CHAPTER 5

Creating Cultural Connections

Navigating Difference, Investigating Power, Unpacking Privilege

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To be honest, I didn't think I had a lot to learn about diversity from taking a service-learning course. I'm a business major, and we work in teams all the time. I've had lots of experience working with people who are different from me.

Truly, though, I am amazed at what I learned. Before, we'd get some random assignment to complete as a team, and we'd finish it, one way or another. In this class, though, we were doing something real for the community. It was a much bigger proposition than just doing something for a grade. I had to figure out how to work well with people whose experiences and perspectives were totally different than mine. I had to figure out the differences between what it means for me work collaboratively and what it means to others. And I was surprised to find that I had a lot to learn from the practice of joining with others to address a community problem.

The biggest surprise was the basic realization that recognizing and respecting our differences actually helps collaboration. We were all far more creative in this course. What I mean is, before in groups we usually competed with each other, but it doesn't make very much sense to compete with each other in a situation like this, because competition gets in the way of using all our skills and different ways of looking at things to get the job done.

—Michael, community-based learner, working on a marketing plan for a Meals on Wheels program

PERHAPS YOU ARE like the student quoted above, engaging in this service-learning environment with a lot of prior experience working with other students in team settings. Even if your only team experience has come through the work you are currently undertaking in this class, after reading the last chapter you have begun to think about the diverse roles and responsibilities that exist within a group, and you have practiced some strategies for working effectively with others. At the very least, you have probably started to think about the many factors that affect group dynamics; clearly, any collection of people yields lots of differences in personal preferences, styles, and ways of being and doing in the world.

Where do these differences originate? Is there a deeper, more meaningful way to think about both the differences and similarities that exist among people that can offer clues to greater understanding of yourself as an individual student? Might these insights further your own knowledge base and skills for operating in a diverse world, for connecting with team members and classmates in your course, and for positively impacting the larger community you are serving?

Service-learning experiences are opportunities for bridging a variety of cultural ways of being and doing. This chapter offers resources to frame your experience in order to expand your capacities for working effectively with those who are different from you, and to recognize how to act on commonly held desires for creating positive change in the world. Further, we explore how our different perspectives are actually keys to maximizing the innovative problem-solving capacities that exist in any community setting. We look at the ways that our notions of "service" are culturally based and seek a common language for serving and learning with respect and integrity.

What's Culture Got to Do with It?

> ***Culture*** is the creation of learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors in a community of interacting people. Each of us constructs a multicultural identity from the many cultural influences that impact us, including nationality, ethnicity, race, age, gender, physical characteristics, sexual orientation, economic status, education, profession, religion, and organizational affiliation.

In your service-learning experience, you may be working shoulder-to-shoulder with people who are culturally different from you. When we talk about cultural differences, we don't simply mean varieties of art and music, but rather different ways of thinking, of communicating, and of applying our distinct values to our actions. In our multicultural world, it is virtually impossible to work side by side with classmates and a community partner and not encounter differences related to culture. In other words, community-based learning is an ***intercultural*** context.

Sometimes this means collaborating with an intercultural team, a group whose members are quite diverse. Other times you may be working alone but engaging with persons from backgrounds so different from your own that you may not be able to comprehend their perspectives. You may find that you are the only person from your own culture present in a given situation, and you might experience a sense of isolation as you immerse yourself in this new environment.

Each of these scenarios requires ***intercultural competence***, the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in a variety of cultural contexts. To be interculturally competent, you need to cultivate a ***mindset*** (analytical frameworks for understanding culture), a ***skillset*** (interpersonal and group skills for bridging differences) and a ***heartset*** (motivation and curiosity to explore cultural variables). These three essential components of competence support your learning with others in the community (Bennett & Bennett, 2004).

The *mindset* gives you knowledge and academic understanding of other cultures through information about attitudes and behaviors. The *skillset* builds on that knowledge base by enhancing your intercultural abilities, including your capacity to listen, to solve problems, and to empathize. And the *heartset*, the interest and concern for others, provides the motivation to continue the effort even when things get complicated and challenging.

As you ponder your own cultural background and that of others, the main characteristic needed to guide your learning is ***cultural humility***, that is, respect for the validity of other peoples' cultures (Guskin, 1991). We are frequently tempted to see the perfectly obvious superiority of our own way of looking at the world, of conceptualizing a task, or of resolving a conflict. Cultural humility instead requires us to recognize that diverse worldviews are equally legitimate. It suggests that we suspend our value judgments, question the primacy of our own orientation, and realize that we may not even know what is really going on in an intercultural context. While this can be a major challenge, it is a prerequisite for getting along with other cultural groups.

A second step in becoming interculturally competent is to develop ***cultural self-awareness***, the recognition of the attributes and patterns of your own culture. Each of us processes many layers of cultural patterning. At one level, you belong to a national culture, or what some call a "passport culture," referring to the country of your citizenship. For some individuals, this is easy to identify. However, if you grew up in Mexico, moved to Canada, and now live in the United States, this becomes a more complicated aspect of your cultural identity.

As part of your developing cultural self-awareness, you may become more conscious of your ethnic heritage, including your relationship to the geography and history of the place your family originated, and how much of that culture they (and you) continue to identify with. Ethnic heritage is often more important than national culture, since so many countries consist of powerful groups with unique identities,

groups that may resist assimilation into the dominant culture. Some of these groups are pan-national, such as Arabs, Kurds, and Roma, whose communities stretch across borders; some of them are within a national border, such as groups within the United States, including African Americans, Latino Americans, Native Americans, Asian Americans, and European Americans. Each of these designations suggests the ethnic background of the individual, as well as the national culture. Particularly notable in the United States is the designation of European American, a group that frequently forgets that it has an ethnic identity.

Stop and think for a moment: What is your ethnic identity? It may seem—particularly to those of European American heritage—that European American patterns are, well, *just the way things are done.* Only by bringing ethnicity into consciousness can we become aware of that bias.

There are other levels to cultural identity. Regional cultures influence our communication interactions. For example, those from the southern United States may use speech patterns and behaviors dissimilar to those who grew up in New England. Socioeconomic class and education impact our values and beliefs as well. Gender culture, the many ways we are acculturated to our roles as men and women (and even the binary description of that designation), affects our cultural beliefs and individual choices. Other cultural influences include religion and spirituality; sexual orientation; physical, psychological, and learning abilities; organizational culture; and, on college campuses, even departmental cultures.

Some aspects of your own cultural identity are probably more important to you than others, for example, your gender culture or your ethnic heritage. However, you create your multilayered, multicultural self through the choices you make about how these cultural influences affect who you are. Culture is not a "thing," but a dynamic process in which you interact with family and community influences to reflect the cultural being you choose to be in the context in which you live, study, and work.

Let's take a look at your concept and experience of "service" through the lens of culture with exercise 5.1.

What does all of this mean to you, as you work in a community to serve and to learn? It suggests that you have to understand who you are culturally before you interact *across* cultures. If your sense is that other individuals are doing things that are weird, indecipherable, or unacceptable, this feeling might be tempered when you realize that you are viewing the situation from your own cultural worldview and that the other persons' perspectives are entirely different

⁂ Exercise 5.1: Cultural Dimensions of Service

In this activity, you will explore how you have come to define and understand what "service" means to you by examining your own cultural definitions. Begin by drawing (or otherwise indicating) yourself in the middle of a large sheet of paper. Around this figure, make notes about what service means to you and what kinds of service to others you have been engaged in, inside or outside a school setting.

Next, draw figures around you and connected to you, representing important persons in your life from whom you have learned about service. These could be parents and grandparents, siblings, other relatives, friends, mentors, schoolmates, teachers, professional colleagues, and others. What kinds of service have these persons been engaged in? What do you believe "service" means or meant to them?

Now, consider these persons and relationships through the lens of culture. Who among them shares one or more aspect of your cultural identity? How do those cultural groups to which you experience belonging understand "service"? How is that reflected in your drawing?

Conversely, who among these persons has had a distinctly different cultural experience from yours? How did these cultural differences affect your relationships with those persons and how they understand "service"?

from yours. Recognizing this, you can make a choice to practice cultural humility in order to learn more about the cultural worldview of those who are different from you.

Recall **Exercise 3.3: Who Am I and What Do I Bring?** on page 36. In this activity, you explored your current understanding of your identity in relation to a variety of racial and cultural factors (race and ethnicity; nationality; gender; language; spirituality and religion; physical, mental and/or emotional ability; socioeconomic class; age; physical appearance; and sexual orientation). These identifiers are lenses through which you perceive the world around you, which in this course includes your teammates and classmates and your community partner. Let's deepen your reflection on this theme with exercise 5.2.

Exercise 5.2: I and We and You and Us and Them

Step 1: Reflect

Reread your earlier reflection on "Who Am I and What Do I Bring?" (exercise 3.3). Think again about the ways that your current understanding of your identity positions you to experience this community partnership. Use the following prompts to focus your thinking about who you are in relation to the others with whom you are working.

- How do the multiple expressions of your identity impact the way that you perceive your community partner as an organization and the work that it does?
- How does your identity impact the way that you perceive other people, including your teammates and classmates, your community partner contacts, and the people served by your partner?
- How does your identity orient you toward effective interactions with others, and how does it challenge effective interaction?
- How might you use your perspective to further your investigations into creating effective working relationships with your team, your classmates, and your community partner?
- How might you learn from the perspectives of others? What particular perspectives would be most valuable for you to encounter?

In preparing your reflection, consider breaking out of the confines of the traditional narrative reflective form. Write a story or a poem or a dialogue. Paint, draw, or collage a picture. Compose and record some music. Choose to be as honest as possible in this reflection, which might mean that you record "negative" or contradictory thoughts and feelings as well as those that seem "positive" and clear.

Step 2: Step Back

After creating your reflection, take some time to review it and consider what it communicates to you. Then answer the following questions in writing:

- What is it like for you, this process of considering identity and its effect on your perceptions of others?
- What thoughts and feelings emerge as you consider these questions?

Step 3: Reflect Again

After your next service experience in the field or class session, reread your responses to the questions in both step 1 and 2 above. What does your reflection reveal about you as a person, a student, a community-based learner? How does this connect to your cultural background? How does it connect you to your team, your classmates, and your community partner?

With an ever-evolving understanding of yourself as a cultural being, it is important to be aware of the pitfalls of stereotyping others. A ***stereotype*** is a "hardening of the categories," a process of developing rigid ways of thinking about individuals from other cultures, as if those individuals represent some statistical "norm" of their culture group. We frequently base such unjustified ways of thinking on having met a single person from a culture or having been exposed to media representations of a culture's patterns.

A ***generalization***, on the other hand, is a lightly held hypothesis based on research about patterns of behavior in the other culture, a hypothesis that we never act on until we have confirmed that it is appropriate for the individual we have met. Thus, if we default to the notion that all men like sports or all Asians are quiet, we are simply stereotyping. However, in interactions across cultures, it is often useful to have hypotheses in mind that we hold tentatively until they are confirmed. In your community-based learning experience, it may have already proven useful to you to be exposed to some generalizations about the groups of persons and the cultural realities they embody to help guide your interactions. In another of his journals, Michael, our community-based learner from the opening of this chapter, described an experience he had of using generalizations to help him relate respectfully to the community he served:

I was riding with one of the Meals on Wheels volunteers on her rounds delivering lunch to persons who are elderly and disabled. I figured it was good to get hands-on experience of what they do before I started working on the marketing plan. I wasn't too nervous about dropping off food with the older folks, because I hang out a lot with my grandfather and his friends, but I don't know any people with disabilities. The last thing I wanted to do was hurt somebody's feelings.

I guess the volunteer must have sensed my nervousness. She said that generally the disabled people with disabilities she serves on this route seem to really appreciate it when she makes eye contact and connects with them. She said it can be helpful to be on the same level with people who are in wheelchairs, for example. Like everybody else on the route, they like it when you can spend a few minutes talking, since we might be their only visitor for the day.

When we showed up, the lady there was very happy to see us. She was in a wheelchair, so I sat on a sofa facing her as I told her how I was a student from the university working on this project for the Meals-on-Wheels program. I have to admit I was surprised when she told me a little bit about the career she had had in advertising. On a whim, I asked her if she might be willing to give me some feedback on the plan before we turned it in, and she said she'd be happy to.

At our group session, I told my teammates about meeting this woman who is not only a client of our community partner but also has done the same kind of work we're doing. Now they want to meet her too. I think getting to know her is going to have a definite impact on our final product in a number of ways.

Conversely, you may have also experienced the negative impact of stereotyping, in which the unexamined views you have held about different cultures have worked against your successful interaction with others. Exercise 5.3 asks you to consider both generalizations and stereotyping in the context of your particular service-learning experience.

Building Intercultural Sensitivity

As each of us experiences cultural differences, we tend to react to those differences in fairly predictable ways. These reactions are based on our worldview and reflect how we think, feel, and behave in the presence of unfamiliar cultures. We can look at the typical stages individuals move through as they acquire cultural self-awareness, learn to identify and appreciate cultural differences, and, eventually, adapt to others as a process of building intercultural competence.

This process has been described in the *Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity*, a framework that explains the development of increasing sophistication in our experience and navigation of differences

⁂ Exercise 5.3: Deconstructing Stereotypes

You may choose to complete this activity in a variety of ways: You might create a collage, using visual and/or word images clipped from magazines and newspapers to create a representation of those persons you are serving in your community partnership. Or you might pay particular attention to the ways that those you are serving are shown in the broadcast media, including film, television, and the radio, by watching and listening to several shows and making notes about what you see and hear. After you have spent some time intentionally engaging with the images in popular media that connect with the group of persons you are serving, respond to the following questions:

- How do these images represent stereotypes about the community you are serving?
- How are the stereotypes about this group reinforced in the media? How do the media negatively portray this group?
- How are the stereotypes about this group challenged in the media? How do the media positively portray this group?
- How do these images connect with your own experience of this group, and how are they different? When you look at these images, do they help you to see the faces of the individuals you are serving, or do they obscure the faces of those individuals? How?

(J. M. Bennett, 1993; M. J. Bennett, 1993; J. M. Bennett & M. J. Bennett, 2004). The model begins with three ***ethnocentric*** stages, in which our own culture is experienced as central to reality in some particular way. The latter three stages of the model are termed ***ethnorelative***, in which one's own culture is viewed in the context of other cultures.

Stage One: Denial of Difference

Individuals who view others through the denial filter either neglect to notice differences at all or think in extremely simple categories. Those who are just beginning to explore cultural differences are often unaware that they have a culture or that certain privileges exist in their world that don't exist elsewhere. They are per-

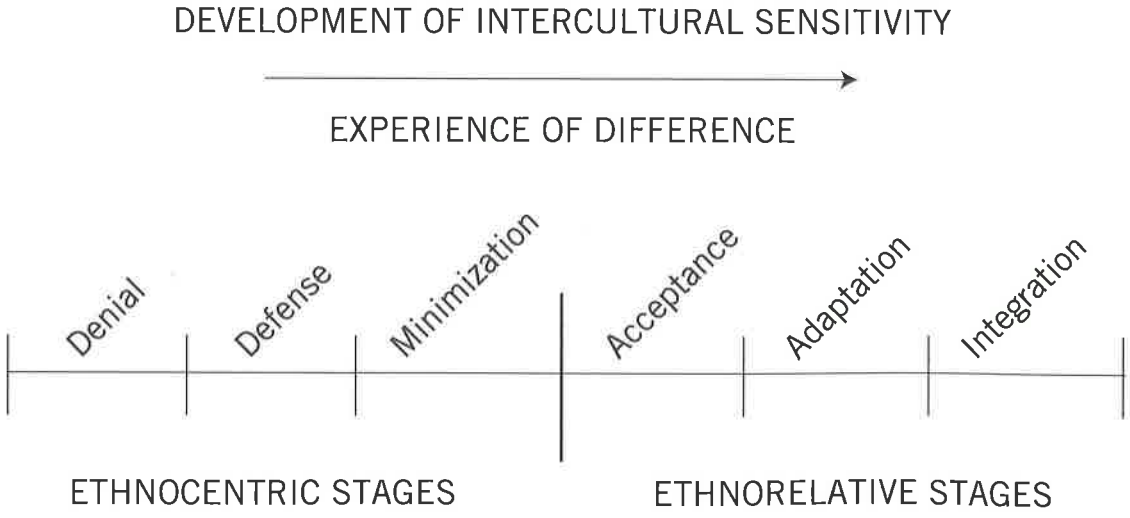

Figure 5.1. Development of Intercultural Sensitivity

From Bennett & Bennett (2004)

plexed when asked about their own cultural filters and are unconcerned about the impact of cultural differences on their lives. The following journal entry was completed by a student named Jennifer, whose service-learning experience involves working at a large family planning clinic in a multicultural community:

> *After learning about cultural patterns in the readings, I expected these patients to be really different from me, and so I'm quite surprised at how smoothly things are going. I've really not met anyone yet who seems that different from me. After all, healthcare is healthcare, no matter what culture you're from. And we all speak the same language, so I figure if I'm just myself things here will continue to be fine.*

Stage Two: Defense against Difference

When individuals become aware of cultural differences in more powerful and penetrating ways, they may slip into the defense posture, where their worldview is polarized into us/them distinctions ("Now that I've noticed they're different, I recognize they're bad!"). Individuals thinking in this way may criticize others or assert the superiority of their own culture. One intriguing variation on the defense perspective is what is called "reversal," which involves denigrating one's own culture and exalting some other culture's ways of being and doing. ("The Native Americans live in harmony with nature, not like us dominant Anglos," says the Anglo student.) While this may superficially seem to be more culturally sensitive, in fact it is nevertheless still dualistic and a defensive reaction to exposure to difference. The object of the defense has simply shifted.

The following journal excerpt is from Todd, a journalism major, completing his community-based project writing for an small alternative press that focuses on the needs of the Latino community. Although he is not a member of this community, he is deeply interested in the impact of addiction and is conducting a research project about heroin treatment in the community he is serving.

> *My visit to the treatment clinic went really badly. I ran into some super-defensive, antagonistic people who clearly didn't grasp why I was there. They were even hostile. I can't understand why they didn't see I was there to help. Man, when these people are angry, they really let you know it. If they had taken more time to get to know me, they would have realized I was on their side. I'm beginning to wonder if we ought to be helping them at all, if they're going to be so rude.*

Stage Three: Minimization of Difference

Those who have achieved the minimization worldview typically feel they have arrived at intercultural sensitivity, since, in most contexts, suggesting that we are all the same despite surface differences is a vast improvement over the cultural biases that normally exist. However, this is perhaps the most complex strategy for avoiding cultural differences. Indeed, if we believe that deep down, we are all alike, then we don't have to do the difficult work of recognizing our own cultural patterns, understanding others, and eventually making the necessary adaptations. This stage is thus characterized by the assumption that we are similar in some universal context, whether physical or philosophical. "It's a small world, after all."

Maria and her team from the business administration program are working to develop a database and Web site for a new minority-owned small business for their community-based learning project. In her journal, Maria writes the following:

> *It's so great to realize that the people here care about the same things we do in my culture. They want their businesses to make money, too! So values really ARE universal! They seem to eat different foods, and dress a little differently than I do, but deep down, we obviously share a common worldview. Partly this is technology that is bringing us all together, and partly it's basic human motivation. It sure makes the work easier this way.*

Stage Four: Acceptance of Difference

As we become increasingly aware of our own culture, we begin to recognize how truly distinct other cultures are from our own, and we understand this distinction as difference without judging it to be "bad" or "less developed." This movement into the stages of ethnorelativism reflects our capacity to acknowledge our own

cultural filters and suspend our judgments temporarily in order to understand others. In a sense, for the first time, we may see the complexity and validity of the other culture's worldview.

Individuals who are operating at the acceptance stage are initially interested in behavioral differences ("They use chopsticks and we don't"), and move into more complicated observations ("I've noticed that Mariko observes our group conversation for a long time and thinks carefully before offering her comments"). Ultimately, those at acceptance are able to decipher—and accept—profound value differences. However, it is essential to note that this does not mean agreement or preference for those values, but rather acceptance of the reality of the other culture's worldview. In addition, people at the acceptance stage will not expect that people in other culture groups will share their worldviews.

In the community, therefore, those in acceptance do not assume they are bringing "answers" or "help," but are more likely to understand that they are operating as "colearners" in the community environment. For instance, as part of her service-learning requirement for her degree, Natacha is volunteering at her local AIDS hospice.

> *When I arrive at the hospice, I now know I am entering a different world. I realize, for the first time, that while I thought I was doing this work to help them, I'm the one who is learning, changing, growing. Sometimes it is really difficult for me, since some of the patients are gay, and I'm not really sure I understand everything I should about their culture. Still I try to be respectful of their strength, their humor, and, especially, their patience in teaching me how to be more useful. Sometimes it seems as if we are building a bridge between our ways of viewing the world.*

Stage Five: Adaptation to Difference

The necessary motivation to move to adaptation occurs when we need to be effective in our interactions with others in order to get something done. It is no longer enough merely to have the mindset (to know *about* a culture). Adaptation requires the alignment of a mindset with a heartset (motivation to continue engaging with difference) and skillset (skills for engaging with difference), as well. Bringing all of these elements together helps one develop ***empathy***, the premier capacity of an interculturalist. Empathy is the capacity to take the perspective of the other culture, to shift frames of reference, and to act in the context of the other's perspective. Based on our appropriate frame shifts, we can adapt how we interact, a process called "code-shifting." We may adapt our greeting rituals, our problem-solving strategies, or our apology patterns as part of a reciprocal learning experience.

Those at the stage of adaptation may wonder: "Do I have to abandon who I am to be interculturally sensitive?" For instance, "Do I have to give up being a feminist while I work in a church-based soup kitchen?" It may help us to understand that intercultural sensitivity is an *addition* to your personal repertoire of behavior, not a subtraction. You are who you are, but with adaptive intercultural expertise. You maintain a commitment to your own values and strive to make personal decisions in accordance with them, while understanding that others do the same from within their own cultural perspective. And you take on the challenge of creating an intercultural context large enough for all of these perspectives to coexist.

Kichiro is part of a class team designing a community-based learning project. Not only is the project located in a multicultural area of town with which he is not familiar, but his team also includes members from six different ethnic groups:

> *This term I have been trying very hard to participate in class discussions. Although this is my third year in the United States, I never imagined how difficult it would be to get a turn in an American class discussion. The students always seem to be interrupting each other, so I have resolved to adapt and try to be more direct with them. It's quite challenging to do this. However, I think some of my classmates also realize how useful my more quiet style is when we go into the community, where it fits very effectively. So perhaps the adaptation is mutual.*

Stage Six: Integration of Difference

The natural outcome of sustained, in-depth intercultural adaptation is *multiculturality*, the internalization of multiple cultural identities. This may result

Exercise 5.4: The Competence Continuum

Reread all of your own writings completed so far for this course. (These could be pieces that came from the reflection activities suggested in this book or other assignments you have completed.) Highlight passages in these writings that reveal one or more of the stages of the development of intercultural sensitivity. What do you notice about these statements? How is your awareness of your own ability to practice intercultural sensitivity impacted by your re-reading of your written work for this course? How has your capacity for working across cultures changed over the duration of this service experience? What specifically has facilitated that change? How have you been encouraged to practice cultural humility and intercultural competence, as revealed in your own written work?

What do these statements suggest about the effectiveness of your work in the community so far? What information is present here that suggests areas for additional attention as you continue to work collaboratively with each other and with the community and develop your intercultural competence?

when individuals intentionally make a significant, sustained effort to become fully competent in new cultures. This adaptation may occur for nondominant group members to a dominant or colonial culture, or persons who grew up in multiple countries, or long-term sojourners who have lived for extended periods of time in other cultures. It may also occur for individuals who consciously live in ways that bring them into full participation in two or more cultures simultaneously.

This multicultural identity allows for lively participation in a variety of cultures but may result in an occasional sense of never really being "at home." Home has become everywhere: Your sense of who you are as a cultural being becomes quite complex. The multicultural person brings many perspectives to every task, numerous ways to solve problems, and multiple possibilities for shifting codes. While multiculturality is certainly not a prerequisite for deeply effective and respectful collaboration across cultures (which becomes increasingly possible as one develops one's mindset, skillset and heartset), engagement in such collaborations may ultimately inspire a person to desire and strive for this degree of intercultural competence.

Soraya is a chemical engineer who has lived in other cultures most of her life. For her senior seminar community-based project, she is working on an environmental task force dedicated to saving the local river basin. In her journal, Soraya wrote the following:

I enjoy this task force because I can use the many cultural frames I have to try to solve problems. In each culture where I have lived, people resolve challenges differently. While I can shift from one frame to another, I still know who I am. I feel most comfortable bridging differences and acknowledging all the parts of the multicultural me.

A Step Further: Investigating Power and Unpacking Privilege

Becoming both interculturally sensitive and interculturally competent is fundamental to working successfully with others who embody different cultural ways of being and doing. These differences may be clear and overt, or they may be quite subtle. Adopting a stance of cultural humility, as a preliminary step, allows us to remain open to the many expressions of human ways of being and doing that have their foundation in the rich diversity of cultural forces.

To go a step further, we may choose to investigate the ways in which some groups have historically been and continue to be disadvantaged both socially and politically. This is referred to as ***marginalization***—the exclusion or separation of individuals and groups of people from access to power, opportunities, and resources afforded to others. As you consider your community partnership, think about ways that mar-

ginalization currently manifests within the community you are serving. In other words, how is the social and political reality you are engaged with in your community partnership informed by racism (exclusion based on race and ethnicity), sexism (exclusion based on gender), classism (exclusion based on socioeconomic status), heterosexism (exclusion based on sexual orientation), and other forms of ***discrimination***? Further, what can each of us do about these social injustices, while we are members of this class community and after we leave this particular community setting?

Giroux (1983) and Solorzano (1997) claim that "marginalized" persons can become empowered agents for change beyond the boundaries of socially and politically imposed separation. This insight is especially important with regard to students' experiences in service-learning courses. In fact, marginalized persons—those who find themselves outside the centers of power—may be more likely to instigate change since these persons may have less to lose and more to gain by doing so. While systems and organizations may have historically disenfranchised and isolated some groups of people, true hope for improving social conditions resides (at least in part) in collaborating with those who best understand that isolation and exclusion through their own lived experience. For many of us as community-based learners, understanding how we may have experienced marginalization in some aspects of our lives as well as access to power in other aspects will help us understand more precisely how we may collaborate with others to bring about the change we all, as collaborators, desire.

In a well-known and widely available article, author Peggy McIntosh writes about her awakening to the fact that she experiences ***privilege***, or unearned benefits, on the basis of her white skin (McIntosh, 1988). McIntosh writes that, although she did not ask for these benefits, she receives them simply because she is a member of a dominant group. Further, she was not taught to investigate these privileges or even to recognize that they exist, because, while we may understand that racism is something that puts others at a disadvantage, we are generally taught not to see that the privilege that stems from having white skin puts white people at a distinct advantage:

> My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as . . . an unfairly advantaged person. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed the pattern my colleague Elizabeth Minnich has pointed out: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow "them" to be more like "us." (McIntosh, 1988, p. 1)

In her article, McIntosh gives many examples of the ways she benefits by her membership in the dominant racial group in the United States. Among other things, she includes everyday benefits related to being and doing in the world, such as "I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed," as well as deeper social issues, in that "I can be pretty sure that if I ask to talk to 'the person in charge,' I will be facing a person of my race," along with broader political issues like "I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color who constitute the world's majority without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion" (1988, p. 1).

Because the way that privilege works is often so tricky to understand, so slippery, and generally so invisible and complex, it can be difficult for those of us who experience privilege to fully understand that we hold it and how it may act as a barrier to our successful work across cultures. Because of the complex nature of identity—the fact that most of us experience some degree of privilege stemming from some aspect of our identity that aligns with a dominant culture—we are all charged with investigating the ways that we do and do not have access to power, and how that power is connected to certain social and political benefits.

Take, for instance, a student of working-class background who is of the first generation in his family to go to college. Perhaps this student is you or sits beside you in your community-based learning course. Because he is the first among his family to attend an institution of higher education, in his first days on campus he may find it an enormous challenge to navigate the complicated systems in this new environment: how to register for courses, how to sign up for a library card or a meal plan, or how to approach a professor with a request to be added to a class. Given the lack of experience his family has had in this regard, he may have to do much more work to understand these systems than someone from a middle- or upper-class background who has

been informed by her parents or siblings about what to expect and how to negotiate it. Not only is the first-generation college student disadvantaged in this scenario, but the student with a family history of college attendance holds privilege relative to that status. This student didn't ask for the benefit, most likely doesn't even know it exists, and certainly is not a bad person for holding this privilege, but the privilege exists and benefits her regardless of her awareness of it.

Another way to think about privilege comes from the work of sociologist Pierre Bourdieu (1977), who describes ***cultural capital*** as specialized or insider knowledge not available equitably to all. If we understand "capital" in the way economists do, as a synonym for "wealth," we begin to see how particular cultural experiences may become more highly valued than others, because these experiences transfer the kinds of attitudes and knowledge that give their owners greater access to power and resources. The first-generation college student described above did not have the same cultural capital as his classmate to "spend" in his first days at school, and so had to extend additional amounts of his time and energy to figure things out. Similarly, we may think about cultural capital as it applies to the persons we are serving in our community partnerships, and how limited access to particular kinds of highly prized and useful information may keep entire groups on the margins.

As learners who are serving, we are charged with exploring the ways in which privilege attaches to membership in certain groups in order to better understand the cultural dynamics at play in our community partnerships and to continue to develop our intercultural competence. Helpfully, McIntosh (1988) offers a list of ways in which she has identified her white-skin privilege, which we will use in exercise 5.5 as a way to investigate privilege.

Conclusion

Let us return to our starting point: with Michael, our community-based learner, reflecting on how his collaborative partnership brought out more creativity than he had ever experienced in a group setting. Asked to speak about the learning he gained around intercultural sensitivity, power, and privilege, Michael had this to say:

At first, I have to admit, I was defensive about all this privilege stuff. As a white male who grew up

⁂ Exercise 5.5: Investigating Privilege

Begin by reading Peggy McIntosh's article "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" (available free in abridged form through several Internet sites). After your reading, respond in writing to the following questions:

- What feelings emerged after reading this piece? Describe as precisely as you can the body sensations and emotions that you experienced. What information does this mix of feelings give you about your own experience of privilege or lack of privilege relative to race and ethnicity?
- How is your reading of this piece informed by your complex cultural identity? For example, are there particular ways you read this piece because of your socioeconomic class, nationality, native language, gender, sexual orientation, physical/mental/emotional ability, spirituality/religion, political views, or other identifiers?
- How does this piece connect for you to your experience of your community partnership? Adapting McIntosh's list to your own experience, are there points of intersection between your position relative to power and privilege and the positions of others served by your community partner? Are there dislocations between you and your community partner that you can identify through your adapting this article to your situation?
- What does your developing consciousness about power and privilege mean for your work with the others in your class and with your community partner an for your developing intercultural competence.

in a middle-class household, it seemed that this was about bashing me and people like me for having had a good upbringing. It seemed at first that I was supposed to pretend to be someone I wasn't, or apologize for who I am and be ashamed of it. After being in this course, though, I am gaining some new perspectives. It's not that I'm supposed to deny that I have access to privileges because of my position in the world, but that I should become aware of them so that I'm more effective at communicating with people from different backgrounds. I realize now that I can make a choice to use my privileges for the benefit of both myself and others. I realize that I'm privileged to be in college, and I have the opportunity because of it to connect this community organization up to new marketing strategies for their Meals on Wheels program for the elderly.

One thing in particular my professor said has really stuck with me. You know how we've all learned the Golden Rule, to treat others the way we want to be treated? She said that, in intercultural relationships, we should use the Platinum Rule [M. Bennett, 1979] *instead: "treating others the way that they themselves want to be treated." To do that, we have to really get to know each other. And to really get to know people, we had better get pretty good at communicating despite our differences.*

Like everything else, "service" as a concept and practice is informed by our complex cultural identities and the privileges we hold (and do not hold) relative to those identities. We end this chapter by asking you to go deeper still, into the heart of your motivation for doing service and the impact that motivation may have on others. Remembering McIntosh, who said that unexamined privilege may lead us to see our own positions as "neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow 'them' to be more like 'us'" (McIntosh, 1988, p. 1), be cognizant about how we may frame our culturally informed positions on service so that they may orient us to serve from a place of being agents for social justice and social change, for the benefit of us all.

Key Concepts

cultural capital	ethnocentric	marginalization
cultural humility	ethnorelative	mindset
cultural self-awareness	generalization	privilege
culture	heartset	skillset
discrimination	intercultural	stereotype
empathy	intercultural competence	

Key Issues

- What is an "intercultural" context? How is it especially relevant in community-based learning?
- How do your mindset, skillset, and heartset orient you toward effective intercultural communication?
- How might generalizations help us familiarize ourselves with cultures that are new to us? How do stereotypes hinder our understanding?
- How do power, marginalization, discrimination, and privilege affect individuals, relationships among classmates, and community partnerships?

ADDITIONAL EXERCISE

⁂ Exercise 5.6: Serving Justly

Reflect on all of the information, reflections, and activities you have engaged with in this chapter. How has this chapter informed your ideas about yourself as a cultural being? How has it encouraged you to develop your intercultural sensitivity and competence as a community-based learner? How do you understand your ideas about service as issuing from your cultural being? What stance can you adopt as a community-based learner and worker that respects the cultural differences you encounter while also creating positive change for the common good?

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