

# Motivating People from Privileged Groups to Support Social Justice

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*One of the more challenging aspects of multicultural education is engaging people from dominant social groups (e.g., men, whites, heterosexuals) in promoting equity. This article presents a theoretical perspective for understanding what may motivate people from privileged groups to support diversity and social justice. The three main sources of motivation discussed are empathy, moral and spiritual values, and self-interest. The complexities and limitations of each are considered. A model is also proposed that broadens the conception of self-interest. Educational strategies are suggested to address these different sources of motivation. By better understanding what motivates someone to support diversity and equity, educators can more intentionally choose approaches that will engage individuals, and thus more effectively promote personal and institutional change.*

Efforts to promote multicultural education and social justice are widespread in our educational systems. I refer to endeavors that focus on equity and social change, not simply inclusion and tolerance (Sleeter, 1996; Sleeter & Grant, 1994).

Multicultural education challenges and rejects racism and other forms of discrimination in schools and society and accepts and affirms the pluralism (ethnic, racial, linguistic, religious, economic, and gender, among others) that students, communities and teachers represent. Multicultural education promotes the democratic principles of social justice. (Nieto, 1995, p. 307)

These multicultural efforts, however, are met with varying responses. Some individuals actively try to implement curricula, programs, practices, and policies that foster diversity and social justice. Others attempt to block changes that would increase the representation and empowerment of oppressed groups. In general, people from marginalized groups are more likely to see the need for multiculturalism, whereas people from privileged groups (whites, men, heterosexuals, upper-class people) are less likely to advocate such changes. Yet in order to attain educational and social reforms,

we need to enlist the support of people from privileged groups, including those who are policy makers, administrators, teachers, parents, community members, and students.

There are obvious reasons why people from dominant groups resist challenges to the status quo—they are in the more powerful and privileged roles. There are also plenty of reasons why they remain apathetic and uninvolved. Yet we know from history and our current experiences that people from privileged groups also support, and often lead, struggles for social justice. Instead of focusing on why people from privileged groups *don't* support equity, I have been exploring what motivates people to do so. Why do some people from dominant groups act as allies, supporting the rights of an oppressed group of which they are not part? I have been reviewing research and asking people in classes and workshops that question.

People's responses tend to fall into three distinct, though related, categories.<sup>1</sup> Some speak about a personal relationship they have with an individual from an oppressed group, of how they can relate from their own experiences to the experiences of others, or how they feel a sense of connection or "we-ness." I call this type of response empathy.

Others speak of their need to act morally and their discomfort with the hypocrisy between what they believe in and what they observe around them. Some talk of unfairness, of how certain groups don't deserve their plight, and of their desire to fulfill the American ideal of equality. A spiritual belief in the inherent worth and dignity of all people motivates others. I call this type of response moral principles and spiritual values.

Still others focus on how oppression affects them as members of the dominant group and the potential benefits of greater equity. They speak of wanting to live in a world with more harmonious intergroup relations, of wanting a world safe for their children, and of seeing how the survival of the planet requires greater justice. They yearn for more authentic relationships with diverse people, more comfort and freedom in their interactions, and an increased knowledge of other cultures. Some acknowledge the benefits to their organization through increased enrollments, retention, or profits. This group of responses I name self-interest.

In this article, I will first describe and discuss empathy, moral/spiritual values, and self-interest separately, addressing the variations within each. I will then explore how to appeal to each of these factors in order to engage people from dominant groups in multiculturalism. Finally, I will briefly consider their interconnections and the value of utilizing multiple approaches.

## EMPATHY

Empathy involves being able to identify with the situation and feelings of another person. It incorporates affective and cognitive components, requir-

ing both the capacity to share in the emotional life of another, as well as the ability to imagine the way the world looks from another's vantage point. Empathic connections can be useful for promoting more positive attitudes and inspiring action. Research suggests that empathy and the desire to help is a natural human inclination (Kohn, 1990).

Many theorists have discussed the significance of empathy in social relations (see Kohn, 1990, for a review of the literature). Inhibiting empathy for people in oppressed groups is a powerful tool in maintaining oppression. When we fail to see our common humanity with people we perceive as different from ourselves, we can more easily ignore their plight. It also allows us to dehumanize others, seeing them as less than human or unworthy of care and respect. This sets the stage for the acceptance or perpetuation of violence, a common strategy during wars (Grossman, 1995).

On the other hand, empathy can be a powerful tool in promoting social responsibility. Empathy helps us connect with and subsequently care about others who seem different. "Coming to see others as more simply human than one of Them, represents so drastic a conceptual shift, so affecting an emotional conversion, that there may be no greater threat to those with an interest in preserving intergroup hostility" (Kohn, 1990, p. 145).

Empathy also evokes altruistic motivation. This helps to counter the egoistic desires to avoid personal costs and maintain relative advantage. Furthermore, it makes it more difficult to use derogation as a means of maintaining a belief in a just world—vilifying or blaming victims for their circumstances in order to continue to believe that society is fair (Rubin and Peplau, 1975). Instead, it tends to encourage prosocial action to remove the injustice (Batson et al., 1997).

There is a difference between using empathy to motivate altruistic or helping behavior and using empathy to encourage social activism and support for social justice. Most research on empathy and altruistic or prosocial behavior is confined to studies of people responding to someone's immediate distress (often in laboratory conditions). A single act will often suffice to alleviate that distress. Prosocial activism, on the other hand, is "sustained action in the service of improving another person's or groups' life condition by working with them or by trying to change society on their behalf" (Hoffman, 1989, p. 65). This involves understanding that the other person(s) is part of a social group and recognizing the chronic nature of the victim's distress. Although I will draw upon the research on empathy and prosocial behavior to discuss why people act in caring and socially responsible ways, the research on prosocial activism is most relevant to social justice efforts. As I will show, it is important that we encourage people to see beyond aiding an individual in a particular situation, to supporting societal changes in order to improve the lives of those who face systemic victimization.

## POTENTIAL PITFALLS OF EMPATHY

While empathy is a powerful force in acting for justice, we need to be careful in our efforts to help people from dominant groups empathize with the experiences of people from marginalized groups. Elizabeth Spelman (1995) spells out some of the paradoxes of these efforts and dangers to watch out for. In the “paradox of appropriation” there is the tendency in the process of seeing oneself in the experiences of others to erase the specifics of the other’s experience and to equate the two experiences. While we want someone to connect to the experiences of another and to a sense of shared humanity, we do not want them to expropriate that experience. It is falling into the trap of thinking, “I know just how you feel!”

In the “paradox of identification” the danger is overemphasizing the similarity of experiences by ignoring the differences and the larger social and historical context in which these experiences take place. This overlooks the implications of differential social positions and access to power and privilege. Since oppression depends on highlighting difference and building barriers based on those differences, identifying with others can break down those divisions. However, this poses the danger of thinking “We’re all alike.”

## TYPES OF EMPATHIC RESPONSES AND MOTIVATIONS TO ACT

An empathic connection with someone who is suffering tends to elicit two kinds of affective responses (Hoffman, 1989). One is *personal or empathic distress*. This is when the empathy generates uncomfortable feelings for the person who is empathizing. This “negative arousal” may make the person feel anxious, upset, disturbed, guilty, or shameful. With empathic distress, an individual is having a personal reaction of distress to the situation of another. For example, when I see the unsafe, overcrowded, and inadequate conditions of the schools for children in the inner city near where live, I often feel guilty and upset.

A second kind of affective response is *sympathetic distress*. This is what usually comes to mind when we think of empathy or compassion. It involves caring about and feeling for the person in distress. In response to the above school conditions, I may also feel sorry for the children and their families who must live with these circumstances. Hoffman (1989) has suggested that sympathetic distress may also elicit other related feelings. These can include feelings of empathic anger—anger on behalf of the victim toward the party responsible for the suffering, and empathic injustice—feeling that the victim’s treatment is not fair and not deserved.

Once we have empathized and feel some kind of empathic or sympathetic distress, we have to decide what to do about it. Different types of

empathic responses tend to produce different motivations to respond to the person (group) in need. While these motivations are independent and distinct internal responses, they are not mutually exclusive and often occur together.

Two main motives for acting on our empathy are egoistic motivations since they are primarily concerned with addressing our own needs (Batson, 1989). The first motivation is based on acting in *compliance with internalized standards*. Through socialization, we internalize standards or expectations for appropriate actions or behaviors. We may act on our empathy to live up to these expectations and to avoid feeling guilty or uncomfortable by falling short of our standards.

The second type of egoistic motivation is *aversive arousal reduction*. The motive is to reduce one's own distress that was generated by empathizing, to counter feelings such as guilt, anger or discomfort. A third motivation that is not egoistic is *altruism*, which is focused on addressing others' needs. This motivation to act is based not on relieving one's own distress, arousal or needs, but on responding to the needs of the other person.

People's motivation to act on their empathic responses can be based on any one or all of these factors; often the line is blurry. Though isolating the specific factors is not crucial for educators, it can be helpful to understand people's motivation in order to better foster and channel their emotional energy.

#### LIMITATIONS OF EMPATHY

The potential of empathy as a positive social force can be diminished in many ways. There are many factors that reduce people's ability to feel empathic. People need a certain level of cognitive ability and flexibility to engage in perspective taking, as well emotional flexibility to make an affective connection to someone else. People are less likely to experience empathy if their own needs feel more pressing than those of others, if the victims are seen as accountable or deserving of their fate, if the others are seen as too different from themselves, or if the situation feels too psychologically threatening (touching on one's own unresolved issues, unconscious conflicts, or disappointments).

Even when people do feel empathy, there are several factors that reduce their motivation to act on this empathic connection. One is empathic over-arousal. People can be overwhelmed by their own feelings of distress that are generated from being empathic. The level of guilt or anxiety can be immobilizing. Second, a person who is unable to relieve the suffering of another may rationalize the failure to act by derogating the victim. Third, we live in an unsupportive social context, in a culture where people are encouraged to see victims as deserving their plight. Empathic abilities and the motivations to act are not widely taught, encouraged, or valued in this society.

In order to use empathy as a motivation for progressive social action we need to help people emotionally and intellectually relate to other's experiences. As educators, we need to understand that people may be motivated by their own personal needs as well as by altruism. We also need to be able to assess and address the various individual and societal impediments to people first developing and then acting on their empathic responses.

#### FOSTERING EMPATHY

In order to increase empathy, both the intellect and the emotions need to be engaged. In general, to foster empathy, people need to maximize personal knowledge and heighten emotional attunement. By imagining people's point of view and feelings, they can better understand another's situation. It is also helpful to minimize distance and anonymity by actually getting to know real people and experiencing their life circumstances.

There are many things educators can do to increase the empathy of people from privileged groups toward people from oppressed groups. Individuals can be exposed to the life experiences of others through books, movies, panels, and personal testimony. Hearing the information in person tends to be the most powerful (though this has a higher risk since there is less control over what people say and do). There is, of course, the possibility of seeing an individual as an exception or atypical for his or her social group. Therefore, it is valuable to include a variety of experiences from within that group, or to discuss how this individual reflects the experiences of many others. In addition, since perspective-taking fosters empathy, we can provide frequent opportunities for people to develop their ability to take the perspective of others and consider other points of view. This can be done through simulations, role plays, and case studies.

Educators can also ask people to reflect on and share their own experiences with discrimination and oppression. Nearly all people are members of at least one oppressed group. And, everyone has some experience of being stereotyped or treated unfairly. People can better understand the feelings of others through considering how they felt in similar circumstances. This can be a helpful starting point in making some connections and developing compassion, but further discussion is needed so that isolated incidents are not equated with systematic, socially sanctioned mistreatment.

Furthermore, if we want people to be engaged in social action, they need to understand that a person's plight is not just an individual issue. Lack of opportunities or disadvantage are due to larger societal conditions, which requires addressing social inequalities. People need to understand that the distress of an individual is symptomatic of some form of systemic oppression that also affects many others like them.

Finally, people can be given the opportunity to get to know actual people and experience their situations firsthand. In a diverse class, cooperative learning and group projects can help achieve this end. Internships, extended visits to different neighborhoods, volunteer work, and service learning can reduce both emotional and physical distance.<sup>2</sup> Even helping that is initially done nonempathically can lead to empathy (Kohn, 1990). People who help tend to develop a more positive view of those they have assisted, become more concerned with their well-being, and feel a greater responsibility to continue to help them (Staub, 1989).

In general, empathy allows people to connect with others who are different, see their common humanity, and begin to care about the situation. This can lead to a desire to help change the circumstances that are causing suffering. Since the effective use of empathy generally requires that people see the victim's situation as somehow wrong or unfair, moral principles become an important ingredient.

#### MORAL PRINCIPLES AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

Morality deals with questions of right and wrong. Research suggests that people are intrinsically motivated to behave fairly and to seem moral and good (Kelman and Hamilton, 1989; Tyler et al., 1997). Value systems affect people's judgment of a situation and their determination of whether it violates their moral or spiritual code. When someone considers something morally or spiritually wrong, it provides an impetus to act to remedy that situation. Even though people from privileged groups may be inclined to justify their advantage as fair, studies demonstrate that concerns about justice affect both the feelings and behaviors of the people in privileged positions (Tyler et al., 1997). Many actions toward social justice are taken to uphold ethical or spiritual values (Colby and Damon, 1992; Daloz et al., 1996; Hoehn, 1983; Oliner and Oliner, 1988).

#### TYPES OF MORAL REASONING

There are two commonly recognized modes of moral judgment. One is a person-oriented ethic of care; the other is a principle-oriented ethic of justice (Gilligan, 1980; Lyons, 1988; Reimer et al., 1983). The dominant ideology in the United States that espouses values of fairness, equality, and equal opportunity reflects a justice orientation. Each of these moral orientations has implications for motivating support for social justice.

A morality of justice, long believed to be the only system of moral reasoning, is focused on rights and fairness. This form of morality is concerned with upholding principles or standards and is rooted in a formal sense of equality and reciprocity (treating others as you would want to be

treated). When using this type of reasoning, people make moral decisions based on the application of logical, abstract, and impartial rules or principles. From this perspective, people contend that something is unfair or unjust when it violates these accepted standards, which often involve equal rights, equal opportunity, or role-related obligations or duties.

A morality of care is focused on relationships and responsiveness. This type of morality is concerned with promoting the welfare of others, preventing harm, and relieving physical or psychological suffering. Using this type of reasoning, people arrive at moral decisions inductively, based on maintaining connection and avoiding hurt. From this perspective, individuals contend that something is morally wrong when people are being harmed or not cared for.

People may therefore agree that something is morally wrong, but arrive at that determination in different ways. Take, for example, a situation of housing discrimination based on race. A justice perspective might focus on its unfairness, since it violates our laws that assert equal opportunity. A care perspective might focus on the harm to the families looking for a home and the suffering it causes them.

Most people tend to prefer one type of moral orientation, though they often use both. Since a morality of justice is the norm, even people who prefer an ethic of care are fluent in and use an ethic of justice perspective. Studies have suggested that women tend to use an ethic of care more frequently than men (Gilligan, 1980; Lyons, 1988). There are also developmental sequences within each of these moral frameworks—ranging from self-protection or self-advancement to concern for the common good. These stages further impact people's moral judgments and motivations to act on them. Moreover, since people use different kinds of moral reasoning, they may be motivated to do the "right thing" for different reasons. (See Gilligan, 1980, for a description of the sequences. See Goodman, 2000, for a discussion of how these relate to working with people from privileged groups.)

Spiritual beliefs may fall within the moral frameworks of care or justice or have their own ethical imperatives. Some talk of upholding the Golden Rule, of treating everyone as a child of God, or of the importance of relieving suffering. Despite their many differences, most religious or spiritual belief systems share a common mandate to care for those less fortunate and to treat people humanely.

#### LIMITATIONS OF APPEALING TO MORAL PRINCIPLES AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

Equity theory suggests that recognizing an injustice produces an uncomfortable and distressing emotional state (Tyler et al., 1997). People attempt to restore a sense of justice (1) behaviorally, by changing their behavior or

the situation and (2) psychologically, by changing their interpretation of events (such as assuming people are lazy, incompetent, undeserving). The psychological solution allows people to justify their advantage. People who view themselves and others as personally responsible for their success or failure are more likely to assume that societal inequities are legitimate.

Even when people do recognize an injustice, they decide whether to act based on two main factors. The first is practical concerns (e.g., the likelihood of success or of retaliation, the amount of self-sacrifice). People may want to see justice occur, but may not be willing to incur the consequences of the imagined change. The second is the ambiguity of the situation—how clear it is that an injustice has occurred and what needs to be done to address it. If people are not convinced that there is an unfair inequity or do not believe that what is proposed will remedy it, they are less likely to act.

In addition, there may be some groups of people who are seen as non-entities, undeserving, or expendable, and thus are morally excluded from one's scope of justice (e.g., migrant workers, the Japanese during WWII, gays) (Opatow, 1990). This allows people to see the harm to these groups as acceptable, appropriate, or just. Moreover, the less a person's sense of self is rooted in a moral identity, the less persuasive moral arguments will be.

#### APPEALING TO MORAL AND SPIRITUAL VALUES

Invoking moral principles and spiritual values can motivate people to live up to their values, and to right what they perceive to be wrong. However, for people to act on moral or spiritual principles they need to be aware that there is, in fact, a violation of their values. Everyone may not agree on how to remedy the moral infraction, but if they see that there is an injustice, this can generate concern and investment to address it.

First, it can be helpful to encourage people to identify and articulate their moral/spiritual values. This provides a standard from which to judge situations. It can also provide educators with useful information about how to speak to their concerns. Although everyone does not have the same interpretation of justice or fairness, most people in this country support the notion of equal opportunity and equal rights.

Next, we can educate people about inequality. People often have little accurate knowledge about social inequities. In addition to providing facts, statistics, personal stories, and theories, people can be asked to conduct research themselves and to gain awareness from firsthand experiences. Students are usually more persuaded by information they uncover themselves. If people think that a life on welfare is one of luxury and an easy free ride, we can ask them to research the amount of the allowance, to live on that amount for a few weeks, or to apply for welfare to see how they are treated.

Once people are aware of an inequity, we can help them to see that it is unfair, that it violates their moral/spiritual principles. Unless they perceive the discrepancy as an injustice, they will not feel that a moral wrong has been committed. Since there is pressure to cognitively distort situations in ways that justify the status quo, educators need to be able to challenge those distortions. We need to help people question the dominant ideology that makes inequities seem fair and to offer alternative explanations. People can be encouraged to reexamine their assumptions and beliefs that blame the victim, deny discrimination, and presume a level playing field. We can help elucidate how institutional structures and practices violate stated principles of fairness and equity. When myths are exposed and systemic inequality is revealed, people are more likely to feel that their values have been breached, that something isn't right. Consider the above example of welfare. If people realize how inadequate public assistance is in supporting families and in providing the necessary job training, transportation, day care, and employment opportunities for people to get decent paying jobs with medical benefits, they are more likely to feel that people are being denied the opportunity to live a reasonable life off welfare. This can be detrimental to those individuals and society at large.

Since an ethic of justice tends toward an intellectual or cognitive orientation, providing information and facts is a useful strategy. An ethic of care tends to be more feeling or affectively oriented. In this case, an effective approach is to illustrate the harm of social injustice, thereby promoting empathy. This appeals to values of caring for others and alleviating suffering.

After people recognize a moral injustice, the next step is motivating them to take some action to remedy the situation. For some, the clarity of a moral wrong might be enough to elicit their support. For others, more particular appeals may be needed. We can be more effective at appealing to moral values if we understand the process through which people determine what is just and why they would act morally. Otherwise, we can offer a range of reasons that will appeal to people with different moral orientations and motivations.

When I do antiracism training in schools with teachers, I will appeal to their sense of morality. I presume that most teachers became educators because they cared about students and education. First, I discuss how schools inadequately educate students of color and the (unintended) racism in many school practices, policies, and culture, such as the disproportionate representation of students of color in special education classes, more severe disciplinary actions, higher drop-out rates, lower expectations from teachers, and noninclusive curricula. This sets the stage for a moral response. There are usually several ways to appeal to people's moral values to engage them in creating a more inclusive and equitable school environment. I tend to include a variety of rationales, both to appeal to different concerns and to provide examples of more principled and caring considerations.

There are some individuals who are most concerned with protecting their personal reputation or professional career. For them, addressing racial inequities can reduce the likelihood that they will be accused of racial bias by parents or students. For those most concerned with being able to teach with fewer discipline problems and conflicts, the training can help them reduce negative behavior and tensions among students. For those concerned with being good, fair, and caring teachers, the training can help them better meet the needs of their students and be more trusted by them. They can better prepare all their students to value differences. Some people are concerned with upholding stated values such as wanting every child to be able to reach their full potential or wanting to create a caring community where people are not subjected to hurtful or demeaning behavior. They are seeking ways to create an environment in which everyone can learn and work effectively.

Deciding whether to address a moral injustice is more than a simple instrumental decision, a rational assessment of the costs and benefits of a certain course of action. Emotional reactions may be the most important influence on *whether* or not people take actions. The *type* of action is more a function of cognitive judgments (Wright et al., 1990). Thus, eliciting emotions such as anger or moral outrage enhances one's likelihood of acting. People are also more likely to act to restore justice when there is a clear injustice and when there is a particular set of actions that could correct the injustice. Therefore, it is important that people have specific ideas of how to act that they feel will make a difference. Otherwise they may feel hopeless and powerless and resort to psychological distortion.

In order to successfully appeal to moral or spiritual values, we either need to know how people conceptualize an issue or provide an array of reasons so that at least one connects with their perspective. If we just present what we personally find ethically persuasive, we may not reach people or foster more complex moral thinking.

### SELF-INTEREST

Self-interest is assessed, in part, by considering the limitations of the current situation and the potential advantages of a new arrangement. Even though there are many benefits of oppression for people from dominant groups, there are many drawbacks as well. I have identified some common costs of oppression to people from privileged groups across different forms of injustice. I developed this list of costs based on exercises with hundreds of individuals from advantaged groups and on a review of the literature that addresses the negative ramifications of various types of oppression on the dominant group (e.g., sexism: Kaufman, 1993; Kimmel and Mesner, 1989; Kivel, 1992; Thompson, 1988; classism: Bingham, 1986; Mogil and Slepian, 1992; Wachtel, 1989; racism: Bowser and Hunt, 1981/96; Feagin &

Vera, 1995; Kivel, 1996; and heterosexism: Blumenfeld, 1992; Thompson, 1992). These costs include the loss of mental health and an authentic sense of self, the loss and diminishment of relationships, the loss of moral integrity and spiritual center, the loss of a full range of knowledge, and the loss of safety, resources, and quality of life. Many people from privileged groups seek greater integrity, better interpersonal relationships, safer communities, more effective organizations, and a better utilization of our resources toward the common good (health, environment, education) rather than to address the results of inequality (criminal justice, social services, welfare). These various psychological, moral, intellectual, social, and material costs, and perceived benefits, provide some basis for why people from privileged groups might support greater equity and how justice can be in their self-interest. (For a more complete discussion of these issues see Goodman, in press.)

The term "self-interest" tends to have a negative connotation. In fact, the primary dictionary definitions refer to it as selfish concern and personal advantage. These common definitions of self-interest imply that one gains at the expense or exclusion of others, that it is a zero-sum game. While this may reflect one aspect of self-interest, it ignores that what may be in my interest may also benefit you.

People often assume that there is something inherently wrong or less "pure" in considering one's own interests or needs, especially in doing work as an ally. Yet a healthy self-concern is not the same as selfishness. We do not need to ignore or act against our own needs in the process of working for justice. But to do so, we need a broader understanding of self-interest (see Lappe and Dubois, 1991, and Kohn, 1990, for a discussion of alternative conceptions of self-interest). In this spirit, I will propose a more complex conception of self-interest and suggest that it is a useful, if not necessary, component of motivating people from privileged groups to support social justice.

#### CONTINUUM OF SELF-INTEREST

Instead of defining self-interest merely as selfish concern, we can define it more broadly to include benefits to oneself that do not necessarily exclude benefits to others as well. Self-interest can incorporate the interests of others and oneself. It can range from a very narrow, selfish perspective to a more inclusive, interdependent perspective. There are two key factors that distinguish different types of self-interest: one's conception of self (separate and autonomous or connected and relational), and a short- or long-term perspective (whether one focuses on immediate or long-run interests). Moreover, as evidenced in the costs of oppression mentioned earlier, the benefits for people from dominant groups may take various forms,

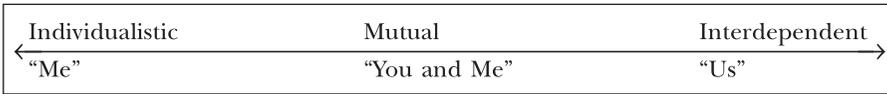


Figure 1: Continuum of self-interest.

from the psychological to the material. I will describe a continuum of self-interest (Figure 1) and provide some illustrations of the various perspectives.

On one end of the continuum is *individualistic* or “me-oriented” self-interest. This coincides with the common equation of self-interest with selfish concern. People operating from this type of self-interest may support social justice efforts solely for their own perceived personal gain. The concern is for the self; the fact that it benefits someone else is incidental or secondary. The prime motivation to support multiculturalism is seen in terms of what it will do for me. Appealing to this type of self-interest may get someone to do the “right thing” for what may seem to be the wrong reason. It is a short-sighted and short-term perspective on self-interest, concerned with immediate benefits, most often material in nature. For example, a politician may support rights for people with disabilities because it will provide votes among a needed constituency. A student may take a class on diversity issues simply because he thinks it will look good on his resume and will increase his marketability.

Further along the continuum, self-interest involves a consideration of what benefits others as well as oneself. Moving away from a narrow, self-oriented perspective, this reflects a more *relational* view of self-interest. A *mutual* perspective sees benefits for both—“you *and* me.” The action is based on real concern for others. The personal benefits may be of many types. People may volunteer in a food kitchen because it makes them feel good about themselves and allows them to feel they are doing something helpful (psychological) or to learn more about homelessness (intellectual). At the same time, they may also genuinely want to do something to address the disadvantaged situation of others. There may be material benefit when the decision to sponsor a “diversity week” is based on the desire to respond to the concerns of marginalized groups, while also seeing it as a strategy to quell greater demands and accusations that the organization doesn’t care about diversity.

My assumption is that for the majority of people who support social justice efforts, there is some sense of mutual benefit. Even though they might like to believe or have others believe that it is solely on behalf of the oppressed group (in which case it would be pure altruism with no self-interest), I suspect that most of us also get some other personal satisfaction from engaging in such actions. This, in turn, motivates further involvement.

The *interdependent* perspective has a greater relational view. It blurs the boundaries between you and me and sees “us.” As Sampson (1988) explains, “When the self is defined in relation, inclusive of others in its very definition, there is no fully separate self whose interests do not of necessity include others” (p. 20). Work on behalf of others is simultaneously work on behalf of oneself. From this interdependent perspective, since our lives and fates are intertwined, social justice efforts are being done for our collective benefit. A heterosexual person who fights against homophobia might feel that all of us need to be free from rigid sex-role and lifestyle constraints.

Interdependent self-interest may require that people work against what appears to be their immediate self-interest. However, a relational sense of self and a more long-term perspective allows them to see the benefit to themselves and others in the long run. Wealthy people may support higher tax rates or caps on executive salaries (which impact their own earnings) in order to create a more equitable distribution of wealth. They may believe that since a more peaceful society depends on people having quality educational and work opportunities, and decent living conditions, there needs to be a fairer allocation of resources. White men (or women) may support affirmative action, even though in the short run it reduces the likelihood that they themselves would be hired. They support a practice they feel will lead to the kind of world they want to live in—one with great equity and the inclusion of important talents and voices that have been discounted.

#### APPEALING TO SELF-INTEREST

Most change agents know that you need to be able to answer the question, “What’s in it for me?” People are concerned with how things will affect them. The previous section outlined how people may construe that question differently, yet in some form, people want to have their needs met.

A basic principle of conflict resolution is to identify underlying concerns and interests and to try to develop a solution that meets the needs of both (all) parties. This requires letting go of preconceived solutions and the willingness to think creatively in order to come up with alternatives that would be satisfying to everyone involved. Conflicts often persist because people cannot imagine alternatives to the present situation or do not believe that their needs will be met by the currently proposed solutions. The same is true with issues of social justice. People often don’t support efforts to eliminate oppression because they feel nothing can really change or they cannot imagine how it could be different and not threaten their well-being. Ultimately, we need to help people from dominant groups expand their sense of possibilities to see how their long-term interests and needs really can be met by social justice. In the meantime, we may need to identify their

present and short-term interests and find ways to address those while engaging them in actions for equity.

Some appeals to self-interest can be strategically targeted toward a specific issue or action. In this context, self-interest is used as a strategy toward a particular end (at least for the moment). We are interested in getting support for a given program or project. It can also be used in a more educational or theoretical way to help change people's ways of thinking about multiculturalism and to help them understand how oppression is harmful to all. In this case, the goal is two-fold: consciousness raising and changes in attitudes and behavior. Both strategic and consciousness raising approaches can be used separately or together.

### *Strategic Approaches*

First, we need to find out what people are concerned about. Then we can try to show how those concerns can be addressed by supporting a social justice agenda. For some people, these concerns may be very self-focused. For others, they may be more inclusive of other people. The examples along the continuum of self-interest illustrate what might appeal to people with different types of self-interest. The most important thing is to understand their viewpoint and to speak to their needs. From there we can make the link to issues of equity and show how their needs can be compatible with social justice.

Even while appealing to the more individualistic types of self-interest, we can offer a more interdependent perspective. It is a chance to raise consciousness, to provide alternative ways of thinking and challenge the win-lose mentality. Since we do not want to reinforce individualistic thinking, the goal is to start where people are and help expand their perspective toward thinking about the common good. While providing additional examples of how to use self-interest to garner support for a current issue or project, I will also illustrate how we can expand on narrow self-interest, help people see their personal concerns in a larger context, and link their short-term and long-term interests.

As a University Affirmative Action Officer, I needed to enforce affirmative action guidelines that many people felt were unfair and interfered with their right to hire whom they wanted. In order to get their cooperation, I often pointed out ways in which hiring a person from an underrepresented group benefited them—not only were they more likely to get permission to actually fill that position, but that person might also help attract and retain students in their department, especially from underrepresented groups (which was important for maintaining or increasing the viability and resources for their department). I also included how this new person's experience or perspective might enhance their own scholarship and thinking about their

discipline, and how diversity makes the campus a more vibrant and attractive place to students and faculty. Finally, I challenged them to think about what it meant to be “most qualified” (especially when diversity is a goal) and provided information about how to more fairly evaluate qualifications. Regardless of the real reason for their compliance, I felt I needed to expose them to broader ways of thinking about and of justifying the hiring of an under-represented candidate.

Another approach is to link personal concerns to larger issues of equity and justice. This shifts the dynamic from blaming the victim to blaming the system. Many college students, particularly at public universities, are concerned about paying for college and experience the stress of working and worrying about expenses. I have heard white students complain about the “special treatment” some students of color receive, and about some of the scholarships that are set aside just for them (though this is quickly changing). This leads some white students to blame students of color for the white students’ lack of financial support for college. The economic concerns of white students are valid. However, the real problem is not students of color (who also generally receive very little financial backing). Some white students realize this. Instead of working against scholarships for minority students, they have organized to challenge the larger system that does not make college accessible to all who want to attend. They have enlisted the support of other white students by addressing their concerns about college costs, but focus on the bigger issue of educational funding and opportunity. Through collective action and lobbying with students of color (and other allies), they have been more successful in addressing access to a college education (e.g., through lower tuition and more state and other aid). Although their concerns may be about their own college tuition, the solution may be to address the larger issue of economic and social equity. Their self-interest is better served by more systemic change.

Lastly, we can help people see that they can better meet their short-term *and* long-term interests by supporting efforts that promote justice. Most people are concerned with juvenile crime and drug dealing. Some people believe that building more prisons is the answer. In many communities, people are trying to create comprehensive programs for youth that include education, training, and constructive involvement in recreational and community activities. One strategy to enlist support for these efforts is to help people see how these types of programs reduce violence, are far more cost effective than building prisons, and improve their quality of life. In the short run, young people are less likely to be involved in illegal activity and create problems on the street. In the long term, they are more likely to become productive, contributing citizens as opposed to adult criminals, prison inmates, or welfare recipients, who require further government money. Comprehensive youth programs also maintain the integrity of the commu-

nity and property values. Instead of some “quick fixes,” people’s short-term as well as longer-term concerns can be addressed.

### *Theoretical/Consciousness-Raising Approaches*

The strategic use of self-interest clearly provides the opportunity for consciousness raising. Educational contexts often offer us greater latitude in educating people from privileged groups about their self-interest in social change. We can help them to explore the costs of oppression, the benefits of justice, and how to move toward the kind of world in which they would like to live.

There are many ways people can be given the chance to consider the costs of oppression to themselves and others from dominant groups. I have asked them to identify the ways they feel negatively affected by some form of oppression in which they are part of the privileged group. This exercise makes most sense once they have already done some exploration of oppression and multicultural issues. After considering this question individually, they then listen to the responses of peers, which provokes further reflection and discussion. Students can also do this activity in small groups with others who share a particular dominant identity. Together they can explore how they as members of a privileged group have been hurt by social injustice.

This may be one of the few times when the pain of people in privileged groups has been acknowledged and validated. When I have conducted this exercise with groups, simply viewing the list of costs generated by the group has had a significant impact. It vividly illustrates the pervasive detrimental ramifications of oppression for members of dominant groups. For some groups, having them respond to a general list of costs will be much easier and more effective than trying to develop their own. You can ask what items they relate to and to add their own examples. Even for people who have a difficult time identifying costs, it encourages them to think in a different way, it allows them to hear the stories of others, and it begins to broaden the way they think about oppression and their role in it.

People from oppressed groups may have difficulty seeing themselves as members of a privileged group. I consistently find that people of color have difficulty with this type of exercise. They tend to be most aware of their experiences as the victims of racism and less able to identify as members of racial a privileged group in another “ism” (for example, able-bodied, heterosexual, male, middle-class, Christian). Some of this may be due to their stage of identity development as well as to the fact that the existence and impact of racism is often minimized. I have found it important to acknowledge the pervasiveness of racism and its widespread effects, including how it mitigates other areas of privilege. However, the focus of this exercise is not on privilege but on the costs of oppression to all. Therefore, I encour-

age them to think about how they might also be harmed by an oppression where they are not the direct targets. In addition, before I begin the discussion of costs to the dominant groups, I usually review how oppression affects those in disadvantaged groups and some of the privileges for those in advantaged groups. I then add the part about negative effects on people from dominant groups, suggesting it is a way to provide a more complete and complex understanding of oppression. Naming oppression and recognizing privilege at the outset allows some people from oppressed groups to then feel more comfortable considering costs to the privileged group.

People may suggest situations in which they see themselves as the victim of “reverse racism” or another form of oppression. Affirmative action is often a favorite example of how white people are negatively affected by racism. First, it is helpful to dispel the myths that there is currently a level playing field and that affirmative action has taken away so many jobs from white men. Then it’s important to help them reframe this situation and understand that whites are not the victim of racism, but face limitations imposed by affirmative action as a result of racism in our society. A system of racial discrimination and bias has motivated the establishment of these kinds of programs and supports. If there were no racism, there would be no need for affirmative action and special consideration because of race.

Students can then be encouraged to imagine what it would be like if there were no racism, sexism, or other forms of oppression, and how that would benefit them. What would it feel like to be rid of the limitations, pressures, guilt, moral ambivalence, conflict, and ignorance? Visualizations, drawing, writing, discussion, and list making can make these imaginings more concrete. A related approach is to have people compare their vision of an ideal world with current reality. Ask people to imagine and describe the kind of world they want to live in. They can consider how oppression and inequities undermine this ideal and how greater social justice might help to reach those ideals. This exercise can also be focused on a particular aspect of society—for example one’s community, school, or workplace.

We can also help people to identify and experience more equal and satisfying relations in everyday life. Imagining a total transformation of society can seem too unrealistic or abstract to be useful. Yet in most of our daily lives we have the kinds of experiences that would be more available in a just and caring society—more equitable, mutually supportive, and authentic relationships. Help them verbalize these situations and positively reinforce these kinds of connections and ways of being. This activity can be used to discuss how to create more of these types of experiences and how to change the systems and structures that undermine these ways of being. This discussion can help people think about their investment in social justice and lead them to consider ways to move towards that vision.

## PROS AND CONS OF APPEALING TO SELF-INTEREST

Intentionally appealing to self-interest can be a controversial strategy. It has advantages as well as dangers. Although it can be a useful and necessary approach, we need to be thoughtful and careful in its use. I will first discuss some of its possible pitfalls and then consider some of its positive uses and benefits.

One of the major dangers of using narrow self-interest to motivate support is the distrust it breeds from people (both allies and people from oppressed groups) who are more genuinely committed to the action. People appropriately may not trust the motives, the depth, and/or the longevity of the support from people acting out of individualistic self-interest. If the motivation stays only at the level of narrow, individualistic self-interest, their support may be withdrawn when self-interest is reassessed as circumstances change. Appealing to individualistic self-interest without trying to broaden their perspective or commitment may reinforce a way of thinking that is counter to our ultimate goals.

Additionally, someone may engage in superficial involvement or low-risk commitment while undermining a more serious examination of the issues or meaningful change. This often ends up as mere lip service. Or it can trivialize or co-opt the issue. Most people are familiar with the token committee, the unread report, or diversity training that never goes beyond understanding cultural differences to address inequities in organizational policies and practices. Sometimes strings are attached. All too often, support will be given as long as the work is not too radical or avoids certain topics.

Using self-interest to develop support also has advantages. Appealing to narrow, individualistic self-interest starts where people are and engages them in a way that makes sense to them. "Speaking their language" initially may be more effective than appealing to issues that hold little interest. While we might prefer that people engage in actions from more lofty ideals and commitments, this is not always immediately possible. Obtaining support, even if it is with selfish motives, may allow a project that would otherwise be blocked to move forward.

Engaging people by appealing to narrow self-interest can also help them develop a deeper concern and investment. Involvement with an issue may expose people to individuals, situations, or information that they might not have otherwise encountered and which may, in turn, change attitudes and subsequent behavior. This can result in a more genuine commitment to equity. In some situations, if the ally behavior is inconsistent with currently held beliefs or behavior, it may create cognitive dissonance and the need to rationalize the new behavior. Attitude change may occur in order to justify the behavior to oneself and others.

Furthermore, recognizing one's self-interest, particularly from a mutual or an interdependent perspective, can foster a more long-term commit-

ment to social justice. A recognition of the collective benefit may mitigate against a patronizing attitude of just “helping them.” This reduces the potential for condescension and makes one more trusted by the oppressed group. Shifting the focus from only doing it for others to also doing it for ourselves enhances our investment. It can be hard to sustain a commitment to social change, particularly when some issues are framed as against your immediate best interests. Acting for oneself, not just for others, can help deepen and sustain support for multiculturalism.

### THE CONNECTIONS AMONG EMPATHY, MORALITY, AND SELF-INTEREST

By themselves, empathy, moral or spiritual values, and self-interest can provide an impetus to support social justice. Figure 2 summarizes the three main sources of motivation. However, they often operate in conjunction, and can be addressed in combination to strengthen the appeal to alliance and action. I will provide some examples of how they can be used to bolster each other.

#### EMPATHY JOINED WITH MORAL PRINCIPLES AND SELF-INTEREST

The use of moral values along with empathy can help transform feelings into action. Instead of someone’s just feeling badly, moral or spiritual principles can create a sense of responsibility to act to alleviate the suffering or injustice. The experience of empathy may lead to the invocation of moral principles. In addition, since empathy generally requires that people see the situation or suffering as unjust, moral principles can allow people to come to that understanding or interpretation.

Self-interest is implicit in much empathically motivated behavior. People often act in socially responsible ways to address their empathic distress. Self-interest can motivate and sustain action once their empathy has been aroused.

#### MORAL PRINCIPLES JOINED WITH EMPATHY AND SELF-INTEREST

Empathy can help move one’s moral concern out of the abstract and impersonal. Over-concern or emphasis on rules, ideology, or abstract principles may impede or diminish one’s sensitivity to the suffering of real people (Kohn, 1990). In these cases, empathy can help put a human face on and make a personal connection to moral injustice and thus enhance their commitment to address the situation. Feeling a human connection can also help expand one’s sense of who is included in one’s moral community. The more others are seen as similar or sharing a close relationship, the less able

**EMPATHY:** Identifying with the situation and feelings of another person. The capacity to share in the emotional life of another, as well as the ability to imagine the way the world looks from another's vantage point.

*Motivation:*

- 1) to reduce one's own negative feelings that were aroused by empathizing (e.g., guilt, anger)
- 2) to comply with one's own internalized standards (e.g., of being caring)
- 3) altruism

**MORAL PRINCIPLES AND SPIRITUAL VALUES:** Beliefs about what is right and wrong.

*Justice oriented*—Focused on rights and fairness. Concerned with upholding principles or standards that are rooted in a sense of equality and reciprocity (treating others as you would want to be treated).

*Care oriented*—Focused on relationships and responsiveness. Concerned with promoting the welfare of others, preventing harm, and relieving physical or psychological suffering.

*Motivation:*

- 1) to live up to and according to one's moral/spiritual values
- 2) to right what one perceives as a wrong

**SELF-INTEREST:** Benefits to oneself that do not necessarily exclude benefits to others as well.

One's conception of self-interest can range from a very self-oriented, *individualistic perspective*, to a *mutual perspective* that includes benefits to oneself and as well as others, to an *interdependent perspective*, where one's own and others' interests are intertwined.

*Motivation:* to get one's needs met

Figure 2: What motivates people from privileged groups to support social justice?

one is to maintain the cognitive distortion to justify the status quo. In addition, empathy may be evoked after initially acting out of moral principle once some human contact has been made.

Moral values promote action in part to maintain self-integrity. It is in someone's self-interest to protect his/her self-esteem and self-image. For some, self-interest is central in their process of making moral judgments. For those with more principled reasoning, a more mutual and collective sense of self-interest strengthens their ability to follow through on their moral convictions. Since people generally weigh the personal costs before taking action on their moral values, increasing the sense of personal benefit helps shift the balance toward acting.

#### SELF-INTEREST JOINED WITH EMPATHY AND MORAL PRINCIPLES

Empathy can shift people out of narrow, individualistic self-interest by fostering a concern for others. It can strengthen the feeling of connection and promote interdependence. This can help move toward a more mutual and collective sense of self-interest.

Moral principles can encourage people to act not just out of selfish motives or short-term advantage, but also out of ethical considerations. They provide people with other guidelines to make decisions about their behavior. Since we want people to be engaged in social justice work with commitment and integrity, enhancing one's emotional and intellectual investment leads in this direction.

#### CONCLUSION

The framework of empathy, morality, and self-interest can help educators reflect on how they try to engage people from dominant groups in diversity and social justice issues. It offers those who are advocating for multicultural education another way to think about how to be more persuasive. My impression is that educators often emphasize one of these aspects—usually empathy or morality—to the exclusion of others. Or some people address all of these factors in general ways, without considering some of the variations within each. For example, people may discuss justice-oriented moral arguments but not care-oriented ones. They may highlight interdependent self-interest but not individualistic self-interest.

As I've discussed, there are many reasons people from privileged groups become engaged with social justice concerns. I think educators tend to highlight the information that they find most powerful and convincing. However, if we only present the perspectives that *we* personally find compelling, we will not necessarily meet people where *they* are or speak to their concerns. By better understanding and analyzing the thinking and motiva-

tion of particular individuals, we can better tailor our approach to them. We can more intentionally include activities and arguments that target different sources of motivation. This can be especially helpful with people who seem apathetic or resistant. In general, as we become more conscious of how we use empathy, moral and spiritual values, and self-interest, we can enhance our educational effectiveness.

Moreover, by developing and appealing to empathy, moral and spiritual principles, and self-interest, we can go beyond just eliciting feelings or enhancing awareness to encouraging action toward social justice. People can not only learn about different cultural groups and their plights, but develop an interest in addressing the injustices they face. This, ultimately, needs to be the goal of multicultural education.

### Notes

1 I wish to acknowledge the work of Steve Wineman (1984), which suggested a framework for these responses.

2 Even though service learning can be beneficial for both students and communities, there is also the potential for it to undermine the goals it seeks, such as reinforcing stereotypic beliefs and a colonialist mentality of superiority, and of exploiting the community for the benefit of the student (see, for example, Cruz, 1990; Kendall, 1990; Reardon, 1994).

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Start studying social justice. Learn vocabulary, terms and more with flashcards, games and other study tools. Privileged individuals do NOT have to be personally oppressive to benefit from the oppression of subordinated groups, Individuals from privileged and subordinated groups CAN work to end oppression/create or work toward social justice, People from dominant and subordinated groups CAN contribute to or perpetrate oppression., Oppression creates systematic, unearned advantages (privileges) for dominant groups and systematic, unearned disadvantages for subordinated groups. reasons why members participate in oppression of their own groups. Criminal act that is motivated by a bias toward the victim(s) real of perceived ID. california. Most people involved in social justice will have a similar story " taking a small, initial action that propelled them into social justice. If you want to get involved in a movement for good, check out these eight tips for how to get started and meaningfully support others doing impactful work. Image: Mashable Composite, CEM OZDEL/ANADOLU AGENCY/GETTY IMAGES, 350org on Instagram. 1. Educate yourself on a particular movement.