A Socialization-Based Values Approach to Embracing Diversity and Confronting Resistance in Intercultural Dialogues

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The dynamics of resistance articulated by the Privileged Identity Exploration model highlight the need to acknowledge the role of socialization in the formation of attitudes and behaviors that can support identities of privilege. Exploring individual and group related socialization processes in the context of a difficult dialogue might facilitate an atmosphere of understanding and mutual respect between participants.

The role of socialization has been accepted as a core aspect of individual development and is viewed as being directly informed by the cultural context within which it occurs (Yeh & Hunter, 2005). Simply stated, socialization is a process by which individuals learn the beliefs, values and behaviors that are considered to be normative within their specific reference groups - racial, ethnic, religious, etc. (Harrison, Wilson, Pine et al., 1990). As such, the process of socialization has a powerful effect on what individuals bring to intercultural dialogues and how they interact in such exchanges. In this regard, the Privileged Identity Exploration (PIE) model (Watt, 2007) provides an excellent framework within which to understand various process dynamics associated with the socialization of individuals from identities of privilege. This article addresses the mechanism through which socialization processes may underlie the defenses outlined in the PIE model. In addition to outlining the socialization-based values approach to intercultural dialogue, we also offer an example of how to incorporate this approach into student affairs practice.

Multicultural Competence and Difficult Dialogues

While being historically located within the counseling literature, the notion of multicultural competence has been applied to both student affairs (Mueller & Pope, 2001) and, more broadly, to approaches for dealing with diversity on college campuses (Pope & Reynolds, 1997). Key constructs in multicultural competence are an awareness of personal biases and systemic oppression, coupled with the development of skills based on acquired knowledge of the experiences and cultural values of varied racial and cultural groups. A more recent shift has been to incorporate social justice as both an ingredient and

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outcome of multicultural competence (Vera & Speight, 2003), a shift that allows for a more concerted focus on issues of privilege, oppression, and advocacy.

A critical element of multicultural competence is the ability to participate in and foster dialogues that non-defensively acknowledge patterns of social hierarchy and dominance. This involves the difficult task of acknowledging personal participation in the oppression of others through various aspects of privilege or unearned advantage and conferred dominance associated with race, gender, etc. (Macintosh, 1990). Central to the process of acknowledging ones status of dominance is an understanding of the role of socialization in shaping values, ideology and behavior.

Socialization and Construction of Normality

Perhaps one of the most powerful ways in which socialization impacts intercultural dialogues is in the construction of normality. Within a society such as the United States, which is structured according to a distinct racial and patriarchal hierarchy, (Smedley, 1999), normality tends to be associated with, and defined by, the dominant majority, and is largely accomplished through its institutions (media, educational, religious, judiciary, etc.). In other words, what is considered acceptable in relation to ways of speaking, expression of affect, evaluation of behavior, assumptions of morality, and constructions of family and community is prescribed and reinforced by the aforementioned institutions. Therefore, socialization has a direct bearing on the value orientations and worldview that include implicit and explicit assumptions about self and other that individuals bring to an intercultural interaction.

Socialization and Cultural Values

Value orientations and worldview can be viewed as the primary determinants of the socialization process and therefore an important consideration when discussing interpersonal interactions. Value orientations are beliefs about human nature, social relationships, and attitudes toward time and activity orientation. These orientations have been noted to vary according to racial and ethnic group membership (Carter, 1991). Therefore, we could assume that membership in particular reference groups (e.g. race, gender) involve learning and behaving according to the norms, beliefs and attitudes associated with the specific groups' value orientations and cultural identity.

Worldview refers to a broader construct which incorporates value orientations associated with culture as well as other aspects of an individual's life

experiences such as sociopolitical history, language and acculturation (Ibrahim, 1991). It is thought that one's worldview is shaped and informed by one's system of values, which in turn influences attitudes and behavior. To illustrate, if one's activity orientation is toward "doing", a core belief would be that success is defined by productivity, and as such behavior that is competitive in nature will be valued and reinforced. Consider then the potential for conflict when one is engaged in dialogue with an individual whose activity orientation is toward "being", that is an acceptance of one's place in the universe and by extension a rejection of success as defined by productivity. The potential for terms like materialistic and superficial versus unmotivated and lazy can become part of the spoken and unspoken dialogue. Furthermore, in the context of American society where "doing" is normative and central while "being" is deviant and marginalized (Stewart & Bennett, 1991), one can see how in this situation an opportunity for genuine understanding could be lost, with stereotypical judgments and prejudicial behavior taking its place.

To summarize, membership in a given social group usually involves socialization into a particular worldview. This worldview includes a number of rules and values that are reinforced by personal (internalized), social, and institutional forces.

Socialization and Intercultural Dialogue

Given the considerable influence the above socialization processes play in intercultural communication, we believe that the explicit acknowledgment of these processes is necessary if the conditions conducive to genuine intercultural dialogue are to be met. We contend that these conditions include an explicit identification of the participating individuals' worldviews and how these worldviews shape and inform the intercultural dialogue. Specifically, we recommend utilizing the following activities and goals to foster greater understanding in intercultural communication:

1. Identify the relevant values and assumptions that each participant brings to the encounter (including those that are automatic and unrehearsed – i.e., stereotypes).
2. Identify the ways in which these values have been constructed and continue to be maintained by socialization processes.
3. Seek to identify how these assumptions are directly impacting one's assessment of the other's position or point of view.
4. Examine the ways in which the assumptions are considered normative and deviant, including the role of privilege (conferred dominance) in the construction of normality.
5. Seek to accept one's notion of normality as reflective of profound experiences of socialization and not necessarily individual notions of

superiority (seeing one's values as *a way* of viewing and responding to life and the world, rather than *the way*).

Case Illustration

In order to provide a concrete illustration of the implementation of these suggested goals and activities in a difficult dialogue, the following example is offered.

While the example focuses on heterosexual identity, we argue that the illustration is applicable to a range of dominant/marginal group pairings including dynamics that occur along the lines of race, religion, ethnicity, ability and social class.

Drawn by the availability of free food, several heterosexual students enter a Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgendered (LGBT) student social event that is sponsored by an Office of Student Affairs. They soon become aware of the presence of the LGBT students and proceed to cope with their discomfort by making derogatory comments about them. One of the comments catches the attention of a few LGBT students who duly confront the heterosexual group. The heterosexual students adopt a dismissive stance and continue to make jokes. A student affairs staff notices this encounter, and, seeing it as an opportunity for learning, comes over to intervene.

Quite often such teaching moments are framed such that the individuals from the dominant majority group are seen as those most in need of further learning. Therefore in the above scenario, a typical approach would be to focus on the need to educate and sensitize the heterosexual students to the experience of the LGBT students, an approach consistent with a good deal of multicultural trainings, workshops, and seminars that seek to introduce groups from so called privileged identities to the world (experiences and values) of the other (Collins & Pieterse, in press). While this knowledge is important, this approach can also be limiting if the heterosexual students are not also encouraged to explore the construction of their heterosexual identities (Worthington, Mohr, & Navarro, 2001), and how their socialization experiences - values, beliefs and behaviors associated with being heterosexual - provide the lens through which they understand the LGBT other. Teaching heterosexuals about the LGBT world, when done without self-exploration of their heterosexual experience, can tend to reify the oppressive hierarchy in that heterosexuality is normalized and centralized while LGBT experiences is rarefied and thus marginalized. The LGBT world becomes an exceptional new place that heterosexuals visit and the opportunity for an examination and potential deconstruction of

heterosexual privilege is lost. A related consequence of such an approach is that the flow of information tends to be uni-directional, i.e. the heterosexual students being taught about sexual orientation (and even heterosexuality) by the LGBT students and student affairs staff, instead of a mutual dialogue seeking to understand both self and other. These unidirectional roles of learner and teacher limit the ability to genuinely understand the other as equal and therefore serve to maintain oppressive social structures as pointed out above.

Additionally, having everyone become potential learners reflects the reality that everyone participates in oppression (e.g., heterosexual privilege and internalized homophobia). This challenges the myth that oppression exists solely because bad people do bad things (like the heterosexual students making offensive comments because they are bad individuals), a myth that presents a major barrier to honest dialogue and movement towards overcoming oppression. Instead, there needs to be an acknowledgement that oppression is woven into the fabric of every individual's life and into the institutions we interact with, participate in and create. In difficult dialogues therefore, opportunities for learning are guided by reciprocal attempts at understanding and not necessarily the acquisition of knowledge and a shift in attitudes by the *privileged* party.

In the case illustration, therefore, student affairs staff would approach both groups involved in the incident in an attempt to foster new learning. This teachable moment would include an attempt by both student groups to understand the assumptions they make about each other and how these assumptions are informed and driven by socialization related experiences. For example, how do heterosexual students view themselves and how does this view inform their evaluation of the LGBT students? What are the values and rules that guide both the LGBT and heterosexual students' lives and how do these rules impact what happened and is happening in the encounter. Furthermore, how have these views and values been developed and how are they maintained. It is imperative that this exploration include a discussion of privilege (conferred dominance), and in this context we view the PIE model (Watt, 2007) as providing an excellent guide for how to build understanding of Privilege, a core aspect of the experience of individuals from dominant groups. An understanding of the common defenses described therein is critical as student affairs staff attempt to engage the heterosexual students in a difficult dialogue about the incident. This may include an exploration of what defenses are being utilized to maintain heterosexual worldviews and resist awareness, flexibility and change.

We caution, however, that the staff not simply focus on the "*privileged*" aspects of heterosexual experience, rather that they also explore how the position has been constructed through a process of socialization. An exclusive focus on

privilege provides a limited perspective on what it means to be heterosexual and how one might react to and interact with individuals of differing orientation. Perhaps more importantly, focusing exclusively on privilege also perpetuates a myopic focus on who is to do the learning and who is to do the teaching.

This is not to say that conferred dominance or privilege is not a critical aspect of the heterosexual experience, because it is. However, to focus solely on privilege might circumscribe the dialogue, and set a tone in which the heterosexual students could possibly promote the reactionary and defensive positions listed in the PIE model, or perhaps worse yet, become guilty learners driven by external constraint rather than internal transformation. Additionally, an exclusive focus on privilege robs the LGBT students from exploring their own socialization and ways in which they contribute to and participate in the ongoing system of marginalization, silence and invisibility. As noted above, it is also essential that the LGBT students engage in the same type of self-reflection around how their sexual identities have been constructed and challenged through socialization processes, as well as how they may participate in the perpetuation of oppression (e.g., internalized homophobia).

A final aspect of this approach is the recognition of the intersecting nature of individual identities (Reynolds, 1991). Therefore, in addition to a socialization informed exploration of the students' sexual orientation identities, we propose that identities relating to race, ethnicity, sex, class, ability, religion, etc. be also woven into the discussion where appropriate. To illustrate, since a student may experience privileged status in one aspect of their identity (e.g., heterosexual), but also experience a marginalized status in another aspect (female), this expansion of focus allows for an exploration within one student of both types of experience. It can be very enlightening for a student, when seeking to understand her experience of gender oppression, to explore this oppression though the lens of heterosexual privilege. This expanded focus allows students to see the struggles of other groups who experience both privilege and marginalization based on their varied individual identities.

We realize that the aforementioned exploration can represent a challenge in terms of time constraints. However, we strongly encourage staff to avoid rushing this process. We have argued elsewhere that getting this process successfully started may be all that can be expected and may also be all that is necessary in some circumstances (Collins & Pieterse, 2007).
Yet it is important to acknowledge that time is a critical element of this socialization-based values approach and therefore leads to a consideration of some of its limitations. Firstly it does not provide a "quick-fix", instead it looks

to achieve change through the vehicle of personal transformation – a process that inherently takes place over time. Secondly, it is primarily an approach the focuses on individual experience and therefore does not target systems and institutions. Thirdly, to be effective it needs to take place in the context of an explicit and overt institutional commitment to multiculturalism and social justice, thereby providing an institutional level of safety that is mirrored in the level of safety provided by the student affairs practitioners.

Conclusion

In sum, the socialization-based values approach offers several benefits. The goal of such an exploration is to understand a person, rather than to teach him or her about their status of privilege. It allows for, and anticipates the inevitable denials and distortions that accompany difficult dialogues, and provides a non-threatening stance from which to explore personal experience. The socialization values approach invites students to express their experiences more fully rather than forcing them into a reactive role, such as the chastised evildoer, or the reluctant educator. With this sort of guidance genuine understanding and connection can occur as instances of dominance and oppression are identified, processed and challenged. While this does not mean that the interactions will be free of pain or conflict, it does allow for the pain to expressed and processed more directly when the roles (of teacher/learner, accuser/defender, etc.) are not inflexibly prescribed. An act which in and of itself represents a weakening of the oppressive hierarchies that undergirds those roles that are so often exhibited when a difficult dialogue takes place.

Finally, it is important to note that in order for student affairs practitioners to facilitate the type of dialogue and growth advocated by the socialization-based values approach, it becomes imperative that they themselves engage in a similar exploration and interaction and in so doing reflect the notion of "being the change we want to see" (Gandhi, 1869 – 1948).

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