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The Tiller of Authority in a Sea of Diversity:

Empowerment, Disempowerment, and the Politics of Identity

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“Diversity” has become a catchword of the 1990s, a framework that implies that a wide variety of differences among us deserve recognition, respect, and protection. Such a framework appears to promise a more complex, integrative model of group relations and individual identity. For example, a brochure for a recent conference focusing on themes related to diversity, cosponsored by the Washington-Baltimore Center of the A. K. Rice Institute and the Office of Continuing Studies at American University, asserts that “no longer can the struggle be reduced to such basic

dichotomies as black or white, male or female, rich or poor, old or young, American or international, gay or straight, oppressor or oppressed." Our political leaders frequently reinterpret such differences as valuable and indispensable to a richer whole, with metaphoric references to tapestries and rainbows. According to R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr., of the American Institute for Managing Diversity, "If you have a jar of red jelly beans and add some pink and green ones, diversity is not the pink and green jelly beans, but the resulting mixture" (MacDonald, 1993, p. 25).

At the same time, the grimness, seriousness, and violence of the conflicts that underlie the issue of "diversity" have never been more apparent. The entire nation watched as all of Los Angeles seemed to be in flames in response to the verdict of an all-White jury that appeared to convey the message that White policemen could brutalize or even kill Black men with impunity. There were diametrically opposed reactions to the recent trials of several African American men charged with the attempted murder of a White truck driver during these disturbances. Some viewed these men as scapegoated by a judicial system implacably hostile and fundamentally unfair to Blacks, and cast them as political prisoners by referring to them as the "L.A. Four." For these people, the verdicts of innocent on most of the charges were cause for jubilation. Others viewed with dismay and fear the apparent fact that innocent people could be beaten and severely injured, simply because they were White, without swift and severe punishment. The deep differences in the worldviews of many Black and White Americans have never been so apparent or so public as in the aftermath of the O. J. Simpson verdict. Turning to issues of gender and sexual orientation, we note that terrorism and even murder have become commonplace in the battle over the reproductive rights of women. In towns, cities, and states across the country, far-right groups organize movements to make it illegal to offer protection from employment discrimination to gays and lesbians, and hate crimes against gays and lesbians have continued to increase. Recently, a Virginia court took a mother's children away from her, ruling that the mere fact of a woman's lesbian relationship rendered her an unfit mother, regardless of

the nature of her relationship with her children or the environment she provided.

One of the risks of the semantics of diversity is that these deeper and unresolved problems may be obscured by the new rhetoric of the bean jar as much as by the old rhetoric of the melting pot. The cover of diversity may be used to avoid some of the most fundamental conflicts we face as a society. For example, it is difficult to accurately identify and discuss the fundamental problems of American racism when these issues are couched in terms of diversity. African Americans become simply one of many politically defined subgroups competing on ostensibly equal terms for attention and resources, as do Native Americans and others who carry long and deep histories of racist oppression. Thus, devastating injustice may be trivialized through discussions of diversity. Diversity can be "celebrated" or "managed," while racism, sexism, and homophobia cannot. Further, the semantics of diversity may be used specifically to exclude consideration of particular issues and problems. For example, the current, bitter struggles over the treatment and rights of gay and lesbian citizens are explicitly excluded from consideration in discussions of "cultural diversity," "ethnic diversity," or "multiculturalism."

Since we point out that semantics frame the political issues, perception, and discussion of diversity, a comment about our own terminology in this chapter seems appropriate. Specific subgroups that are most identifiable on the field of diversity are most frequently referred to as minorities. However, the term "minority" implies a one-down relationship to the "majority." This term reinforces the specific social perception that "minority groups" are distinct constituencies comprised of small numbers of individuals who demand special rights and special treatment at the expense of most other people. For example, movements to prevent the extension to gay and lesbian citizens of basic civil rights granted without question to others have achieved particular success by casting gays and lesbians as demanding "special rights." The term "minority" also defends against the fear that if these groups united they might constitute an actual majority, and that American Whites may be outnumbered by members of non-White ethnic groups in the foreseeable future. However, there is not an

equivalent term to denote these groups. Therefore, we have used the terms *minorities* and *minority groups* at times throughout this chapter, but have often placed them in quotation marks to highlight these dynamics. There is also some social debate over the use of the terms *African American* and *Black*. Clearly, not all individuals who are socially identified as "Black" are of ancestry that can be most immediately traced to Africa. However, the connotations and political implications of the term *Black* have been justifiably questioned. In this chapter, we consider issues related to race, particularly to "Africanism" (Morrison, 1992). However, we have to some extent used the terms *African American* and *Black* interchangeably, although with some awareness of their different implications and connotations.

In addition to these broader social themes, issues of "diversity" are currently prominent within organizational, institutional, and industrial contexts. In an article entitled "The Diversity Industry," MacDonald (1993) cites estimates that 40% of American companies have instituted some form of diversity training, and that half of the Fortune 500 companies have someone within the organization with responsibility for diversity. This figure grows each year. She describes the burgeoning field of diversity consulting, with practitioners charging companies average fees of \$2,000 per day. Similarly, universities have struggled with demands for greater numbers of, more powerful, and increasingly specific cultural studies departments. There has been some thoughtful concern that racial separatism and infighting between groups on campus is fueled by this trend, as well as more predictable, less thoughtful backlash by White students, administrators, and faculty. Amid these struggles, the political use of the "diversity" trend to increase the power of various subgroups is clear. Recent protests at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) focused on the creation of a Latino studies *department*, in spite of the fact that there was an existing interdepartmental program. Thus, the goal of the protest seems not to have been to make Latino studies courses available to students, since these already existed, but to gain greater power and autonomy for this program within the university. Parity with African American studies programs was also raised as an issue.

Our goal in this chapter is not to examine whether diversity management programs or cultural studies departments are necessary or appropriate, or to determine what form they should take. Rather, our goal is to articulate and clarify the political nature of issues related to diversity, and the obstacles and resistance to meaningful social discourse, learning, and change related to these themes. These dynamics are generally unspoken and covert, and frequently unconscious. We use both our personal perspectives and the theoretical framework of group relations as a point of departure. We argue that when we undertake discussions about diversity—as leaders, consultants, group members, or as a society—we must acknowledge the political nature of these discussions. Our goals and agendas when we take up these issues must be clear. There is an underlying assumption that examination of these issues will lead to social learning that will somehow be valuable and helpful. This vague hope is not sufficient. True social learning leads to change. If our goal or our effect is to produce change, we need to be very clear about what we have been authorized to do by whom—hence, holding the tiller of authority in a sea of diversity.

Further, as we develop in this chapter, many of the dynamics surrounding diversity function to preserve the status quo, rather than to support change of any kind. We must be conscious of the risk of being co-opted by these forces. We must be clear about how our work may be used to justify and shore up existing structures and institutions, while creating the appearance of addressing issues of "diversity." Specifically, conferences or task forces on diversity may be used by organizations and institutions as tools of oppression. Without meaningful authorization and commitment to structural change, these efforts may be no more than window dressing, serving to mollify discontented members of oppressed subgroups and to quiet the disturbances they create.

Much of our perspective in this chapter comes from a series of conferences on diversity sponsored by the New York Center of the A. K. Rice Institute, and conducted at Teachers College at Columbia University from 1992 through 1995. The first of these conferences had been requested in large part due to an institutional disturbance at Teachers College created by gay and lesbian

students. During a case conference, a student (not gay or lesbian) had presented the case of a homosexual man she was seeing in psychotherapy. She indicated that both her supervisor and the professor of her course on object relations viewed homosexuality as inherently psychopathological. She said that this was confusing for her because this was not her experience in treatment with this man. Instead, his homosexuality seemed to her to be simply a part of his identity and situation, and not something that in itself should be a focus of treatment. The views of her supervisor and professor were not countered by any of the faculty members present at the case conference. The subsequent protest of these events by gay and lesbian students eventually led to the creation of a "task force" on diversity (led by a junior faculty member), and to the request for a conference.

No one with significant institutional authority attended the conference. Only junior and adjunct faculty members, who did not have the power to create meaningful changes in the institution, were present. We use this example, and will return to it later, to highlight the risk that such task forces or conferences on diversity may function primarily to create the appearance of addressing "minority" concerns, preventing these subgroup members (in this case gay and lesbian students) from demanding more basic, profound, and real change in an institution that continues to exist long after the temporary institution of a conference has ended.

OUR PERSPECTIVE

We believe that it is important for us to articulate our personal point(s) of departure for the remarks that follow. We met, quite literally, at the staff-group member boundary at the 1992 Diversity and Authority Conference at Teachers College, Columbia University. We use incidents from that conference, and several others focusing on these themes, throughout this chapter to illuminate our discussion. In addition, it is clear that our own perspectives on diversity are framed by the lenses of experience and

identity through which we view the world. We wish to acknowledge our similar, yet different, personal frames of reference.

The first author enters this discourse as a White, gay man, who has had access to the privileges of being White and male, but who has also suffered personal and institutional discrimination because of his homosexuality. Containing both "oppressor" and "oppressed" aspects of identity contributes to his perspective in this chapter. The second author is a woman who identifies as White, but whose skin is darker than that of most Latinos and many African Americans, and who is often perceived by others as non-White. This response to the color of her skin and her features deeply influences her identity and results in her experience of being on the boundary between Whites and people of color. For both of us, "passing" in dominant society has afforded privilege, and at the same time contributed to the experience of being on the margin, at risk for being found out and rejected based on other aspects of who we are. In a sense, then, we both enter this discourse on diversity at the boundary, containing opposing positions within our own identities.

The fact that collaboration across these boundaries is complex and difficult has been obvious throughout our work together. In order to collaborate at the staff-member boundary when we met, we had to overcome the shame of not knowing, the one-down position of a less powerful group in relation to a more powerful one. We have struggled with similar feelings, particularly the perceived necessity for one light to be dim so that another may be bright, throughout our work on this chapter. Indeed, the academic model of authorship has no mechanism to identify equal collaboration, but is a model of dominance, the ranking of one person's contribution over another's. We wish to acknowledge our differentiated, interdependent model of working together, and our equally important contributions to this chapter.

THEORETICAL ORIENTATION

Originally developed at the Tavistock Institute for Human Relations, the theoretical roots of the Group Relations model can be

traced to the work of Wilfred Bion and Melanie Klein (see Rioch, 1979). The group relations perspective highlights such issues as power, authority, and leadership in group and institutional life. The group relations model assumes that group process always occurs on two levels, overt and covert (see Rice, 1965). The overt refers to what is explicit, the content of what is being communicated, the group's stated purpose, tasks, and self-conception. The covert refers to what is taking place under the surface, what is implied and not stated, the dynamics and process of group functioning, and is often unconscious. A premise of the Group Relations model is that in the same way that infants struggle with conflicting wishes to merge and separate from the mother, who has the power to both gratify and frustrate basic human needs, group members struggle, generally unconsciously, with conflicting desires to join and to remain separate (see Wells, 1990). In order to tolerate the tension between engulfment and estrangement, to manage the anxiety and ambivalence that is inherent in group life, defense mechanisms are employed. These mechanisms are fundamental methods of simplifying the contradiction, ambiguity, paradox, and multiple realities inherent in human experience.

Splitting and projective identification are two of the most commonly used defenses. At its most basic level, splitting refers to the process of dividing the world (and others) into all good and all bad. Splitting also describes the polarization of specific characteristics as contained within individuals or subgroups, whereby all of a particular quality is perceived as being contained within one, and all of its opposite contained within another. Projective identification refers to the process by which individuals and groups deposit undesirable or ambivalently held aspects of the self and/or group into other individuals or groups, and is a mechanism through which splitting is accomplished when it involves one's own individual or group identity. The individuals or groups receiving these projections are subtly and often unconsciously encouraged to behave in ways that are consistent with these projections, since they are expressing these aspects on *behalf* of those who projected them (i.e., through identification). Individuals or groups who are chosen to express others' feeling do

so because they have an unconscious disposition, or "valence" for such expression, and/or because of demographic characteristics. To the extent that group members involve themselves in disowning unwanted aspects of themselves, and taking on unwanted aspects of others or of the group, they tacitly contract to participate in an interdependent, collusive process. It is precisely through this process that group members are connected to one another. This unconscious agreement constitutes the covert level of group life and creates the group-as-a-whole. Individuals and subgroups represent not only themselves, but also some part of the larger group or system.

SOME SOCIAL DYNAMICS OF IDENTITY

Group relations methodology allows us to examine the ways in which groups, organizations, and institutions use subgroups and individuals as spokespersons, leaders, scapegoats, heroes, or enemies because of stereotypical assumptions about those subgroups based on such variables as race, gender, and sexual orientation. We view the defenses of splitting and projective identification as powerfully related to the issues surrounding "diversity," particularly to those that are most explosive and divisive and create the greatest obstacles to collaboration across group lines.

Both individuals and groups actively construct self-identities from the available set of roles through processes of internalization and identification. Externalization and rejection of other potential identities, then, is the corollary of this process of identity construction. A fundamental part of both the individual and intragroup defense systems is the use of the "other" as a container for undesirable aspects of the self (Bion, 1959; see also Skolnick & Green, 1993). This is accomplished in large part through splitting and projective identification. Aspects of the self or the group that are disowned or rejected are projected onto others, so that desirable characteristics are contained entirely within the self or one's own group, and their undesirable counterparts in the "other." At the group level, this process is an important basis for stereotypes. Thus, projections and stereotypes are among the

building blocks from which self-concepts, public personae, and group identity are constructed. The "not me" and "not us" are used to define "me" and "us."

In her book of literary criticism entitled *Playing in the Dark: Whiteness and the Literary Imagination*, Toni Morrison (1992) describes the ways in which African Americans have been used throughout American history to contain disowned aspects of dominant White society, a process she refers to as Africanism. "Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny" (p. 52). Morrison's central thesis is that for White Americans, the ideals and experiences of freedom, individualism, manhood, and innocence have depended on the existence of a Black population that is manifestly *unfree*, and which serves Whites as the embodiment of their own fears and disowned desires. Women have been used in a similar way to contain projections of being weak, passive, and powerless, as well as being seductive, manipulative, devouring, and castrating. Gays and lesbians have carried disowned projections of sexual depravity based on the fear that unbridled expression of sexual impulses will lead to the collapse of the institutions of family and society. Of course, it is *one's own* sexual impulses, not those of others, that are the real source of terror. It has been argued that sexism and homophobia are linked through the use of femaleness and homosexuality (particularly male homosexuality) as "not me" to define American male identity.

A related, but more subtle, phenomenon is that victimization is a source of identity for oppressed groups, who are unified and emotionally connected by the oppression that they have experienced. It is well established in the social psychological literature that external threat is one of the most powerful factors increasing group cohesion (e.g., see Sherif & Sherif, 1965). It is difficult to imagine the form that modern African American identity would take if slavery had never existed, and if no hierarchy of freedom, power, and desirability had ever been based on skin color. As a more specific example, sexual historians point out that while

homosexual *behavior* has apparently existed throughout human history, homosexuality as an *identity*, as a *type* of person, is a relatively modern phenomenon. The crystallization of homosexuality as an identity may be traced, in part, to the development of social ideology directed toward oppressing homosexual behavior. Powerful social movements focusing on "vices" during the late 19th century Victorian era, as well as the systematic witch hunts and purges conducted in America from the late 1940s to the early 1960s against homosexuality along with Communism were among the factors that led to the evolution of homosexual communities, homosexual lifestyles, and individuals who defined themselves specifically in these terms (e.g., see D'Emilio, 1983; Rubin, 1984).

THE POLITICAL USE OF IDENTITY

As may be inferred from the preceding examples, it is our position that at the heart of discussions regarding "diversity" are issues related to power. Our use of the term *power* here is intended to encompass a range of meanings. We include access to and control of material, social, and institutional resources. We include meaningful enfranchisement in political and organizational contexts, and the ability to shape and influence decisions, agendas, and priorities. We include the ability to act instrumentally on one's own behalf or in the service of one's own interests. We include connection with a network of others with similar interests, when acting in concert with these others produces greater results than acting in isolation. Perhaps most importantly, we include the power *to define* social reality, experience, and history (Sampson, 1993). However, many of the dynamics that connect issues of diversity with issues of power are generally unspoken. We attempt to articulate some of them here.

A core cultural assumption about power is that it is inevitably scarce. We view our world as one of limited resources. We maintain the fiction that some must go hungry because there is not enough food, some must be poor because there is not enough money, some must be homeless because there is not enough shelter. The combination of the assumption of scarcity and the American "myth of meritocracy" (McIntosh, 1992) allows us to

maintain the belief that people deserve what they get and get what they deserve, justifying the inequities of our system. Similarly, we act as if there is a sharply limited quantity of political and institutional power, access, and influence. By necessity, a few will have this power, and most will not. The assumption that scarcity is the necessary state of the world and the necessary model for power relations masks the political choices we have made as a society. The assumption of scarcity shapes social discourse on diversity in fundamental ways, although the underlying questions are rarely raised explicitly. For example, if only some will have power, if only a few will have access to resources, who will this be? Which groups are deserving, and which are not? The assumption of scarcity suggests that the best bet for each group and each individual may be to try to obtain as much as possible for oneself, regardless of the consequences to others.

The political nature of identity becomes apparent when individuals are pressed to identify themselves as belonging to one group or another. In these situations, such identification frequently has direct consequences for the power base of the various groups involved. It must be acknowledged that presenting a unified front has been a historical necessity for the survival and welfare of many oppressed groups. The civil rights and organized labor movements are obvious examples. However, our point here is that the choice of public identities is in large part determined by this process of "constituency building" (Alderfer, 1983). This leads to strong pressure on individuals to emphasize specific identity characteristics at the expense of others, depending on which characteristics are most politically valuable within a particular setting.

Within institutional settings, questions of diversity are frequently raised in relation to the allocation of resources—programs, positions, time, funding, and so on. If a group is perceived as systematically disadvantaged, then a case can be made that this group is deserving of proportionately greater institutional resources. There may be significant intergroup conflict related to which groups are most deserving of corrective advantage. Identity groups and individuals may minimize their

own advantage or emphasize their disadvantage within the context of such discussions. We refer to this as the relationship between context and currency: What chips are worth the most in what context, and how is public identity selected and displayed to others on this basis?

Historically, perhaps the defining characteristic of "minority" identity is the lack of access to positions of power and influence. For example, South African Whites carried the "majority" identity for many years because of their control of resources and political power, in spite of actually comprising a small minority. Discussions of themes related to diversity often focus on demands made by various subgroups to be included in the existing power structure, often without otherwise changing it. Thus, these discussions are based on and framed by the existing model of power relations and the assumption of scarcity (what Sampson, 1993, refers to as monologism), rather than aimed at the conceptualization and development of an alternative model. Within this context, representation becomes a central issue. The assumption is that if individuals who share the externally identifying characteristics of oppressed subgroups are among those at the inner circles of power, this will improve conditions for other members of that group.

However, this dynamic often leads to reductionism, and contributes to the failure to address the real, underlying issues. For example, the Los Angeles Unified School District recently needed to select a new superintendent. The number two position with the district had been occupied for some time by a Black man, who seemed to be best qualified to fill the post. A large contingent in the community said that because of the high percentage of Latino students in the district, a Latino candidate must be appointed to the position. The Black candidate's record and sensitivity in responding to the needs and concerns of Latino students and the Latino community was not generally discussed in the acrimonious debate that followed. Similarly, as a nation we have examined the demographic characteristics of our president's appointments, without reference to their records in relation to the communities they are assumed to represent.

This reductionism creates the opportunity to twist concerns regarding representation to serve policies of racism, sexism, and homophobia. Representatives of "minority" groups who do not share many of the experiences of oppression, or who are actively hostile to the agendas of groups they ostensibly represent, may be anointed by those in power. Unless deeper questions are asked, the existing hierarchy may consolidate and perpetuate its own power while appearing to satisfy explicit demands for representation, creating a double bind for vocal "minority" groups. It is relevant to point out that our only African American Supreme Court justice is Clarence Thomas, and that a lesbian presided over systematic discrimination against homosexual artists as head of the National Endowment for the Arts during the final months of the Bush administration. As long as the assumption of scarcity provides the framework, access and influence will be denied to the many by the few.

THE MYTH OF REDRESS: A BASIC ASSUMPTION OF DIVERSITY GROUPS

Within groups focusing on the theme of diversity, there is frequently an unconscious fantasy held by the group that appears to share many of the characteristics of basic assumption functioning in groups as described by Bion (1959). Basic assumption functioning is a regressive state in groups that is characterized by specific, generally unconscious beliefs about the purpose and life of the group. In groups focusing on diversity, the operative unconscious belief is frequently that the group has met for the purpose of correcting the injustice of oppression experienced by subgroups collectively and historically, and by group members individually. We refer to this as the myth of redress—that is, that resources and power will be redistributed to correct the injury and oppression that have been experienced by subgroups and by each member.

Basic assumption beliefs are "invested with reality by the force of the emotion attached to them" (Bion, 1959, p. 147). The myth of redress is fueled by the sense of victimization and

narcissistic injury that each member—regardless of ethnic/racial status, gender, or sexual orientation—has experienced at the hands of an unjust world. Powerful, primitive emotions of rage and loss are attached to these experiences. These emotions give rise to a sense of entitlement, including entitlement to concrete, material symbols of power. The looting that occurred during the 1992 civil disturbances in Los Angeles may be partly understood in these terms. Although it is widely perceived that the individuals participating in the looting were uniformly Black, this was not the case. A story reported in the *Los Angeles Times* described a group of White women in a Jeep Cherokee seen looting The Gap on Los Angeles's most trendy shopping street. The emotional justification for such actions is provided by a nearly universal sense of victimization and narcissistic injury, based on the framework of scarcity.

As described by Bion (1959), "any leader is ignored by the group when his behavior or characteristics fall outside the limits set by the prevalent basic assumption" (p. 171). When the myth of redress is operative, the consultant and any potential leader are evaluated based on the group's perceptions of the likelihood that he or she will act to compensate for the oppression of subgroups and individual members. The presence or absence of "diverse" characteristics in the person of the consultant is viewed as signifying the extent to which he or she may do this, and the extent to which he or she will be responsive to or allied with the claims of particular subgroups. In one diversity conference, the small group to which the first author was consulting devalued and ignored him, explicitly because of his being a White male. In fact, the first comment made during the life of the small group was the expression by one group member of her disappointment to come to a conference on diversity and find herself assigned to a White male leader. On the second day, the information was offered by another member that the consultant was gay. This information had been held by specific group members, but was concealed until the consultant interpreted this fact rather vigorously. At that point, the group's response to the consultant shifted dramatically, as though he was no longer a White male. The gay and lesbian group members were given considerable authority. A

powerful "gay and lesbian alliance" emerged, and the oppression experienced by homosexuals became an important matter for group consideration.

The myth of redress underlies competition among subgroups for "the throne of disadvantage" (Gates, 1993, p. 42). The group belief is that if redress for past oppression will be made, it should be given to subgroups according to the degree of victimization they have experienced historically and personally. Competition may be seen as a struggle for who will be first in line. The nature of this competition is discussed in more detail in a later section. When the myth of redress is operative, oppression is power; victimization is the group "currency." Group members identify themselves to others according to the aspect of their identities that most effectively carries the label of victim. Thus, a middle-class African American woman is likely to identify herself as Black, omitting reference to the advantages of her class. A White man is likely to emphasize his impoverished background. Aspects of identity that may fade to the background in other settings, such as being Jewish or gay, become the most prominent aspects put forward. Personal histories of oppression are frequently recited, both by members and by staff. Medals of victimization signify rank in the diversity hierarchy and access to the "truth" about the relevant issues. In this land of the one-eyed, the blind man is king. As suggested by the group's inability to contain both the gay and White male parts of the first author's identity simultaneously in the preceding example, and by the selection of narrow pieces of identity for presentation to others, the myth of redress frequently leads to fragmentation. Individuals are reduced by the group to a sum of pieces through which they can lay claim to the experience of victim. According to this logic, "African American woman" has a higher diversity score than "gay White man," but one that is lower than "physically challenged Latina lesbian."

Rather than offering an alternative model of power relations, groups operating under the myth of redress create a mirror image, bound and determined by the external reality it reflects. Standing the existing model of power relations on its head, however satisfying in the short term, does not provide a viable alternative. The myth of redress fails because ultimately, of course, no

redress is possible. Within American society, it is not possible to devise a corrective for the horror of slavery, or for other social, institutional, and individual forms of oppression. The pain of these experiences cannot be fixed. This is *not* an argument for dismissing our histories of oppression of and by others. Simply saying there is nothing we can do maintains the status quo at society's peril. In order to move beyond our past, to develop an alternative model of collaboration, we must acknowledge our collective participation in the oppression of others, and experience the sorrow related to our powerlessness to change our history. Only through such a process can we negotiate a mutual reality, a shared—though differentiated—experience (i.e., a dialogue; Sampson, 1993) that can be a starting point for a collaborative model. This involves a great deal of pain *on both sides*, and "minorities" cannot do this alone. The fragments must be integrated into a more complex whole. The fear and pain of doing this, and defensive group functioning based on the myth of redress, present a significant obstacle to the construction of a more integrative model. We turn to this theme next.

RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Bion (1977) asserts that significant social learning involves change *that is invariably resisted by the prevailing establishment* (see also Skolnick & Green, 1993). History offers no ready example of a case in which redistribution of power and resources has been willingly granted by those in control of the system, and there is little reason to expect that the current situation will be different. However, to assert that the reluctance of those at the top to relinquish their power is the major form of resistance to change is to collude with the polarizing dynamics that maintain the status quo. Change is terrifying for everyone. As oppressive as the current authority structure may be, the comfort of familiarity is favored over facing the terror involved in change. It is far easier to express anger at the current system than it is to create and take responsibility for a new one.

For oppressed groups no less than for their perceived oppressors, change from the existing model of power relations threatens both identity and community. For example, a new model may mean loss of entitlement and special status, loss of an explanation for failure, and an end to the exemption from facing the victimizer in oneself (a theme we develop in a following section). The abandonment of group defenses seems to be equivalent to annihilation, and gives rise to so much anxiety that change is experienced as catastrophic (Bion, 1977). The existential terror resulting from this threat is likely to be suppressed and maintained at an unconscious level, but is manifested as powerful resistance to change.

In the next sections, we explore in more depth some of the specific manifestations of this resistance, which pose obstacles to a new model of collaboration. Only if these forms of resistance are available to conscious work is there any hope that they may be overcome. We discuss three major forms of resistance. The first is denial of the victimizer role, which serves to trap various subgroups in their function as containers of the experience of oppression. Emergence from this position is impossible as long as the reality of this experience, and the role of others in creating and maintaining it, is not acknowledged. Many of the ideas in this section were developed by Williams (1993) in her paper entitled *The Dilemma of Being Both Victim and Victimizer*, and are repeated here with her permission. The second form of resistance we discuss is fragmentation and competition among subgroups. As long as divisions between various "minorities" are maintained, no effective challenge to the dominant hierarchy (*in fact* a minority) can be mounted (Noumair, Fenichel, & Fleming, 1992). Finally, we discuss how, even when invitations are made to participate in changing the system, the failure to provide meaningful authorization dooms these efforts to failure. These forms of resistance operate together, generally unconsciously, to preserve the status quo and to undermine meaningful collaboration and change.

Denial of the Victimizer Role

While the mayors of our cities and consultants to our corporations talk about "celebrating diversity," there is general silence about the victimizer role. As discussed, the tendency during discussions about "diversity" is for everyone to identify some piece of identity through which he or she may lay claim to the experience of oppression. In this way, the experiences and history of being "Irish," for example, or even blonde and beautiful, are used to articulate a sense of personal victimization. A claim to the experience of oppression is used to deny participation in the oppression of others, as though victim and victimizer are mutually exclusive positions.

This is one way in which those who enjoy privilege deny their participation in a system which confers dominance at the expense of "minority" groups. As McIntosh (1992) states, "Obliviousness about white advantage is kept strongly inculturated in the U.S. and serves to maintain the myth of meritocracy, the myth that democratic choice is equally available to all" (p. 81). Williams (1993) points out that this statement also applies to male advantage and heterosexual advantage. As a result, the experience of victimization—either as subject or object—is identified with "minorities," and the moral and ethical dilemmas of privilege remain unconscious and unexamined. Experiences related to oppression are kept within "minority" group members. African Americans, women, gay men, and lesbians are expected to teach members of dominant groups about "diversity," and, within organizations and institutions, to carry out the work related to this issue. At the same time that members of disenfranchised groups are expected to become advocates for the less powerful, they are frequently accused of seeing only a limited piece of the picture, thereby sabotaging the very work that is expected of them. This perpetuates the denial by members of privileged groups that they have any direct access to or experience of these issues, allowing them to remain unconscious of their role. The need for shared responsibility is obscured (Fouad & Carter, 1992), undermining the possibility of change. Thus, leaving this work to "minorities"

guarantees that the status quo will be maintained and left unexamined.

Denial of the victimizer role is apparent in conferences about diversity. For example, during an early small study group session of a recent conference on diversity, an attractive, young, Southern, White woman described her pain and outrage at having been described as "perky" during a recent job interview. The sexism of this remark is clear and offensive, and there is no doubt that her feelings about it were authentic. Within the group, however, her description of this experience functioned to deny the possibility that she, as a victim of oppression herself, could participate in the victimization of others. This may be understood as a preemptive (and successful) effort to ward off anger and rage that might be directed at members of dominant groups by "minority" members within the context of a conference on diversity. Her equal claim to the experience of oppression was unchallenged by other group members throughout the conference. Through such defensive maneuvers, the dynamics of oppression are made unavailable for group work, since the oppressor is "out there" and "back then," disavowed by and disconnected from any of the people in the room.

It must be pointed out here that the victimizer role is also denied by members of "minority" groups, and that their status as oppressed often provides exemption from examining these issues within themselves. The reality is more complex and painful. Throughout their history of interaction with dominant White society, Blacks have participated in the oppression of other Blacks, just as women have oppressed other women, and gays (such as Roy Cohn) and lesbians have oppressed other gays and lesbians. Alice Walker (1992) begins her book *Possessing the Secret of Joy*, in large part an examination of this theme, with a quotation from a bumper sticker: "When the axe came into the forest the trees said the handle is one of us."

This is partly related to identification with the aggressor, or internalized oppression, but is amplified by the difficulty in maintaining multiple aspects of identity simultaneously: that is, victim and victimizer. Individuals who are members of oppressed groups along one dimension may be members of majority groups along

others. Thus, Black men may victimize Black women and straight Black women may perpetrate heterosexual oppression against gay and lesbian people at the same time that they are themselves victims of racial or gender oppression. However, Williams (1993) points out that for Blacks to acknowledge the role of victimizer is to reinforce stereotypes of being dangerous, violent, murderous, and predatory. "This may also be true of women who are stereotyped as manipulative and devouring, and gays and lesbians whose very existence is considered a threat to children, public health, and so-called family values" (Williams, 1993). Thus, a double bind is created. Members of oppressed groups cannot be expected to speak to their own participation in the victimization of others unless Whites, men, and heterosexuals do so first.

Fragmentation and Competition among Subgroups: Divide and Conquer

An important implication of the assumption of scarcity is the belief that the concerns and demands of one subgroup may be heard only at the expense of others. "Minority" groups are pitted against another, preventing any unified demand for change. Subgroups generally accept the framework of scarcity without question, and demand to be included at the table of power, rather than demanding structural change in the way that power is conceptualized and allocated. Direct competition between subgroups is based on and supports the existing framework, because of the implicit assumption that only one place can be made at the table. For example, prior to the first diversity conference at Teachers College, a meeting was called to discuss the concerns of gay and lesbian students that had been raised following the student presentation described at the beginning of this chapter. During this meeting, a coalition of students of color presented a prepared statement protesting the institution's attention to issues of importance to gay and lesbian students when other issues of concern to students of color had not been addressed. After presenting the statement, these students left the meeting, closing off any

opportunity for collaboration and any possibility of more unified calls for change in the institution.

This example highlights a particular tendency for African Americans to see other groups as interlopers in their struggle for equality. These other groups are seen as appropriating and copying the civil rights struggle. Cultural historians point out that this is an oversimplification, and that distinct social dynamics led to the civil rights movement, the women's movement, and the struggle for gay and lesbian rights (e.g., Harris, 1981). From the African American perspective, however, these other struggles create the risk that the fundamental problem of racism in American society will be ignored and their oppression will continue amid the clamor of other groups. In his thoughtful essay on this topic, Henry Louis Gates, Jr., (1993) quotes a prominent civil rights veteran, who on the day of the recent gay and lesbian March on Washington wrote that "It is a misappropriation for members of the gay leadership to identify the . . . march . . . with the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s 1963 mobilization" (p. 42). Gates goes on to describe the surprisingly widespread sentiment that "gays are pretenders to the throne of disadvantage that properly belongs to black Americans, that their relation to the rhetoric of civil rights is one of unearned opportunism" (p. 42).

Gates asserts that this point of view can only be held by ignoring the existence of Blacks *who are also gay*. He describes the example of Bayard Rustin, a Black gay man who was the organizer of the 1963 civil rights march on Washington. Rustin was prevented from being named the director of the march because of his homosexuality, and the fear that it would be used to discredit the mobilization. The title went to A. Philip Randolph, who accepted it on the condition that he could deputize Rustin to do the actual work of coordinating the mass protest.

This fragmentation maintains divisions between subgroups, rendering parts of the self unavailable. Projections cannot be re-integrated, a more complex whole cannot be acknowledged and held, and such conflicts are unresolvable as long as these divisions are maintained. These dynamics can also be seen in the tensions between Blacks and Jews, or the violence between African American community members and Korean owners of convenience

stores during the 1992 civil disturbance in Los Angeles. Collaboration is prevented, ensuring that there will never be enough united opposition to the power structure to mount a successful rebellion. Subgroups are maintained as "minorities" rather than united as a new majority. Thus, this competition represents an unconscious collusion with the status quo.

As discussed, the competition for the yellow star of oppression, related to whose pain and anger is more profound and whose agenda and needs are more deserving, emerges vigorously in conferences on diversity. Significantly, Whites are generally silent while this subgroup competition plays out, except to offer their own experiences of oppression in order to prevent their identification as victimizers. On the surface, it would appear that this silence is related to the fact that in an environment that attaches a premium to diversity, they have no chips to play. On the other hand, it is clear that as long as competition among subgroups continues, there can be no real threat to the established order or to their primacy within it. The competition serves to detour the greater and more dangerous conflict with members of privileged groups. The competition may also be exploited more actively, by appearing to accede to the demands of the most powerful or vocal subgroup, thus silencing this group or separating it from others with whom an alliance might be formed. "Diversity" is used as a cover for the preservation of power. We have already mentioned George Bush's nomination of Clarence Thomas for Supreme Court justice, and appointment of Anne-Imelda Radice as head of the National Endowment for the Arts as examples of this phenomenon.

Failure to Provide Meaningful Authorization to Effect Change

A third form of resistance to change is that individuals or groups given responsibility for change are frequently given insufficient authorization to carry out this task. Early in this chapter, we described the response of Teachers College to the concerns of homosexual students as an example of this phenomenon. Within

institutions, the appearance of addressing issues related to diversity may be created by designating certain individuals, generally members of "minority" groups, as responsible for these concerns without giving them real power to influence the system. The experience of many individuals on institutional "diversity task forces" reflects this dynamic. In such circumstances, proposals for real change in the power structure are likely to be at best ignored and at worst met with open hostility. Bill Clinton's nomination of Lani Guinier to a top civil rights post was retracted following public and political reactions to her ideas about how greater power and enfranchisement in the political system might be given to minority voters. Her explicitly speculative proposals were painted as a direct assault on the very principles of a democratic society.

The initial sense of gratification and narcissistic inflation that often occurs when members of "minority groups" are asked to represent issues that have previously been kept invisible or unresolved may prevent accurate perception of the absence of real authorization behind this invitation. For example, the first author was flattered by the invitation to be on staff at the 1992 conference at Teachers College, although he was aware that he had been asked specifically because of his homosexuality. In accepting the invitation, he looked forward to the opportunity to address issues related to sexual orientation with integrity and seriousness. Initially, he missed the way in which he was being used by the institution (and the conference) to *contain* the issue of homosexuality by creating for gay and lesbian students the illusion of meaningful action. An institutional commitment to engage authentically in work related to the issue of homosexuality was absent. When this dynamic became apparent in the conference, he experienced his powerlessness to effect any real change, and the demoralization and anger that accompanied that position.

Again, however, to characterize this form of resistance as solely located among those in power is to collude with the polarizing dynamics that maintain the status quo. Frequently, the most bitter attacks on those who wish to change the system come from those on whose behalf these individuals are attempting to act. The history of grass roots advocacy and civil rights organizations is almost invariably characterized by revolving leadership, as each

new leader is unable to withstand both the resistance from above and the unanticipated assaults from below. Skolnick and Green (1993) suggest that flaws in the authorization of international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Court, and Amnesty International often cause them to fail in times of crisis, when they are most needed. We suggest that the authorization is insufficient both from those nations who have the resources to back up these efforts, and from those nations who would be most likely to benefit from them.

TOWARD A NEW MODEL

While diversity is often discussed as a concept that will allow differences to co-exist peacefully in a pluralistic society, we have presented an argument that it is often used as a cover story for the real dilemma, which is the distribution of social power. It is not surprising that interest in diversity has increased at the same time that the redistribution of power has become a major theme in American society and in global politics. Examples of this are plentiful—tax reform, Medicare, Medicaid, welfare reform, term limits, international trade agreements, the fragmentation and bitter conflict in the former Soviet bloc, and others. The frightening question at the core of the most bitter conflicts is "If power is redistributed, who will have it?"

The preceding argument brings us to the necessity of developing a new model of power relations. It is beyond the scope of both this chapter and our ability to create such a model here. However, we believe that this must be a model of differentiated collaboration, arising out of the acknowledgment of our individual and collective participation in the dynamics of oppression, and the negotiation of shared, yet differentiated, reality, experience, and history. Without this negotiation, we are a living Tower of Babel, with no common language and no means of understanding one another (Skolnick & Green, 1993). Developing a collaborative model means addressing fundamental and terrifying questions. If we cannot arrive at this model simply by turning the existing structure on its head, or by admitting selected groups

while leaving others without sufficient political voice out, what will it be? Who will gain and who will lose? Who is allowed to propose new models?

We have argued that the changes involved in creating a new model are experienced as catastrophic and as threatening annihilation. As a result, these changes are powerfully resisted, and we have described several specific forms of this resistance. Importantly, such changes are resisted not only and not even primarily by those currently in power. Human history and the limited supply of the world's resources provide powerful reasons to suspect that the struggle for power and dominance of one people by another is inescapable. Ultimately, developing a new model of power relations may be impossible. However, there may be no alternative if we are to meet the challenges that face the world, or possibly even to survive.

IMPLICATIONS FOR GROUP RELATIONS WORK ON DIVERSITY

The discussion of diversity in groups and organizations, as well as in society at large, necessarily includes attention to power and the allocation of resources. As Noumair, Fenichel, and Fleming (1992) point out, group relations theorists have tended to assume that struggles for power, authority, and leadership can be addressed through the successful reclaiming of projections and the reintegration of disruptive splits (e.g., Skolnick & Green, 1993). Similarly, Fanon (1952/1967) proposes that the polarizing dynamic of oppressor and oppressed can be broken when the oppressed reject the role of abused container without rejecting the humanity of the oppressor. However, the conditions under which subgroups can take up such responsibility and succeed have not been articulated. Is it possible to shift the one-up, one-down structure of group relations, to integrate masculinity and femininity, Black and White, heterosexual and homosexual? Would such integration necessitate the submersion of subgroup identities for the sake of the greater whole?

We must consider seriously the goals of diversity work, rather than assuming that we can be helpful in some unspecified way. Are there goals that can be accomplished? Who has set them and agreed to them? Who is authorized to work in the service of these goals and how are they authorized to work? Is our goal social change? Or is our goal psychological: to be able to see both the oppressor and the oppressed within oneself? If our goal is psychological, what are the social consequences of our work? As leaders and consultants, we need to be sure that we are not unconsciously serving the existing authority structure, or alternatively, using members or those we lead to act out our own revolutionary fantasies, personal agendas, or ideas of desirable social change.

Whatever our answers to these questions, we can expect that authentic work on diversity and authority will be challenging, will take a long time, will be a process, and is likely to involve change that will be experienced as catastrophic and will be strongly resisted. We cannot expect that we can simply import our existing technology to this new set of issues. We will need to develop new models of learning and of being in order to address these issues. If we accept this challenge, we must contain the overwhelming anxiety and terror involved in creating something new—of not knowing the solution, or even if one is possible. This may be the most useful focus for consultation and leadership.

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