6

Minority Groups and the Impact of Oppression

[Prison] relieves us of the responsibility of seriously engaging with the problems of our society, especially those produced by racism and, increasingly, global capitalism.

—Angela Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (2003)

We cannot be sustainable unless we engage the disparities that historically have been created around intentional public policies.

—Robin Morris Collin (2011)

As we saw in Chapter 5, the consequences of poverty are enduring; they affect everything from educational opportunity and incarceration rates to health and mental health measures. The impact of race is strongly correlated with poverty levels and with health problems. For example, infant mortality is more than twice as high among African Americans as among non-Hispanic whites (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2013).

In *Colorblind,* Tim Wise (2010), a popular antiracist speaker on college campuses, reveals how institutionalized racism is ingrained in American social policies as it has been since the days of slavery. It is true that there are paradigm shifts, moments in history when one or another of the formerly subordinate groups rises to a position of greater acceptability, often in conjunction with the passage of protective legislation providing full civil rights. But then, inevitably, the pendulum swings back often during

a time of economic decline, and a backlash ensues. This is one of the major themes of this chapter—an examination of ideologies and policies, of those that protect and those that oppress.

A second major theme is the impact of institutionalized oppression on minority groups. We will talk about oppression in the economic system, in health care, and in the justice system. Rather than focusing on each minority group and the challenges peculiar to each group, we will examine the nature of oppression itself and the way it impacts all minorities. From here we move to a discussion of related concepts—social exclusion, privilege, and intersectionality.

Oppression

Oppression, as defined by the *Social Work Dictionary* is

> 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 who has more power. (Barker, 2014, p. 303)

Some of the words used in this definition—*power*, *exploited*, *deprived*, *privileges*—are key variables related to oppression. Oppression can be viewed as an institutionalized system of power that encompasses a web of cultural practices that serve to exploit and deprive some groups in order to privilege other groups. This brings us to a consideration of a key question: Does prejudice in society lead to discriminatory legislation and practices? Or does the passage of oppressive laws directed against a minority group create a situation that engenders prejudice? We do know of situations in which people turned against minority groups—for example, American Indians, former slaves in the U.S. South, and various immigrant groups—and politicians responded accordingly. But we also know that the passage of discriminatory legislation has a strong influence on the social acceptability of a certain group. Consider the following historical situations: white South African children growing up under conditions of apartheid in which all black servants had to leave the town at nightfall, the passage and enforcement of Jim Crow laws in the U.S. South, and the segregation of school children in Northern Ireland on the basis of religious denomination. Studies demonstrate that when discrimination is mandated in the law, prejudice against the targeted minority groups, including hate crimes, increases. For a recent illustration, we can look to Alabama. In 2011, the state legislature passed HB 56, which allowed for background checks on anyone suspected of being an undocumented immigrant. The negative response against not only Mexicans but other dark-skinned people was immediate: over 6,000 calls reporting personal attacks were made to a Latino hotline (National Immigration Law Center, 2012). Reports ranged from police harassment, white shoppers telling dark-skinned shoppers to go back to Mexico, and the bullying of Latino children in the schools.

Even though the particular conditions and manifestations of oppression may vary, there are common elements pertaining to all oppressions:

- Vested interests by dominant groups to maintain and enhance their access to valued resources.
- Economic exploitation of marginalized groups.
- Representatives of dominant groups control media messages.
- The spread of ideologies holding members of the subordinate groups responsible for their own misfortunes or victimization. Moreover, these ideologies are built on and reinforce the latent forces of racism, sexism, ageism, ethnocentrism, ableism, heterosexism, classism, and sectarianism in the society (Appleby, Colon, & Hamilton, 2011).

Privilege

To Canadian social work educator, Bob Mullaly (2009), privilege is not something we take; it is given to us by society "if we possess the characteristics that society values, such as being male, white, heterosexual, affluent, and non-disabled" (p. 287). From Mullaly's chapter on privilege, we have filtered out the following striking characteristics of privilege:

- It is an unearned not an earned advantage.
- It is invisible to the people who possess the benefits.
- It is not an individual trait but a group characteristic.
- It increases people's power because it makes for more opportunities, advantages, and the status attached to them.
- It is maintained through various avoidance mechanisms such as denial, belief that members of this social circle are the good guys, refusal to hear about the oppression of others, and victim blaming.

Mullaly (2009) provides a wealth of examples of the advantages that people have in the various categories of privilege on the basis of class, traditional family, race, and age. For young and middle-age privilege, for example, he lists the following:

I do not have to endure people yelling at me because they assume I cannot hear.

I can be assured that people will not infantilize me by talking "baby talk" to me.

I am assured that other people will not try to make decisions for me, often, without consultation.

I am not likely to be viewed as a burden on society and draining society's resources (p. 308).

Being a U.S. citizen within the United States is definitely a privilege because it entitles the worker to vote, apply for college freely, and to not fear deportation if

arrested. There is even privilege attached to being a citizen of the most powerful nation in the world when one travels abroad. American embassies look out for U.S. citizens in many instances. But, probably of even more importance, because the English language has become the international language, Americans can often rely on their native language when engaged in Internet use, foreign commerce, or travel abroad, whereas people from other countries, such as Norway, the Czech Republic, and Turkey would do well to rely on English as a means of communication when traveling outside of their own borders.

White Privilege

Mullaly (2009) provides an extensive list of situations in which white privilege is apparent. Among his most striking examples are the following:

- I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.
- I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my own race most of the time.
- I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.
- I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.
- I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.
- I can take a job . . . without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of my race.

We can add to this the privilege that most northern whites and some northern blacks have of speaking Standard English, which is the brand of American English favored by TV and radio news stations. Paralleling the norms for standard American speech patterns in the U.S., there is also the preference for certain physical attributes that conform to contemporary standards of desirability.

The possession of white privilege is largely unrecognized by whites but very obvious to those who do not have it. In this regard, there is a huge racial divide. In the recent case of the not guilty verdict reached in the killing of black teenager Trayvon Martin by the neighborhood watch coordinator, George Zimmerman. Zimmerman had profiled Martin as a likely criminal and was stalking him when apparently a fight broke out between the two of them. Because of African Americans' awareness of inequities in the criminal justice system and of the historic role of racial profiling of young black males, opinion polls following the verdict revealed sharp racial differences. In a *Washington Post*–ABC News poll, 86% of African Americans stated they disapproved of the verdict, with most of them strongly disapproving as compared to only 31% of whites. A slight majority of whites even stated they thought that blacks received equal treatment in the criminal justice system (compared to only 14% of blacks) (Cohen & Balz, 2013).

Cultural standards of beauty, across racial and ethnic lines, often seem to reflect a preference for lighter skin. A fascinating recent documentary, *Dark Girls* (Duke & Channsin, 2013), highlights such discriminatory patterns in South Asia and even in

some countries in Africa. The documentary reveals the business angle in the encouragement of women to spend large sums of money on skin-bleaching creams, while paradoxically, white women risk skin cancer by going to tanning booths to darken their skin. The preference seems to be an olive skin color rather than an absence of all pigment.

These skin-lightening and skin-darkening products and technologies are multi-million dollar businesses, but the big money is in cosmetic surgery. Many black women, as bell hooks (1992) notes, pursue white ideals of beauty and body build: straightening their hair and relying on body modification techniques. In parts of Asia, the situation is more extreme. In South Korea, for example, one in five South Korean women have had some form of aesthetic cosmetic surgery. This compares to around one in 20 in the United States (Stone, 2013). A powerful Korean consumer culture coupled with discrimination in employment against women who do not meet a certain standard of beauty has led to an equation of beauty with professional and economic success. The most common surgeries are eyelid operations to give Koreans the Western crease, or "double eyelid," and reshaping of the nose for a less flat look. We might consider then that young Asian women who achieve the modern standard of beauty in their countries are privileged in the competition for high-paying jobs.

Heterosexual Privilege

Heterosexual privilege is probably one of least thought about (by heterosexuals) and most pervasive of all types of privilege. Even more so than other forms of social attributes, this one tends to be taken for granted by majority groups.

Heterosexuals have the advantage of never having to explain their sexual orientation or of having their sexual practices assumed to be immoral based on who they are partnered with. Heterosexuals do not have to fear violence if they walk down the street arm in arm with their partners. Heterosexual teens do not have to deal with constant bullying and harassment based on their sexual identity, and they always have teachers and probably their parents as role models and social supports. In church, members of the majority orientation are not made to feel that their associations and relationships are immoral. Gays and lesbians cannot count on any of these advantages.

The pathologization of gays, lesbians, and transgender people has a long history in the United States. It was only as late as 1973, in response to heavy criticism, that the American Psychiatric Association (APA) retracted its notion of homosexuality as a mental disorder. In the fifth edition of the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders* (American Psychiatric Association, 2013), again, in response to criticism, gender identity disorder was renamed gender dysphoria. This condition, which is said to occur when a person's identity as a male or female is not the same as the person's biological sex, is still viewed as a mental health disorder. This is a slight improvement in that it is now viewed as a temporary disorder rather than a permanent condition.

Life-threatening violence against known gays and lesbians is a reality worldwide. Recent headlines demonstrate this:

"No Place for Gays in Yemen" (Almosawa, 2013)

"Russian Anti-Gay Law Prompts Rise in Homophobic Violence" (Luhn, 2013)

"Two More Anti-Gay Attacks Are Reported in Manhattan" (Goodman, 2013)

"Uganda Anti-Gay Law Led to Tenfold Rise in Attacks on LGBTI People, Report Says" (Bowcott, 2014)

In the United States, despite remarkable legal advances in recent years, there is still much violence directed against people who are perceived as homosexual. Out of the 6,216 hate crimes reported by the Uniform Crime Reports, 20.8% were attributed to sexual orientation (Federal Bureau of Investigation, 2013).

The privilege of the right to marry for gays and lesbians has received a great deal of media attention within and outside the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) movement with the passage of marriage laws in some European countries and challenges to the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA) passed by Congress in 1996 declaring that marriage was between a man and a woman (van Wormer, Kaplan, & Juby, 2012). Marriage is a right that has been taken for granted by dominant groups of men and women in society, but we should remember that not so long ago, many states in the United States had enforceable laws on their books that prohibited marriages between races. It was not until the height of the Civil Rights Movement, that the U.S. Supreme

Source: Photo by Robert van Wormer.

Homophobia Taught to Children at an Early Age. These children are learning homophobia at an early age. The protest took place at a memorial service for a young gay murder victim in Waterloo, Iowa.

An Advocacy Group in Many Communities: PFLAG. Members of PFLAG (Parents, Families, and Friends of Lesbians and Gays) offer an excellent resource for social workers to refer family members of gays and lesbians dealing with coming-out issues.

Court (1967) ruled in *Loving v. Virginia* that these laws are unconstitutional. And it was not until 2013 that the ban on same-sex marriage by the federal government was lifted (Graff, 2013).

Male Privilege

In the 19th century, American women were viewed as defective based on their differences from men; women who resisted their subordinate roles in society were labeled by Freud as *castrating women*, a term that was widely used through the 1950s. Women, in general, were seen as irrational and as having inherent intellectual, emotional, and mental deficits. Arguments in opposition to women's right to vote claimed they were too temperamental, too emotional, and too frail and that they would even become disabled if allowed to vote (Baynton, 2009).

Male privilege is often taken for granted by men who may be amazed when it is pointed out. Mullaly (2009) provides the following illustrations of situations in which he, as a man, is privileged:

- I can dominate a conversation without being seen as dominating.
- I am praised for spending time with my children and for cooking and doing household chores.

- I am not expected to change my name when I get married.
- I can walk alone in public without fear of being harassed or sexually violated.
- I never worry about being paid less than my female counterparts.
- I don't have to choose between having a career or having a family. (p. 303)

A later section on oppression in the economic systems provides statistics that reveal more about the impact of male privilege.

Intersectionality

Intersectionality is the term used in oppression theory to address the experiences of people who are subjected to multiple forms of oppression and domination. Patricia Hill Collins (2010), explains how through this multidimensional lens, we can understand how membership in one minority group, such as female gender, combines with other key social characteristics and statuses related to oppression, such as race or ethnicity, to produce a synergistic or multiplying effect. This effect is probably stronger than even the sum of the separate categories of difference. National origin, culture, religion, caste or class, age, gender identity and sexual expression, (dis)ability, and/or having the status of ex-convict are other categories that in combination can subject people to heightened levels of discrimination.

Thinking back to past racial oppression in the hills of Kentucky, bell hooks (2009) reflects on the dualism of race and class:

> I was a little girl in a segregated world when I first learned that there were white people who saw black people as less than animals. Sitting on the porch, my siblings and I would watch white folks bring home their servants, the maids and cooks who toiled to make their lives comfortable. These black servants were always relegated to the back seat. Next to the white drivers in the front would be the dog and in the back seat the black worker. Just seeing this taught me much about the interconnectedness of race and class. (pp. 148–149)

To learn about race-class dynamics from the women of the Great Migration's point of view, see *The Maid Narratives* (van Wormer, Jackson, & Sudduth, 2012).

Tim Wise (2010) debunks the liberal dogma that we can separate the forces of racism from the forces of classism and claim that colorblind policies will overcome racial inequality through treating everyone the same. Moreover, by not considering the intersections of our multiple roles and identities, we can easily fall into arguments of comparison about whose oppression is worse. The end result of dichotomizing categories of difference is that oppression can then be blamed on just one group (e.g. working-class white men) rather than considering power relations within society as a whole.

We can also look to experimental research to gauge the degree of discrimination inflicted upon individuals who occupy two categories of difference simultaneously. Sociologist Devah Pager (2003) tested the concept of intersectionality in labor market research. She sent out pairs of white applicants (100) and otherwise identical black applicants (250), where one member of each matched pair had a criminal record (see

also Pager, Western, & Bonikowski, 2009). Pager and her colleagues found that employers strongly discriminated against the black applicants and especially against those with supposed criminal records. They were even more likely to make job offers to whites with criminal records than to African Americans with clean records. This research provides evidence that the effect of race can be magnified by additional factors such as criminal history. Now we move from a focus on instances of discrimination to a consideration of the psychological impact of oppression.

Systemic Examples of Oppression

Oppression in the Economic System

According to the report, *The State of Women in America,* authored by Chu and Posner (2013), women now make up almost half of all workers in the United States. In 1969, they were only one-third of the workforce. And 2012 was a watershed year for women in terms of getting elected to public office, which brought their numbers up to 18% of the total seats in Congress. And yet, substantial inequalities remain.

We learn further from the report by Chu and Posner (2013) that although an increasing number of women are either the sole breadwinners for their family or they share the role with their partners, women are paid only 77 cents for every dollar a man makes. The pay gap is even larger for women of color. On average, African American women make 64 cents for every dollar that white men make.

One tangible aspect of privilege is the ability to obtain employment. See Figures 6.1 and 6.2 for the racial and ethnic breakdown of earnings and unemployment rates. Figure 6.1 also shows the disparity in earnings by gender. The female-to-male earnings ratio varied by race and ethnicity: White women earned 81.4% as much as their male counterparts, compared with black (89.6%), Hispanic (89.5%), and Asian women (78.5%) (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). The differences among the men are interesting as well, with Latino men well below other racial and ethnic groups, and Asian men doing the best of all.

The success of U.S. Asians' earning levels is striking as indicated in Figure 6.1. We need to take into account, as Wise (2010) points out, that Asians and Asian-Americans in the U.S. are far better educated than Americans as a whole. He cites research that shows comparisons of Asian and white Americans at the same educational level, which indicate that whites earn from 14% to 28% more. Therefore, he concludes, we cannot dismiss the reality of white privilege with regard to Asians.

Disparities in the Health Care System

In his review of the research on the diagnosis and treatment of heart and stroke conditions, cancer, HIV/AIDS, and mental health, Robert Keefe (2010) found that to date, only a handful of several hundred studies find no racial and ethnic differences in health care. When statistically controlling for various factors including socioeconomic status, disparities by race and ethnicity in health care continue to emerge. For example, as Keefe indicates, the research shows that even after controlling for variations in

Figure 6.1   Median Usual Weekly Earnings of Full-Time Wage and Salary Workers by Age, Race, Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, and Sex, Not Seasonally Adjusted, First Quarter 2013
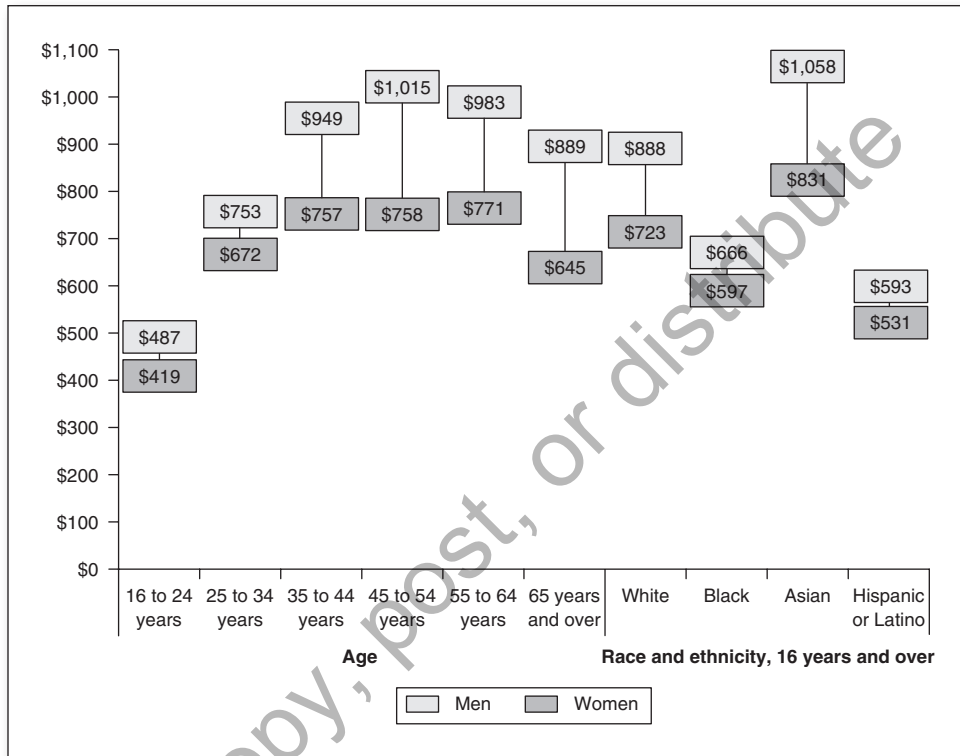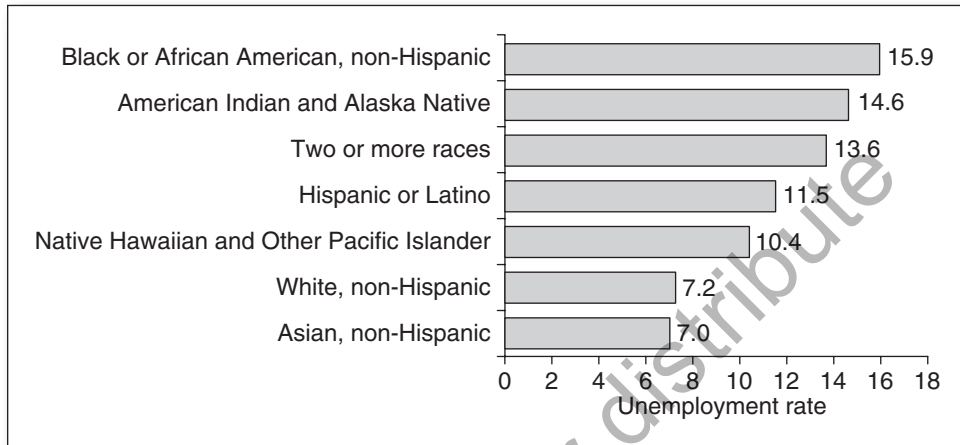

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013).

insurance status and income, African Americans, relative to whites and in some cases Hispanics, are less likely to receive appropriate cardiac medication. African Americans are also shown to receive cardiac bypass surgery significantly less often than whites. This fact helps to explain the greater mortality among African American patients. White Americans were also significantly more likely than Mexican Americans to have received appropriate medication.

Based on their history of economic exploitation and even of being the objects of medical experimentation, Dominiguez (2010) found that African Americans are significantly less likely than non-Hispanic whites to trust their medical providers to do what is best for them. This distrust is especially pronounced in patients receiving their care in health centers, outpatient clinics, or emergency departments, and they are less satisfied with the services they do receive.

Delgado (2007) discusses the widely reported phenomenon that recently arrived Mexicans are healthier on practically all health indexes compared with Mexican

Figure 6.2   Unemployment Rate by Race and Hispanic or Latino Ethnicity, 2011 Annual Averages

Race/Ethnicity	Unemployment rate
Black or African American, non-Hispanic	15.9
American Indian and Alaska Native	14.6
Two or more races	13.6
Hispanic or Latino	11.5
Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	10.4
White, non-Hispanic	7.2
Asian, non-Hispanic	7.0

Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics (2012).

Latina Woman Addresses Crowd in Protest Against Wells Fargo Bank, Seattle. This was part of a nationwide protest against discriminatory lending practices by this bank. The bank later was fined $175 million by the civil rights branch of the Department of Justice for discrimination of minority groups.

Americans; the longer they live in the United States, the less healthy they become (this finding is not true for Cubans and Puerto Ricans). Factors singled out in the literature are a rise in eating disorders and substance use in general among second-generation Mexicans and barriers to health care including public health services for Latinos, inability to pay for treatment, and lack of transportation to medical clinics. Lack of health insurance is a major factor in preventing Latinos from receiving preventive and adequate health care. Undocumented workers are excluded from coverage under the Affordable Care Act, and although payroll taxes are removed from their paychecks for Medicare, they are not eligible to receive health care under this program, which covers adults over age 65 (National Immigration Law Center, 2013).

Similarly, Ramos, Jurkowski, Gonzalez, and Lawrence (2010) found through interviews with Latina women a close correlation between the high rate of poverty in Latino families and their inability to access health care treatment. Difficulties ranged from the unavailability of physicians or clinics, to lack of transportation, inability to afford treatment, lack of child care, and not feeling comfortable at family planning clinics.

One serious cultural barrier to mental health treatment is the stigma that pertains to mental health problems in many cultures. This may involve seeing individuals with psychological problems as bringing shame to their family, destroying the family's reputation, or even as a result of sin in a former life.

Related to health disparities is the disparity in access to a clean and uncontaminated environment. This disparity is reflected regionally as well as worldwide.

Environmental Oppression

When we examine the state of the physical environment in which people live, we come face-to-face with the reality of oppression. Economic and racial oppression are revealed in answer to a simple question: Who enjoys the bounties of nature with access to scenic views and clean air and water, and who lives in flood zones or near contaminated soil or polluting factories?

The global crisis caused by climate change, environmental degradation, and food and water insecurity has created fertile ground for global inequalities. These global inequalities are seen at the micro-level as well, within individual nations. This is where a concept we will call *environmental classism* comes into prominence.

Environmental classism comes into play when poor and marginalized people are pushed into the undesirable sections of town. We see it, likewise, when wealthy developers come from outside of the community and build factories for corporate profit that threaten the health of local people. A good example is provided by Schmitz, Matyók, James, and Sloan (2012), who describe what has happened with coastal development in some areas, where water has been pumped out of the aquifers, damaging the residents' water supply for the benefit of rich landlords and tourists.

Jerome Ringo (2010) has witnessed the effect of environmental destruction in Appalachia as well as in "the hood" in Washington, DC. Ringo, in his keynote speech at the Council on Social Work Education's (CSWE) landmark conference on sustainability, described his journey from an employee of a polluting petrochemical company to an environmental activist and researcher. The company Ringo worked for was

situated near a poor, black neighborhood in southern Louisiana that later became known as "cancer alley." This place got its name from the high cancer rate caused by exposure to industrial toxins by residents of the area. Ringo traveled across the U.S. conducting investigations of corporate pollution. "I realized," he said, "it was not an issue of color, but an issue of poverty."

Collin (2010), on the other hand, stresses the racial factor. The best predictor of the location of hazardous waste sites is, as Collin suggests, the race of the community. Researchers, such as Rogge (2008), refer to this phenomenon as *environmental racism*. The population of neighborhoods in which hazardous waste sites are located has been found to be 56% people of color, notes Rogge. Not only are African Americans over-represented in such neighborhoods but also Latinos and Asian Americans. Rogge calls on social workers who work in low-income communities to learn how to recognize the signs of health problems caused by exposure to toxic substances, to educate parents on this subject, and to work in the political realm to effect policy change.

In actuality, classism and racism are inextricably linked. As a case in point, we can consider what happened in the natural disaster in New Orleans caused by Hurricane Katrina. The storm, as Dominelli (2012) indicates, exposed the risk factors of margin-alized residents (those without cars) and the protective factors for members of privi-leged groups. The latter not only had the means to leave town; their homes were more often on higher ground and substantially insured. Poor African Americans living in the Ninth Ward, where poverty, race, and class intersected, suffered the most damage during the storm. Even years afterward, the homes in this neighborhood have not been restored.

In Canada, First Nations leaders have engaged, for some time, in a struggle to preserve their ancestral homelands against the poisoning of their land by the extraction of tar sands. And in 2012, environmental activists organized in resistance against the construction of KXL South, built to pump up to over half a million barrels of toxic tar sands to be refined in Houston and Port Arthur, Texas (Nuss, 2013). The communities near the sites of these refineries, which are already heavily polluted, are mostly low-income communities of color—Latino in Houston and African American in Port Arthur. Already children living in the affected area in Houston are 56% more likely to get leukemia than those living 10 or more miles away. Asthma attacks and skin rashes are daily realities for residents.

Oppression in the Criminal Justice System

Blacks, who are 14% of the population, make up 37% of the prison population, including 42% of death row inmates (Norris, 2013). African American males are six times more likely to be incarcerated than white males and 2.5 times more likely than Hispanic males (Bureau of Justice Statistics, 2012). If present rates continue, one in three blacks and one in six Hispanic males can expect to spend some time in prison.

The prisons are heavily populated by minorities as a result of mandatory mini-mum drug sentencing passed as federal law in the 1980s and then modeled by the states. These laws were passed as part of the 1986 and 1988 Anti-Drug Abuse Acts, which established harsh mandatory minimum-sentencing guidelines targeting crack cocaine, a drug that had become associated in the public mind with inner-city crime.

Source: ©iStockphoto.com/oneword.

The American War on Drugs Has Led to the Incarceration of Many. Around one in three black men can expect to spend some time in jail or prison.

In response to a politically motivated mass media campaign, which frightened the general public, Congress passed federal laws establishing punishment for possession and dealing of crack cocaine that was 100 times as high as the possession and dealing of the more expensive powdered form of cocaine. This calculation was based on the fact that the punishment for possession of 5 grams of crack cocaine was the same as that for possession of 500 grams of powdered cocaine. One result of the strict enforcement of antidrug laws was that the number of black women incarcerated for drug offenses increased 828% between 1986 and 1991 (Bush-Baskette, 2010). This increase was more than three times that of white women. Only recently were the 100 to 1 sentencing laws, which were widely recognized as racist and unfair, reduced through federal law to a still lopsided 18 to 1 ratio.

In *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness,* civil rights attorney Michelle Alexander (2010) provides compelling documentation for her contention that today's drug war is the new Jim Crow. An extraordinary percentage of black men in the United States are legally barred in many states from voting, public housing, jury duty, and many jobs as a result of their felony convictions. Some states are passing laws to force welfare recipients to pass drug tests before receiving benefits. Once a person is labeled as an ex-convict, the old forms of discrimination are suddenly legal. Today, discrimination is done through a different language and labels which appear to be colorblind but are racist in their connotations. In some major cities, Alexander reports, 80% of young African American men have criminal records and are subject to legalized discrimination, not because they are black but because they have a label that now substitutes for race. In fact, as she further points out, there are more black men behind bars or under the watch of the criminal justice system than there were enslaved in 1850.

When Angela Davis (2013) was delivering her keynote speech at the University of Northern Iowa, she was asked by a student in the audience about the school-to-prison pipeline. This was in reference to the criminalization of children today and especially of African American children, who are turned over to law enforcement when they get into trouble at school for offenses that would have been handled informally in the past. Some of them end up in juvenile institutions. Public schools today, according to Davis (2013), replicate the prison culture of discipline and punishment for breaking the rules. Thus, she says, we have a school-to-prison pipeline, which seems to prepare children in trouble at school for life in a correctional institution later on. The link

between school and imprisonment is reinforced as well because the resources that could be devoted to education are devoured by the prison industrial complex. The prison industry is highly profitable, as Davis argues, with a stake in the continuing expansion of prisons and imprisonment.

Before we move on to a discussion of progressive, anti-oppressive policies in the United States and abroad—and the responses they engender—consult Table 6.1 for an abbreviated list of racist, sexist, and ethnocentric policies and events through U.S. history.

Table 6.1 A Shameful Past: Legacy of Discrimination in the United States

1838	Forced removal of 18,000 Cherokees from their land to west of the Mississippi River
1876–1964	Jim Crow laws enacted that mandated segregation in all public facilities in Southern states; laws overruled by the Civil Rights Act of 1964
1882–1930	More than 1,200 blacks were lynched in the South
1883	U.S. Supreme Court upholds state bans on interracial marriage; repealed in 1967
1896	The Supreme Court in *Plessy v. Ferguson* rules that state laws requiring segregation of the races is within the bounds of the Constitution as long as equal separate accommodations are available
1914	Harrison Act outlaws nonmedical use of opium, a drug associated with Chinese immigrants; Southwestern states passed laws against marijuana associated with Mexicans
1919–1933	Prohibition laws against alcohol sales are passed; alcohol use was associated with Catholic immigrants entering the United States
1924	The Ku Klux Klan claims 4.5 million members
1933	20 lynchings officially recorded during the worst year of the Depression
1942	U.S. government places around 110,000 Japanese Americans in relocation camps
1952	Homosexuality declared a mental disorder by the American Psychiatric Association; removed in 1973
1953	President Eisenhower fires all federal employees seen as guilty of "sexual perversion"
1960s	Indigenous children removed from their homes and placed in non-Native homes in Canada, Australia, and the United States

(Continued)

Table 6.1 (Continued)

1965–1970	Due to inhumane farm worker conditions, Mexican American labor organizer César Chávez leads a boycott of grapes
1969	Memorable police raid on a gay bar, the Stonewall Inn, in New York
1982	Equal Rights Amendment to provide equality for women falls three states short of ratification
1986	The Supreme Court rules that states can continue to outlaw homosexual acts between consenting adults; decision reversed in 2003
1986	Anti-Drug Abuse Act passed by Congress providing harsh sentences for possession and distribution of crack cocaine, which leads to mass imprisonment of blacks; law modified in 2010
1993	President Clinton announces a Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy for gays in the military
1996	Defense of Marriage Act signed into law by President Clinton stating that marriage was only between a man and a woman; overturned in 2013
2000	Supreme Court rules that Boy Scouts of America has the right to exclude members based on their sexual orientation
2008	Postville raid at an Iowa meat-packing plant results in the arrest of 300 undocumented immigrants; many are imprisoned and later deported
2010	Supreme Court removes restrictions on corporation campaign financing through *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission,* which is a boon to the election of right-wing candidates
2013	Supreme Court overturns Voting Rights Act of 1965, which opens the door to states' use of voter-ID laws effectively restricting voting by poor and minority citizens

Source: van Wormer, Jackson, & Sudduth, C. (2012); Zinn, H. (2005).

Progress and Backlash

We have seen how oppression is kept in place by institutionalized ideologies and the propagation of doctrines that legitimize inequality and injustice. But such ideologies and doctrines are social constructions, which are often exchanged for non-oppressive alternatives. Sometimes, as it is said, the people lead and the leaders follow. Let's look at some of the recent moves toward a more progressive society and the backlashes that have followed them.

Progressive Policies

Women's Rights

The first feminist movement was born in 1848 at the Seneca Falls Convention when women demanded the right to vote. Its suffrage emphasis culminated when the 19th Amendment to the Constitution was ratified in 1919. The second feminist movement began in the late 1960s. It was bolstered by the Equal Pay Act of 1963, which required equal pay for equal work, and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which applied to wages as well as hiring and promotions. Even though sex was only added to the act by a sarcastic Congressman in hopes of derailing the bill's passage, and this addition was little noticed at the time, the Civil Rights Act was destined to be a boon to the legal challenges of sex discrimination.

The publication of Betty Friedan's (1963) *The Feminine Mystique* and Simone de Beauvoir's (1970) *The Second Sex* did much to raise the consciousness of educated women concerning their subordinate plight. Fortified by the example of the Civil Rights Movement, a number of varieties of feminism evolved in the 1970s and 1980s, with much overlap between them—for example, liberal feminism, radical feminism, black feminism (womanism), postmodernism, and so on. This period is known as the second wave of feminism. Emerging in the 1980s and 1990s, the third wave of the women's movement challenged the idea that poor women, women of color, and lesbians share the same problems as white middle-class women or similarly located poor men, men of color, or gay men (Price & Sokoloff, 2004, p. 3). Women at this time made enormous strides in pursuing higher education and taking their place beside men in professions, especially law and medicine.

Affirmative Action

Out of the groundswell of public opinion that took shape in the 1960s, other progressive policies were enacted, one of the most controversial being affirmative action. A term first introduced by President Kennedy, *affirmative action* refers to programs designed for the purpose of alleviating prejudice through encouraging equal status contact among people who are different. The focus on equal status contact is a key component in the alleviation of prejudice. A relationship between master or mistress and servant may be close, even intimate, but it is likely to be prejudicial as well. A relationship among equals, in contrast, helps dissolve feelings of superiority by one person over another.

A second key aspect of affirmative action is compensation for persons who have suffered from societal discrimination. In contrast to colorblind policies, which strive to overlook differences and treat everyone the same, these policies take a proactive stance in seeking to increase diversity in the educational and professional communities.

Through affirmative action policies, members of historically deprived groups, including women, have made significant strides in gaining access to privileges that might otherwise not have been available to them. As often happens when progress is made, a backlash ensues. And so it is with affirmative action. Opponents of affirmative

action argue that minorities are hurt more than helped by policies that lower the standards for their admission or hiring and that such policies only arouse resentment by white or Anglo males and that such preferential policies undermine the principles of equal opportunity and fair play.

Persuaded by such logic, some states have retreated from their previous efforts toward educational integration, and efforts toward affirmative action are on the wane. "Just treat everyone alike," is commonly said. But such colorblindness may not be a practical option. Given the substantial decline in African American and Hispanic (although huge increase in Asian) enrollments at the top universities in California, today colorblindness means effective exclusion of many members of these minority groups from positions of influence, wealth, and power. Still, many conservatives and some liberals continue to profess a belief in colorblindness, arguing that society has an obligation to guarantee every citizen the opportunity to compete as equals (Wise, 2010). Other liberals, in contrast, contend that the equal opportunity focus perpetuates inequalities because we are indeed not all equal. In *Colorblind: The Rise of Post Racial Politics and the Retreat of Racial Equity*, Tim Wise (2010) contends that colorblindness can perpetuate and even deepen systemic racism. If university admissions counselors and employers, for example, fail to consider the way that applicants of color have been impacted by the opportunity structure as under a merit system, they are more apt to perceive these applicants as less qualified than their white counterparts and to reject their applications. In the interests of social justice, as Wise (2010) argues, we must continue to seek institutional remedies for the cultural sources of oppression in order to compensate for them.

LGBT Rights

The movement for LGBT rights got its impetus in 1969 when the police raided Stonewall, a gay bar, and the gay patrons fought back. Following heavy publicity, a new movement for human and civil rights was born. The level of formal, as well as informal, oppression, as documented earlier in this chapter, has continued to the present time. But almost overnight, in the summer of 2013, there was great cause for celebration among gays and lesbians and their allies. In a somewhat surprising decision, the conservative Supreme Court declared that the federal government must recognize *all* state-sanctioned marriages, including same-sex marriages (Graff, 2013). In other words, the Defense of Marriage Act was struck down. The significance of this ruling cannot be exaggerated. Now, for the first time, married gay and lesbian couples had access to their partner's Social Security benefits, the right to file their income taxes jointly for a lower rate, and much improved inheritance rights.

The state of same-sex marriage in America is constantly evolving as state laws are being upheld or struck down. The total number of states in which same-sex marriage is legal has risen, as of 2014, to 32. In one month, barriers to gay marriage fell in Arizona, Alaska, and Wyoming following a series of federal court actions declaring that the marriage ban laws were unconstitutional (Schwartz, 2014). The next month, a federal court ruled the other way and upheld the ban laws in four other states. This conflict among the federal appeals court paves the way for a return to the Supreme

Court so the nation's highest court can settle whether gay and lesbian couples have a fundamental right to marry under the U.S. Constitution or whether states can ban gay marriage (Eckholm, 2014). Meanwhile, surveys show that hostility to gay rights has declined significantly since the beginning of this century, with over half of Americans now favoring legal marriage rights for same-sex couples (Graff, 2013). Still, this leaves a sizable minority of the population in disapproval of gays and lesbians having these rights of citizenship, and their opposition is strong.

In summary, we have been describing in this section some key policy advances that have opened the doors to more equitable treatment for members of minority groups who have suffered societal discrimination. Along with protective legislation have come greater opportunities for people in the United States to take pride in their social identities and to pursue the "American dream." At the same time, there has been substantial resentment by members of the historically dominant class, rich and poor alike, who have experienced in some cases a certain loss in status. This brings us to a discussion of backlash.

Backlash Against Minority Group Advancement

Backlash occurs when people who have privilege in society in one context feel threatened that they have lost, or will lose, some aspect of their privilege—economically, socially, in employment, education, and so on—and they lash out against those they believe are the source of their frustration and resentment. Similar to victim blaming, people attach blame to those who they view as undeserving of any legal remedies for the plights that led to the passage of favorable or protective legislation in the first place. Let's take a look at some examples of this phenomenon, with a special emphasis on the reaction to the women's movement and its offshoots.

Anti-Immigrant Backlash

Mass immigration is taking place worldwide, in part due to economic globalization, which is displacing many workers, even as jobs are created for others. Transnational labor flows are taking place as many economies become dependent on a steady supply of cheap labor. Sometimes the migrants are driven out of their own countries due to free trade agreements that drive people off the land. The small farmers in Mexico, for example, can no longer compete with American farmers who ship large quantities of cheap produce to Mexico. So one of the unintended consequences of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) was that it drove huge numbers of Mexicans north across the border. When the economic recession hit in 2008, the presence of these new immigrants was resented. Mexicans were accused of taking jobs away from "real" Americans, and state legislatures passed strict immigration policies (Ayón & Becerra, 2013).

Deportations under the Obama administration proceeded rapidly. By Obama's second term as president, approximately 1.2 million undocumented immigrants had been deported (Romero & Williams, 2013). Pending deportation, many immigrants are confined in privately operated detention centers. Private corporations are making

huge profits in holding these immigrants; these companies build and administer the facilities in Britain and Australia as well as the United States. With little government or legal oversight, abuse and neglect of the inmates is common.

To better gauge the personal impact of U.S. anti-immigrant policies, Ayón and Becerra (2013) conducted focus groups involving 52 first-generation Mexican residents of Arizona. The participants reported experiencing discrimination at institutional and individual levels; this included insults due to their limited English proficiency and racial profiling. There were problems in the schools with teachers who announced that "they [the immigration authorities] are going to kick all Mexicans out of the country" (p. 213). And the children have become afraid of the police who are checking for documentation. A major finding that emerged from this research was that after the passage of the discriminatory laws by Arizona, people have become rude, even refusing to speak Spanish when they used to do so.

In Australia, anti-immigrant sentiment is reflected in the elections of more conservative governments with leaders who promise to restrict immigration. A nation paradoxically built by immigrants, Australia faces fresh challenges in dealing with new arrivals. An influx of migrants from India has been met with hostility and a spate of violent attacks on Indian students who have come to study in training programs. With a promise to use the navy to deport the boat people to remote Pacific Islands, the Conservative Party won the election in a landslide victory.

Australia is not the only government to be overturned due to the perceived immigration crisis. Norway recently elected a conservative prime minister and gave a strong showing to the far-right Progress Party, which has campaigned against immigration for years. According to Nilsen (2013), writing in *The Guardian*, the new government advocates tax cuts, deregulation, and a substantial reduction in public spending on welfare. And a recent article in the *New York Times* notes that the surge in right-wing populism is rapidly spreading from Denmark to France to all across Eastern Europe and is an outgrowth of an anti-immigration backlash.

The Antifeminist Backlash Against American Women

The publication of Susan Faludi's (1991) landmark *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against American Women* did much to raise women's consciousness concerning an antifeminist backlash against advances associated with the women's movement. Faludi provided extensive documentation to show the media reports linking purported problems in the American family with women's advances in the workplace stemmed from antifeminist propaganda pumped out by conservative research think tanks.

Thanks to the 2010 Citizens United decision, the Supreme Court gave corporations much of the same rights to political speech as individuals have, including anonymity, a torrent of corporate money is being funneled to push a far-right conservative agenda (Bai, 2012). Women's reproductive rights, immigrants' human rights, and social welfare programs are areas that have been especially hard hit.

Among the proposals that have been highlighted in the news are funding cuts to low-income preschool programs including Head Start; family planning services; and services for older adults living at home, including Meals on Wheels ("The War on Women," 2011). The term *entitlement programs*, as discussed in Chapter 5, has become

a negative label originally used by Ronald Reagan and immediately picked up by the business community, and politicians and pundits of all political stripes are considering serious reforms affecting all these social insurance programs on which women in poverty increasingly are dependent upon (see Hertzberg, 2013).

The antifeminist backlash can be seen more clearly in the sharply increased rate of incarcerated women, especially poor and minority, throughout the 1990s—despite a significant decline in violent offenses committed by women. Today's women's prisons are now modeled off the medium security prisons designed for violent men, and the hiring of men as administrators and correctional officers in women's prisons has become the norm. Sexual abuse scandals involving women inmates and male officers have become commonplace (Amnesty International, 2011b).

The war on drugs has been characterized as a war on women of color. This claim, which is voiced by Bloom and Chesney-Lind (2007), is based on the increasing numbers of impoverished minority women serving lengthy sentences for involvement in drug-related offenses. This situation, in conjunction with the media's showcasing of isolated episodes of girls' and the right-wing war on women's reproductive freedom, can be viewed as a counterreaction to women's successes in other areas of social life.

The right to equality is also used against women in child custody situations. In a reversal of the traditional custom, women are no longer given preference in parenting arrangements. The rulings against women here, as in many of these legal situations, are that women are equal now, and as equals they can no longer expect special consideration. The media have both reflected and promoted this shift in perspective.

In recent years a fathers' rights movement has influenced family law with damaging consequences for many women and children and indirectly putting many battered women at risk of abuse (DeKeseredy, 2011). This is because judges increasingly are awarding the custody of children in contested cases to the fathers or responding to fathers' requests for joint custody in the affirmative. In either situation, the relationship between the former partners is unduly prolonged, as is the mother's dependency on the father for the right to visitation with the child.

Backlash Against Women in Health Care

Attacks on women's reproductive choices have been loud and clear; these have taken the form of restrictive legislative proposals and demands for funding cuts of women's health services that reflect a general climate of conservatism that swept across the United States in the second half of the Obama administration. Many have come about as a result of the tea party movement with attacks on liberal policies related to women's reproductive health and welfare aid for families living in poverty.

Planned Parenthood, which provides family planning services (abortion accounts for only about 3% of Planned Parenthood's activities), has been singled out for the brunt of the attacks (Chu & Posner, 2013). Despite the value of these services, state legislatures across the United States cut the funding for Planned Parenthood and other women-centered health care providers. Because so many women lack access to publicly funded contraceptive services, and because a smaller number are desperate for personal reasons to have an abortion, the closing down of these centers is predicted to have devastating results. Some states have even started mandating ultrasounds for

women seeking an abortion in an effort to interfere with a woman's choice (Guttmacher Institute, 2013).

To put these restrictions in context, consider that although the United States spends more than any other country on health care, according to a report from the Center for American Progress, the United States has the highest first-day death rate for infants in the industrialized world (Chu & Posner, 2013). In addition, women in the United States have a higher risk of dying of pregnancy-related complications than those in 49 other countries, including Kuwait, Bulgaria, and South Korea (Amnesty International, 2011a). The Center for American Progress, however, applauds provisions in the Affordable Care Act that are geared toward providing women with the prenatal and maternity care that they need (Chu & Posner, 2013).

The Global Dimensions of Backlash Against Women

Over most of the course of human rights history, issues of gender have largely been ignored. Much of the reason lay in the philosophy of cultural relativism, the belief that we must respect cultural tradition, even those that seem abhorrent to us because of our own cultural conditioning. This reluctance of social scientists, including feminists, to appear ethnocentric, to judge other people according to principles of Western society, is understandable. But this reluctance has meant that until relatively recently, abuses such as family murders for adultery ("honor killings") and mutilation of girls' genital organs were not investigated and rarely, if ever, mentioned in literature. And it was believed that it was up to the women in the individual countries to bring about the changes they desired without outside interference.

Paralleling women's awakening to human rights issues and an awareness that women in some countries are much more empowered than are members of their gender elsewhere, a strong vigilance is evident to keep women "in their place." The fear in certain quarters across the globe is that if women's consciousness is raised, they will demand their rights. A counterreaction, therefore, has taken place, a backlash by entrenched forces with a vested interest in the status quo. This backlash is especially pronounced in regions of the world where religious fundamentalism has been used to threaten women and suppress them.

In a time when women's rights are threatened on the home front, major sources of protection from foreign aid sources are drying up. And for political reasons, family planning services have suffered severe funding declines in recent years, even in countries with scarce resources and where overpopulation is a major concern. Conservatives in the U.S. Congress have targeted international family planning funding out of the fear that abortion services might be offered. Paradoxically, the prevention of unwanted pregnancy is the best way to reduce the numbers of abortions, many of which now are performed under unsafe conditions. We also know from U.S. Agency for International Development (AID) data collected from seven countries that for every dollar invested in family planning and reproductive health care, there are significant savings in education, immunization, water and sanitation, maternal health, and malaria (Lasher, 2013). In Bolivia, for example, $9.00 is saved for every dollar invested.

In India, the practice of dowry (or a gift from the bride's family to the groom and his family) is implicated in over 8,000 deaths of young women every year. The problem

arises when the bride's family does not fulfill what is believed to be the obligation of paying the dowry. Many more women are maimed through bride burnings and other attempts to inflict pain. This practice is forbidden in law and vehemently protested by feminists and other activists but still it persists.

The global economy makes women vulnerable to victimization in yet another way. Girls and young women from Eastern Europe, for example, who face economic hardship at home, can easily be enticed to relocate with the promise of lucrative employment abroad. They are then ripe for sexual exploitation, including being tricked into sex trafficking and/or economic enslavement.

At the same time that female vulnerability is increasing in some ways, the women's movement is effecting changes for women worldwide. And much attention is being paid in the international media and by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to the plight of the world's women. The adoption of a human rights framework is increasingly relevant today, given the realities of globalization and the enhancement of organizing efforts through modern technologies.

"Human rights are women's rights" became the motto of the international movement to protect women from abuse. In 1995, women from Austria to Zambia linked up at the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women. The historic conference was held at Huaira and Beijing, China. Whereas at previous women's conferences, feminists from the Westernized nations were reluctant to join their sisters to criticize abusive traditions from other parts of the world for fear of being accused of lacking cultural sensitivity, this time women's voices were united on behalf of the many who are unable to speak. At this historic conference, the debate on health and reproductive rights was led primarily by delegates from the non-Western world.

Inspired by this international gathering of women who demanded an end to the abuses inflicted upon them, Amnesty International took up the call and listed trafficking in women along with torture, slavery, and jailing "prisoners of conscience" as serious violations. In its annual reports, Amnesty International continues to outline the mechanism by which hundreds of women a year are smuggled, imprisoned, exploited, raped continuously, blackmailed, and physically and sexually abused, and documents attempts made to combat these human rights violations.

Today, feminists and other social activists—in collaboration with indigenous women or women who have become refugees from violence—increasingly look to international law. The focus on human rights is, by definition, international—the belief in higher laws that transcend national laws. This broadening of focus is a legacy of the Nuremburg Trials that followed World War II when Nazi leaders were judged by a world body (albeit one organized by the victors) for crimes against humanity. Even more significant as a legacy and a model was the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights that was adopted in 1948 (see Chapter 12). Today, attention increasingly is drawn to this document (reprinted in Appendix A), which included women as an at-risk population whose rights need to be protected. Feminist groups today are networking globally around issues of injustice, violence, structural inequality, and women's right to resist fundamentalist religious movements that deprive them of human rights. Because Canada was a signatory (unlike the United States) to the entire UN Declaration, human rights activists in that country can turn to international law as a valuable tool for advocacy for social and economic justice within the era of globalization. Their counterparts in the United States are relatively limited in this regard.

THINKING SUSTAINABLY

The many gains women made in terms of the recognition of their equal rights in the 20th century have been threatened by an antifeminist backlash, which reveals itself in many ways here in the United States: the attack on abortion rights, the prevalence of domestic violence and rape, and the failure of women to be equally paid and represented in the work world. This backlash is similar to the one that has occurred since the enactment of the Civil Rights and Voting Rights Acts—legislation thought to be a first step in ending our struggles with racism. Fifty years on, racism and sexism are far more prominent in public discourse than thought possible.

Consider your own feelings on feminism and discrimination of minorities in general. How is the oppression of groups affecting the ability to achieve a sustainable society? Do you observe the backlash mentioned above in your own life? What direction do you envision for society in your own country over the next 50 years?

Work of UN Women

In July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly created UN Women, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women. The task facing this organization is enormous. According to a fact sheet provided on the UN Women's (2013) website, these are some of the global problems facing girls and women:

- More than 64 million girls worldwide are child brides, with 46% of women aged 20 to 24 in South Asia and 41% in West and Central Africa reporting that they married before the age of 18.
- Approximately 140 million girls and women in the world have suffered female genital mutilation or cutting.
- Trafficking ensnares millions of women and girls in modern-day slavery with an estimated 4.5 million forced into sexual exploitation at the present time.
- Rape has been a rampant tactic in modern wars. Conservative estimates suggest that 20,000 to 50,000 women were raped during the 1992 to 1995 war in Bosnia and Herzegovina, while approximately 250,000 to 500,000 women and girls were targeted in the 1994 Rwandan genocide.

To help prevent such violence and enable women to become self-supporting, UN Women manages a trust fund, which provides grants to promote legal remedies to protect women from violence. In addition, this trust fund supports sustainable enterprises to help feed the population through farming.

To help protect the rights and well-being of these vulnerable women from across the world, initiatives financed by grants from UN Women (2012) conduct networking and educational campaigns. In Morocco, for example, the initiative works directly with single mothers and girls who have endured physical and sexual victimization to support

their social reintegration through education, training, and employment opportunities. The program works through NGOs to conduct community-wide advocacy campaigns. Major goals are to improve legal protection for these vulnerable girls and women and to reduce the social stigma they experience in the community. In Iraq, the UN Trust Fund project works directly with the Ministry of Health to ensure that all health care providers are trained to detect and treat survivors of gender-based violence.

Positive Developments in International Law

An important but belated development in recent years was the recognition of rape of the enemy's women—a common occurrence during and after a war—as a war crime. The International War Crimes Tribunal in The Hague took a revolutionary step when three Bosnian soldiers were convicted of rape and sexual enslavement as crimes against humanity. The judgment followed years of lobbying by women's rights groups. Thanks to women's rights activists who have actively been involved in the establishment of the relatively new International Criminal Court (ICC), the ICC prosecutor has appointed a special advisor on women's crimes to ensure that the rights of women survivors are represented (International Law Observer, 2008).

Freedom from domestic assault is a major goal of the 1980 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. This important document has the support of all industrialized nations, except for the United States as the U.S. Senate has never ratified it. The city of San Francisco did pass a model version for the city, and this has been influential in helping preserve programs for girls and women in the face of statewide budget cuts (Andronici, 2009). Such human rights laws provide a valuable theoretical and practical base for assisting in social change.

In Central America, several countries are working in collaboration with the UN Human Rights Office to integrate a Model Protocol into their legal systems to guide investigations and prosecutions launched in the wake of gender-based murders of women in Latin America (UN Women, 2014). This action by the Latin American countries, including El Salvador and Mexico, marks a turning point for taking a stronger stand against *femicide*, or gender-related killings, a leading cause of death for women in some countries. Both El Salvador and Mexico, as a result of advocacy by UN Women, enacted legal reforms that defined femicide as a criminal offense as well as measures to prevent and punish it. This example of reliance on international law to link partner violence with human rights violations has important implications worldwide for women who are subjected to behaviors that could be described as torture, including captivity. If the United States were to reclassify partner violence as a human rights violation, recognized as such by international organizations such as the United Nations, this move would aid in promoting international standards of humanity and equality.

Culturally Competent Social Work Practice

Cultural competence entails recognition of society's prejudices—ethnocentrism, sexism, classism, heterosexism, and racism—and of our own possession of many of these

traits. To fully appreciate cultural differences, self-awareness is a must. Social workers must recognize the influence of their own culture, family, and peers on how they think and act.

The CSWE (2008) in its curriculum standards shifted from an emphasis on a study of cultural traits of specific cultural groups to an emphasis on oppression in social institutions. The incorporation of theories of oppression in the social work curriculum entails a shift in focus from race to racism, sex to sexism, ethnicity to ethnocentrism, and from oppressed to oppressor. The significance of this shift in the standards for the CSWE is that now the focus is structural instead of individual and general rather than specific. In its most recent formulation, CSWE (2015) uses the term *diversity and difference* as a major competency for social work education. To engage in social work practice, practitioners require an understanding of the essence of difference. They need to know that, as a consequence of difference, a person's life experiences may include oppression, poverty, marginalization, and alienation as well as privilege and access to power. Again the emphasis by CSWE is more on external forces than on inculcating knowledge about particular cultural traits and norms.

Still, in the interests of empowerment, in working with members of a diverse population, an effective social worker will make continuous efforts to learn about the client's culture—the norms, vocabulary, symbols, and strengths. In so doing, one avoids the colorblind and genderblind notions of many North American human service workers who refute the significance of color, culture, and gender as important categories of personal and group identity in the society. Delgado (2007) brings our attention to the "cultural blindness" that is so often evidenced on the intake forms used by mental health agencies (p. 130). Basing the definition of family on the nuclear family, for example, is culturally biased and often irrelevant to the Latino family. Many of the official forms, moreover, include questions that are problem- rather than strengths-oriented. When some of the foreign-reared Latino clients, for example, describe the herbal remedies that many of them use, they are apt to be criticized for what may be viewed by staff as ignorant practices.

By recognizing that significant differences do exist between people of different ethnic backgrounds, professionals are recognizing a person's wholeness and individuality. To tell a lesbian or gay person "just stay in the closet and you'll be all right" is to deny that person an important part of himself or herself. To tell an African American "we're all the same under the skin" is to deny the importance of race in society and pride in one's racial identity. Multicultural social work education exposes students to divergent thinking as they are forced to examine assumptions that were formerly taken for granted.

Earlier in this book (in Chapter 4), we discussed the necessity for biodiversity in nature, for the health of the ecosystem, and for the enrichment of plant and animal life. Similar advantages pertain to the cultural diversity in community life, which relies on the spread of knowledge and customs, such as food preparation, cross-culturally. In recognition of the fact that religion and spirituality are forms of diversity from which clients can draw strengths, National Association of Social Workers (NASW) has launched a special resource to provide social workers and educators greater insight into the religious viewpoints of the clients they serve. This resource is in conjunction with CSWE's Religion and Spirituality Work Group, an organization

that includes social work and social services associations of Catholics, Jews, Mormons, and Muslims (Pace, 2012a).

Appreciation of a person's diverse racial or ethnic identity is a core competency that is encouraged in social work education and practice (Pace, 2012b). As social justice advocates, social workers must have an awareness of such experiences and a knowledge of the impact of the legacy of the past in order to address the long-term human costs of oppression. Even while the social worker is seeking evidence of strengths and resilience in a client or cultural group, he or she should be cognizant of the possibility of historical trauma. Historical trauma is considered to be a major factor, for example, in the high Native American mortality rates from alcohol-related conditions, including suicide and homicide and in the fatalism evidenced in some of the most impoverished regions of Appalachia (see Brave Heart, 2007; Messer, 2007; van Wormer & Besthorn, 2011).

For the social-worker-as-sustainability-advocate, an awareness of privilege as well as the impact of historical trauma is an important starting point. For those in a position of privilege, the social worker can take on the role of ally. For those who are members of social groups with a history of oppression, the opportunity is theirs to join with others, including clients, in solidarity.

The CSWE (2013) has issued guidelines for graduate programs of social work that have a trauma-informed concentration. Social work educators are urged to take into account disproportionate exposure to trauma on the basis of culture, race, and national origin, and to "incorporate an understanding of the influence of historical trauma on various cultures into assessment activities" (p. 15). We discuss trauma-informed care related to mental health treatment in Chapter 9.

Summary and Conclusion

This chapter was written with the belief that a sustainable society is one that is inclusive and anti-oppressive and that actively draws on the diverse talents and culture of its entire people. Diversity, as history shows, is as essential to social and economic development as biodiversity is to the natural environment.

The organization of this chapter was inspired by a shift in focus in CSWE's curriculum standards from education into cultural characteristics of a given national group, or tribe, to a focus on societal practices that perpetuate oppression. Such an orientation is more political and radical than a mere review of cultural characteristics of selected minority groups and in many ways is more consistent with a sustainability focus. Current trends related to economic globalization and political backlash compel us to address issues of oppression.

The ethic of sustainability requires us to confront disparities that exist whether because of the uniqueness of history or because of a seemingly natural tendency of those who "have" to not want to share with the "have-nots." This control may be curbed by progressive tax policies, antidiscrimination laws, and government programs, such as public education and universal health care. At the same time, some laws and policies are punitive and cause disproportionate harm to feared or disfavored minority groups.

A sustainability ethic requires a close examination of a nation's laws and policies, and the starting point of such an inquiry is a consideration of oppression and of its counterpart—privilege. Consistent with a sustainability ethic, this chapter presented an overview of types of oppression and mechanisms by which privilege sustains an oppressive status quo. We explored some of the most basic forms of privilege, the possession of which is most often taken for granted, though clearly apparent to non-privileged groups. White, heterosexual, and male privilege were the examples highlighted.

Our exploration of the nature of oppression took us into a look at oppression and disparities built into the economic system, health care options, environmental practices, and the criminal justice system. We presented a list in tabular form of laws that were designed to control the masses, including minority groups, in various ways, and then we learned how through organized opposition by the affected minority groups and their allies many of these oppressive laws were overturned or rewritten. But we saw also that although many of the most hurtful policies and practices have been altered and outlawed, the legacy of racism, sexism, and ethnocentrism endures.

A political backlash is in evidence today against the very groups that formerly received a boost through antidiscriminatory and affirmative action policies. The antifeminist and anti-immigrant legislation can be seen in this regard and also as part of a broader conservative movement. Once, we had a war on poverty; today, we have a war on drugs.

Social work as a profession, as we saw in Chapter 2 on historical foundations, is strongly affected by paradigm shifts in ideology. Under conservative administrations, social workers are impacted through a lessening of demand for their services, and they suffer vicariously when their clients' needs cannot be met. Until the dawning of a new progressive era, social workers will have to do their best to work toward making the unsustainable sustainable. And if the past is any guide, this is what they will continue to do.

Critical Thinking Questions

1. Discuss arguments in favor of being color- and genderblind. What are the arguments against this approach?

2. Can you come up with several elements common to all forms of oppression?

3. Review the facts pertaining to the well-publicized trial of George Zimmerman and his killing of Trayvon Martin. Why was the situation so troubling, and what were the differing responses to the verdict?

4. List the privileges that you have. Do you have the same privilege in every context or social group? Discuss the meaning of this concept to you.

5. Discuss the concept of privilege. How does it relate to youth and middle age?

6. What are some of the statements that Mullaly included in his list for white privilege? To this list add others of your own.

7. What are some examples of the use of body modification related to racial characteristics and dominant standards of beauty? Go beyond those provided in the text and discuss the significance of these physical alterations.

8. This chapter discussed male privilege. Do you think there is such a thing as female privilege?

9. What is intersectionality? What did Pager's experimental research related to job applications show about intersectionality?

10. How do environmental racism and environmental classism relate to the concept of intersectionality?

11. Study Figures 6.1 and 6.2. What do they say about employment by gender? How about race and ethnicity? Are there any surprises?

12. Provide several illustrations of impoverished groups affected by industrial pollution. What do you think could be done to alleviate this situation?

13. Discuss the claim that the war on drugs is a war on minority groups. Why are today's drug wars seen as the new Jim Crow?

14. Review Table 6.1. Which do you think are the three most startling decisions or events? Explain the reason for your choices.

15. Which of the progressive policies described do you find the most significant?

16. What is the importance of the Supreme Court decisions related to same-sex marriage?

17. Discuss the concept of backlash. How does it relate to the perceived immigration crisis?

18. Can you name three ways in which women have been affected by the antifeminist backlash?

19. How do the stresses of economic globalization relate to attacks on women worldwide?

20. How can the UN Fourth World Conference on Women be considered a turning point?

21. What is the significance of international law in protecting the rights of marginalized groups?

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