

The Conspicuous Nature of Power

Conclusion to the Special Issue

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As an introduction, we couched this special issue on social and environmental justice within the unsettling nature of prejudice. Prejudice, subtly and overtly, contribute to injustice and oppression in nuanced ways. Our authors tackled those ways through an analysis of the need to critically rethink the use and provision of greenspaces for tackling homelessness (Rose); the importance of the consideration of having spaces for youth development and empowerment (Kelly & Outley); the need for depth in conceptualizing ethnicity to understand meaning-making and experiential context (Madsen, Radel, & Endter-Wada); food insecurity and access to Farmer's markets (Farmer, Chancellor, Robinson, West, & Weddell); the challenges of creating accessibility to opportunities among those that are underprivileged with traditionally privileged programs (Paisley, Jostad, & Sibthorp); and, the acknowledgment that personal identities and experiences greatly influence our research and affinity to matters of justice (Trussell). But as we acknowledged, prejudice is only an echo or evidence marker that injustice has occurred. Prejudice, in itself, does not create injustice and oppression, power does. With this in mind, we support a perspective that our roles as researchers are to erect and "bring about new schemas of politicization" rather than defend any existing position, in order conceive new forms of social realities (Foucault, 1977, p. 211).

In our call for papers, we noted that Iris Young (1990) outlined five areas or "faces" of oppression and evidence of manifested power: *exploitation*, *marginalization*, *powerlessness*, *cultural imperialism*, and *violence*. *Exploitation* is a process in that the product of labor of one social group benefits another. *Marginalization* is the process and result of isolation, denial, or expulsion of one social group in actively participating in society by the decision-making of another social group. *Powerlessness* is the barring and exclusion of a social group in decision-making structures that limits the groups' ability to formulate opportunities and the fulfillment of capacities. *Cultural imperialism* is the process that the ideals, beliefs, and attitudes of one social group are enforced upon another social group through institutional policies and practices. Lastly, *Violence* is a process that utilizes the institutional condoning or enabling threat and actual use of physical attack to harm, humiliate, and terrorize a social group. Each of these faces, "function as criteria for determining whether individuals and groups are oppressed," and that, "the presence of any of these five conditions is sufficient for calling a group oppressed" (p. 41).

We also noted that Bunyan Bryant (1995) extended notions of injustice but also ways that empowerment could occur through our interactions with the environment by way of “cultural norms and values, rules, regulations, behaviors, policies, and decisions to support sustainable communities, where people can interact with confidence that their environment is safe, nurturing, and productive” (p. 6). Key elements of environmental justice are: *procedural justice*, *distributive justice*, *corrective justice*, *environmental equity*, and *environmental racism*. Unlike the Young’s (1990) “faces of oppression” that are distinct from one another, each of these elements represents foci of analysis on processes and structures of equity and rectification on the manner in which the environment does not harm the growth of people or the growth of the environment is not hindered through our own actions. Advancing environmental justice has also necessitated the need to ensure that full participation of communities that are adversely affected by environmental decision-making, and that policies benefit all and not just those at that “table.”

Unlike privilege or even prejudice, (oppressive) power cannot be simply “unpacked” since it is always operating, even countering the efforts of anti-oppressive practices. Our conventions of leisure are still centered within Western Civilization traditions and histories, as we still have a lack of understanding of Ancient African, Asian, and South American societies conceptions of play, work, and reflection that can be situated alongside our detailed analysis of Ancient Greek and Roman philosophies. Our reverence of a select body of philosophical traditions that today serve as the foundation of our scholarship and indeed our educational underpinnings in the field, has narrowed our viewpoint on culture and modernity. We also fail to reconcile the benefits of the Industrial Revolution that were reaped from the industries of slavery and colonialism. This is the historical era that leads to the creation of the modern city as gendered, racialized, and abled spaces. The unfortunate reality is that our very field, studies, and institutions are embedded with a legacy that has ignored the confluence of power that has created the social order of domination that we see today. The focus on prejudice in this special issue provides an analysis on what we see of the damage that power has wrought in contemporary times. Whereas the focus on power provides an analysis on the long history of how prejudice, injustice, and oppression has been established and constructed. The two foci provide an analysis of the shadow and the “thing” that has casted that shadow.

Power

Power is not vague, as it is something that is conceptualized and possessed. Max Weber (1968), articulated at the individual level, power is “the capacity of an individual to realize his will” (p. 1111). When power is conceived as a “thing,” only those who are privileged can typically actualize this capacity and level of agency. But we must keep in mind that power is a production despite the place that people are situated and positions that people hold in society that may reflect diversity, it is important to be wary of how marginalized and oppressed groups have heightened visibility in society. This “inversion of invisibility” does not mean that societies have been equitably transformed (Foucault, 1975, p. 189). Especially in democratic societies, institutions can operate “physical mechanisms” that guarantees that the “submissions of forces and bodies” are a fundamental aspect of their operation (p. 222). Institutions shape the subjectivities of those that engage, are housed, or work for that institution. As a result, institutions shape the kind of life and professional choices that people make, determine the range of options that are available for those choices, and determine which choice is acceptable or not (Foucault, 2002). Thus, our attempt in concluding this special issue is a call for future research that seeks to embrace the full

reality of the oppressive intentions of institutions and the willful negligence to ignore those realities by giving greater attention to more comfortable subject matter. Social and environmental justice makes power uncomfortable.

Systematic Oppression

It is important to face the reality that power erects “caste systems” as marginalization and disparate conditions have been enduring in American society, in particular, to the point that they appear to be issues that will exist in perpetuity in certain communities (Alexander, 2010). Overt hostilities and power plays are typically intolerable if expressed in the public sphere. Thus, covert forms of power plays operate the ways that we substitute negligible terminology and policies with sanctified ones. “At risk” remains in use in research and professional arenas, and still retains its role as a substitute for Black and Brown youth (with sprinklings of poor White youth) and is no less inappropriate. These youth are risky and dangerous, live in risky and dangerous environments, and engage in risky and dangerous behaviors, but we ignore the risky and dangerous policies and practices of “stop and frisk” that negatively affect them.

One institution in a society hands off to another its discriminatory results. The managers of a festival contact the police due to their concerns of the behaviors of a certain demographic at their exclusive event. Law enforcement then detains, records, and passes those “unruly” individuals off to a criminal justice system that then houses them for a period of time in a system of incarceration. When those individuals have served their time, they are then unable to find work, even custodial work at the festival they were first identified at years before. When we fail to see the consistent rape and sexual assault of college-aged women in and around leisure spaces as a part of a culture, we fail to see systematic oppression. As an example of systematic oppression, rape culture is “a generic culture surrounding and promoting rape,” that determines the “specific settings” in which men and women interact on a college campus and regulates the behaviors of female victims rather than male perpetrators (Boswell & Spade, 1996, p. 133). This is the unending cyclical reoccurrence of oppression. There is intentionality that produces the amount of overrepresentation of people that are “under correctional control today” (Alexander, 2010, p. 175).

Jackson Katz (2006) has brought forward the notion that violence against women is not a women’s issue, as it is so often presented and discussed, but rather a men’s issue. After all, violence against women does not (usually) happen at the hand of other women, but rather by the hands of men. The practice is passed down and therefore culturally institutionalized and condoned from one man to another. This question can be raised about other prejudices as well; that injustice against minority races is not a minority issue, but rather a majority issue. That violence against or intolerance of lesbian, gay and transgender individuals is not a homosexual issue, but a heterosexual issue. Violence and discrimination does not happen at the hands of the oppressed group, but by the hands of the oppressing group. In leisure and recreation, the oppression that happens does so because of the lack of willingness to own the prejudices we possess, and a failure to make a difference by making it “our” problem.

Powerlessness

In social work, oppression is defined as,

The social act of placing severe restrictions on an individual, group or institution. Typically, a government or political organization that is in power places these restrictions formally or covertly on oppressed groups so that they may be exploited and less able to compete with other social groups. The oppressed individual or group is devalued,

exploited and deprived of privileges by the individual or group which has more power.
(Barker, 2003)

Because oppression operates as a system, individualized prejudices do not need to exist in order for the oppression to be present. This operation functions best when the least amount of resistance is occurring. As a result, powerlessness is as much a state of being as it is an end result of a process (Tew, 2006). Similar to social work, sociology acknowledges that, “for every social category that is privileged, one or more other categories are oppressed in relation to it...Just as privilege tends to open doors of opportunity, oppression tends to slam them shut” (Johnson, 2000, p. 39). Above any other markers, powerlessness fosters an inability within the powerless to conceive of a new reality and construct it. They are less capable of wishing a skate park into existence, of lobbying for bike lanes to be allocated, of reaping the benefits of hosting a lucrative special event, or, of being apart of the decision-making process for the design of a facility.

Micro-Aggressions

An unfortunate fact of powerlessness is the reality of being at the mercy of not defining your own reality. Powerlessness results in victimization based on categorical (racialized, gendered, heteronormative, abled, and others) expressions of stigma, stereotyping, and bias based on uncertain boundaries and relationships (Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzalez, & Wills, 1978). Recognition of microaggression by anyone other than the victim counters the notions that people are good, moral, and decent and do not hold prejudicial thoughts, beliefs, and attitudes that result in harm. This leads to aversive forms of domination (racism, sexism, heterosexism, and others). Sue et al. (2007) noted three forms of *microaggressions*: 1) *microassaults*—conscious actions and intentional slurs. 2) *microinsults*—nonverbal and verbal forms of communication that result in the demeaning an identity and convey cultural insensitivities; and, 3) *microinvalidations*—the outright exclusion, negation, and nullification of the thoughts, abilities, experiences, and realities.

Empowerment

Taking Action

A common and traditional lens through which we look at leisure as students, scholars, and practitioners, is as a “benefit” to society. To value leisure and recreation as unconditionally “good” and “beneficial” to self and community is short sighted at best, and dangerous at worst. Leisure and ethical behavior are not on the same continuum. As taught to undergraduate students worldwide, a leisure experience is comprised of four elements: (1) intrinsic motivation, (2) perceived freedom, (3) positive affect, and (4) perceived competence (Hurd & Anderson, 2011). These elements can present, and often do, in activities where the experience is purely self-driven. Thus, the detriment they pose to others is conceivably endless. The insistence on considering leisure and recreation activities, experiences, and mental states as “beneficial” prevents opportunity, willingness, and even ability to see flaws in programming and provision of services. A more critical and honest assessment of the field, and the prejudices we bring to our research and services is the only means by which we can change our approach, whatever discomfort such an unsavory self-assessment may bring. Not doing so is a perpetuation of subtle prejudice and misplaced power.

Harro (2010a, b) has proposed two consecutive processes toward awareness and advocacy of injustice. In the cycle of socialization (Harro, 2010a), she contends that individuals are socialized into thinking a particular way, and then undergo a critical incident or incidents that inspire

awareness of prejudice and the need for change. At this stage, an individual enters a cycle of liberation (2010b), in which individuals become allies and advocate for change. Becoming aware of one's prejudices is part of the first cycle, and only when that process has been embraced can the process for change begin in the next cycle.

Social Justice in Relationship to Realities Power

In conclusion, there are some realities that we must face if social and environmental justice is our focus and paradigm. First, we still must confront the history and role of leisure studies and researchers in contributing to injustice (Mowatt, 2009, 2013). Secondly, justice research and work is about injustice. We must recognize this first as this may separate our focus on issues. Issues are symptoms of larger injustices that are occurring in society. We cannot jump to sustainability before recognizing the irreproachable harm that has been inflicted on some communities over others. Thirdly, social and environmental justice research and work is about seeing and advocating for the "other," in order to change societal imbalances. It is easy to champion "issues" that we might benefit from as a scholar on a subject matter, but it is another thing to champion for the lives of others and more likely receive no benefits, no opportunities, and no accolades. Fourthly, this line of research and work is not comfortable due to the level of injustice and oppression that exists in societies and communities. We must be prepared for the emotional and mental toll of witnessing the injustice, and the potential futility in tackling it. How do we regroup and gather ourselves if confronting poverty and people living in squalor if we walk into someone's apartment and see the mold, conglomeration of bed bugs, etc. Lastly, social and environmental justice is not attractive or popular. Challenging issues will be met with a response with consequences. Our agency partners, associations, and institutions may be hostile, oblivious, or ignorant contributors to injustice. One could lose friends, reputations could be destroyed, or one may even lose their job. Social and environmental justice begs us, as researchers, to fall into a role as,

The intellectual [as] destroyer of evidence and universalities, the one who, in the inertias and constraints of the present, locates and marks the weak points, the openings, the lines of power, who incessantly displaces himself, doesn't know exactly where he is heading nor what he'll think tomorrow, because he is too attentive to the present (Foucault, 1977, p. 225).

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