

# SECTION 1

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## CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

### Introduction

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*Social diversity* and *social justice* are often used interchangeably to refer to *social differences* as well as to *social inequality*. These two terms are closely related but not interchangeable. When we refer to *social diversity*, we have in mind differences between social identity groups based on social categories such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and others. These differences are reflected in a group's traditions, language, style of dress, cultural practices, religious beliefs and rituals. These are usually termed "differences" in that they are understood to differ from some larger societal norm that may be taken for granted by the majority group, and which is, therefore, socially privileged. If one thinks of oneself as a "normal" member of one's larger society, it becomes difficult to perceive oneself, one's family and group traditions, language, style of dress as part of a larger pattern of overall *diversity*. Rather, it is the norm that shapes one's notion of the "differences" of *others*, who are marginalized precisely because they are different. In this sense, it is clear why *diversity* ("difference") profoundly shapes the advantages of some groups (those who are part of the norm) relative to the disadvantages of others (because they are "othered"), which maintains *social inequalities* that are rationalized on the basis of these divergences from social norms. We also use terms such as *oppression* and *social justice* to emphasize our focus on inequality as a social form that shapes life changes for people in ways that are more profound (more "unequal") than simply different.

Thus, although these terms are not interchangeable, they are inextricably linked in everyday discourse, in that *diversity* is too often used to provide an excuse or justification for *inequality*. It's much more comfortable to talk about *diversity* than *inequality*, although clearly we need to understand both. We need to affirm and value social and cultural differences if we are to envision a society that acknowledges and appreciates such differences, by questioning what we had previously accepted as "norms." At the same time, the appreciation of social diversity is a necessary but not sufficient step toward understanding the inequalities experienced by peoples who are seen as belonging to marginalized social groups. It is necessary to understand injustice if we are ever to dismantle the institutions and policies that maintain injustice and to reconstruct institutions and policies based on fairness, equity, and justice. As Young suggests (in selection 5), our challenge is to appreciate social diversity while working to dismantle social inequality.

Several key assumptions inform our perspective throughout this volume, and we identify them in this section as a cluster of four interrelated conceptual frameworks. Our core assumptions are

presented in the General Introduction, and include our awareness that social identity groups occupy unequal social locations or positions relative to each other (that is, one group's privileges are directly related to another group's disadvantages). This awareness leads us to the following four concepts: (1) *social group identities* (such as racial and gender identities) have been used historically to justify and perpetuate the advantages of privileged groups relative to the disadvantages of marginalized groups; (2) these social identities, together with their relatively different "positions" resulting in their inequality, have been *socially constructed within specific historical conditions*, although these social constructions are often rationalized as being derived from the "facts of nature" or sustained by unquestioned religious beliefs; (3) the pervasive historical legacies of inequality require a *theory of oppression* to account for the complex levels and types of privilege and disadvantage that play out at various levels of human society; and (4) a theory of oppression also calls for *frameworks that envision opportunities for empowerment* and that help us to explain the success of past and present for social movements.

### (1) SOCIAL IDENTITY IS BASED ON SOCIAL IDENTITY GROUPS IN ADVANTAGED OR DISADVANTAGED SOCIAL LOCATIONS OR POSITIONS

The first conceptual framework presented in this section examines social diversity based on differences in social identity and social location. Tatum (selection 1) defines social identity in a complex, multifaceted way that captures the tensions between dominant and subordinate identities (those privileged or disadvantaged on the basis of social group memberships) and gives examples of the tensions between them in everyday interactions. She explores the development of social identity in the context of identity development more generally, and describes the ways in which one's identity comes about through the interaction between one's internal sense of who one is (based upon one's social groupings) and the views of oneself and one's group that are reflected back by others in the broader society.

Kirk and Okazawa-Rey (selection 2) note how social identity combines self-perception with personal reactions to attribution by others, so that different contexts may highlight different dimensions of identity (such as racial identity in one context, gender or sexual or class identity in another). They also consider social identity at different levels of social interaction—at the *micro* level (between individuals), at the *meso* level (within communities or social institutions), and at the *macro* level (the overarching society and culture). Similarly, but without using the same terminology, Harro's "The Cycle of Socialization" (selection 6) walks the reader through specific *micro*, *meso*, and *macro* contexts within which social identities and social roles are learned from early childhood and reinforced during adulthood within trusted and familiar contexts—in families, schools, playgrounds, neighborhoods, the workplace, and the media.

Both Tatum, and Kirk and Okazawa-Rey, situate social identity within specific social contexts, in that "social" refers to this individual/societal interaction. Both offer numerous examples of how one's social identities build upon one's social group expectations of privilege or disadvantage, based upon cumulative, historical legacies of group privilege or disadvantage. The connections between privilege/disadvantage and the experience of social identity are the focus for selection 3, in which Johnson explores a number of everyday examples of historically rooted, socially constructed inequalities based on race, gender, sexuality, and disability. His approach, if not his specific examples, is applicable to other forms of oppression treated in this book (such as religious oppression, transgender oppression, or ageism and adultism). Many selections throughout the different sections in this book point out the role of identity and positionality in our experiences of privilege and disadvantage. They also point out the many ways in which these identities intersect, and these intersections are highlighted in the Table of Intersections, which calls attention

to specific selections dealing with race and gender, or class and disability, or many other ways in which our experiences sometimes combine privileged identities with disadvantaged identities, sometimes in the same moment.

## **(2) THE SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION OF PRIVILEGE AND OPPRESSION WITHIN SPECIFIC HISTORICAL CONTEXTS**

A second conceptual framework involves an explanation of how social group differences are *socially constructed* in specific historical situations in which their social meanings justify inequality and oppression. In this way, social identities are understood as social creations—and the assumptions of superiority or inferiority, related to privilege and disadvantage, are also understood as social creations. As Johnson explains (selection 3), most of what we experience in personal and social life is itself a social creation—and the social differences we consider so significant, so “natural,” or so theologically sanctioned, are in fact based on unexamined cultural constructions and not on essential qualities of groups or persons. The implication of this is momentous, for if we understand how specific historical and cultural conditions have given rise to privilege and to disadvantage, we can also understand that these inequities can be changed. Freire helps us grasp how important it is for people to locate conditions of oppression within history, rather than fatalistically as inevitable—that “humans, in their permanent relations with reality, produce not only material goods . . . but also social institutions, ideas, and concepts . . . create history and become historical-social beings” (1994, p. 82). Freire recommends a problem-posing approach to education that takes “the people’s historicity as their starting point” (1994, p. 65).

It can be challenging to discover that skin color, accented speech, perceived gender or sexual orientation, or the presence or absence of a physical or mental disability, are themselves socially constructed categories and are, therefore, useless as indicators of talent, character, intelligence, or morality. The readings throughout all the sections in this volume locate the stereotypes we have been led to believe about “others” within their specific historical and cultural contexts, emphasizing the fact that our assumptions about what it means to be female or male or transgender; gay or straight or queer; White, Latino, or Black; young or old; learning disabled or able-bodied; Christian or atheist or Jewish, Hindu, or Muslim, have been constructed within historical conditions with cultural presuppositions (examples include selections 10, 57, 66, 91, 111, 112, 129, and 132). Harro points out (selection 6) how we unconsciously absorb stereotypes and prejudices as an unconscious part of our socialization from the people who surround us and whom we trust to know what is right and correct.

The following sections have reading selections that refer explicitly to the historical roots of specific patterns of advantage and disadvantage, and the stereotypes associated with them. Lipsitz (selection 11) and Oliver and Shapiro (selection 27) point to specific moments in history that account for the persistence of racism and classism in the present. Roppolo (selection 10), Hilberg (selection 47), Echo-Hawk (selection 50), Lorber (selection 60) and Cerney (selection 96) demonstrate the value of historical analyses of patriarchy, Christian hegemony in Europe and in the United States, or culturally sanctioned assumptions about age, gender, sexuality, and disability. Understanding that we have inherited stereotypes as well as our own group’s privilege or disadvantage as part of our intergenerational legacy helps to demystify them, and makes them seem less inevitable and more susceptible to education and change. The understanding of historical legacies of privilege and disadvantage is important if we are also to learn about social resistance movements in the past that also are our legacy and that inspire us to continue working toward change.

### (3) FRAMEWORKS FOR ANALYSIS OF OPPRESSION

Social justice needs a theory of *oppression* in order to make sense of the sources and persistence of social inequality in a pluralistic U.S. society that was founded on concepts of equality of opportunity and fairness in life's rewards. Thus, the third conceptual framework presented in this section involves our moving beyond the individual (or "micro") level of the socialization process, to analyze how oppression is enacted and reproduced at the institutional level ("meso") and the societal/cultural ("macro") level. Even though most of the examples in Tatum (selection 1), Johnson (selection 3) and Harro (selection 6) focus on the individual ("micro") level of privilege and disadvantage, it is clear that our everyday personal experiences take place in larger institutional contexts such as extended families, neighborhoods, schools, places of worship, and that our experiences of privilege or disadvantage in these social institutions are reinforced by the societal and cultural messages we simultaneously pick up from the media and understand to be part of our normative culture.

In selection 4, Bell itemizes the defining features of oppression and presents an inclusive approach to the many different forms of oppression—such as racism, classism, sexism—that also highlights their complex intersections in everyday life. This approach is reinforced and developed by Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin (selection 4) as the interplay of *levels* of oppression—the individual, the institutional, the societal levels—as well as *types* of oppression—the conscious and the unconscious. These authors define key terminology and analyze the complex and overlapping ways by which interpersonal, institutional, and societal/cultural dimensions of oppression reinforce each other. They are explicit about several underlying assumptions, namely that there is no hierarchy of oppression, that all forms of oppression are interconnected, and that confronting oppression benefits everyone.

There is more than one way to analyze such a complex societal phenomenon as oppression and this section presents at least three approaches. The first can be called a *psychological* approach in that it locates the psychological processes of socialization within the institutions and broader culture of a society (for example, Tatum in selection 1, Kirk and Okazawa-Rey in selection 2, and Harro in selection 6). The second can be called a *sociological* approach in that it focuses on the structural dimensions of oppression as a social phenomenon, and is presented here by Bell, Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin (selection 4) (Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin, 2007). The third, presented here by Young (selection 5), is located within a *philosophical* and *political* discourse about theories of social justice, and focuses on *social* justice as distinct from *distributive economic* justice, or legal, political, or remedial justice (Young, 1990, 2001). In selection 5, Young analyzes the dynamics of oppression—as do Bell, Griffin, Hardiman, and Jackson—but seen by her as five "faces" or facets that interchangeably describe how oppression is experienced by those who are disadvantaged on the basis of social identity groups—namely through their exploitation, powerlessness, and marginalization by those in dominant social positions, or their experience of cultural imperialism and violence. A second selection by Young (selection 7), coordinates the individual or personal focus of the psychological approach with the systemic focus of the sociological approach. In selection 7, Young presents the systemic forces that constrain a young homeless woman's individual choices of residence and work, in the context of the choices made by other actors in terms of other constraints, such as a landlord who is sorry to sell her rental and the real estate economy that leads him to sell, the employers who do not hire her, the schools that did not educate her, the city managers who did not provide transportation from rental properties to workplaces. The constraints and social forces described by Young in this selection (such as market forces and educational opportunities) are themselves made up of people who often mean well, are not acting in malice, who feel "blameless" for the situation of a homeless woman, and yet whose actions taken together lead to "circumstances beyond her control." Young's repersonalization of "shared [social] responsibility" helps readers grasp their personal role in decisions that affect others, and their position in causal networks that leads to

justice for some, injustice for others. This insight, that enables us to coordinate our own personal actions with systemic consequences often far removed from those actions, sets the stage for the sections that follow—the Next Steps proposed in each of the sections—and the emphasis in the concluding section on ways that readers can take responsibility for the immediate as well as the more long-range consequences of their actions.

These three approaches to the systemic dimension of oppression—and the way they are linked in Young's "Structure as the Subject of Justice" selection (selection 7)—are compatible and mutually illuminating, while at the same time focusing on different dimensions of complex social phenomena. And they can be used as analytic frameworks for many readings throughout this volume. In selections 45 and 46, for example, Blumenfeld and Joshi explicitly take one or another of these conceptual frameworks to theorize historical and contemporary religious oppression and Christian privilege.

#### (4) FRAMEWORKS FOR ENVISIONING EMPOWERMENT AND SOCIAL CHANGE

All approaches to oppression have implications for a view of society that might conceivably be characterized instead by fairness and justice. In reading selections 3–5, one can instead imagine what a non-oppressive society might look like, in the absence of each and all five faces of oppression (selection 5), or the reversal of the examples and dynamics of oppression as described in selections 3 and 4. How one might actually describe actions or plan projects toward social change in order to achieve relationships, institutions, and an overarching social system and culture that do not enforce or reproduce oppression is a more challenging question and a challenge that this volume accepts. Each one of the individual topic sections that follow concludes with selections describing Next Steps that people have taken or can imagine taking to transform the specific forms of oppression into empowering relationships and just, equitable social institutions. The volume concludes with a full section describing such steps. So this entire section on conceptual frameworks can be understood as a prelude to these discussions. Harro's "The Cycle of Liberation" (selection 131), a companion piece to her "The Cycle of Socialization" (selection 6), is presented in the final section of this volume. In it, Harro describes personal behaviors that anyone can engage in, to challenge and to transform individual behavior at the personal level. Other selections throughout this volume and in the final section add collaborative institutional and societal/cultural change projects to the repertoire of possibilities available for concerted, effective social change.

#### See Companion Website for Additional Resources and Material

#### References

- Freire, P. (1994, 1970). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (new revised edition). New York: Continuum.
- Hardiman, R., Jackson, B., Griffin, P. (2007). Conceptual foundations for social justice education. In M. Adams, L. A. Bell, P. Griffin (eds), *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice* (2nd edition, pp. 35–66). New York: Routledge.
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