B. (1997). Racism curriculum design. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, & P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching diversity and social justice: A sourcebook* (pp. 82–109). New York: Routledge.

Yeskel, F., & Leondar-Wright, B. (1997). Classism curriculum design. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, and P. Griffin (Eds.), *Teaching diversity and social justice: A sourcebook* (pp. 231–260). New York: Routledge.