

Teaching Race, Gender, Class, and Sexuality

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A Teaching Guide to accompany:

***The Matrix Reader: Examining the Dynamics
of Oppression and Privilege***

INTRODUCTION

Race, gender, class, and sexuality are rich topics for any classroom. No longer are these concepts explored only in social science classes, but now they extend to curricula in humanities, language arts, health studies, business, and even engineering. The issues that arise around these topics are integral in our lives. They speak to how we identify ourselves, how we understand others, and how we interact with each other. These are important ideas no matter what subject you are teaching. When *people* are involved in learning, their social group memberships may at times be put in relief in favor of their cognitive processes. These identities, however, are never absent, and certainly affect the way we all participate in the world.

Focusing on race, gender, class, sexuality, or any other *social location* in the classroom can prove extremely rewarding for educators. Those who teach these challenging concepts can attest to the fact that they can produce inspiring, exciting, and ultimately transformative results. These concepts, however, also produce a potentially volatile environment that can generate devastating consequences for students and teachers, alike.

The Matrix Reader: Examining the Dynamics of Oppression and Privilege provides readings to give students a comprehensive understanding of these demanding concepts. The goal of the reader is to equip students with knowledge and understanding of:

- social group memberships/identities,
- how these identities are categorized and hierarchized in society,

- an historical perspective (“how did we get here?”),
- how these identities play out in society and in students’ lives, and
- how students can work towards individual and large-scale social action

This instructor’s manual provides tools and strategies that can help guide you through this often intense process.

OVERVIEW OF INSTRUCTOR’S MANUAL

Each section of this manual corresponds to each section of *The Matrix Reader*. The manual starts off with strategies and suggestions for the first day of class. It then provides interactive class activities for small and large groups, suggestions for videos, discussions, and additional resources. In addition, from teaching this subject for many years, I have found that there are certain points in every semester where the bulk of students’ resistance to the material becomes apparent. Each chapter of this manual includes a section entitled, *Potential Challenges*, which provides concrete solutions for dealing with this resistance in (and sometimes outside of) class.

One of the many goals of *The Matrix Reader* and this manual is to ground students with knowledge and then to equip them with strategies so they can become agents of change. The editors organized the book in an order that we felt enables students to learn the material optimally. Some of us, however, introduce certain concepts earlier than others. For example, one editor chooses to begin her class with the concept of privilege as she has found that students immediately become aware of how privilege plays out in society, and subsequently, in their own lives. The students then have the rest of the semester to unpack the concepts that surround the topic of privilege. Other

editors choose to wait until students have an understanding of some of the history of oppression before introducing the concept of privilege. The book and the manual take the latter approach, but that does not mean you have to teach the topics in this order. In fact, you will see that periodically the manual will refer to an article from *The Matrix Reader* that is from a different section. I encourage you to experiment with and discover what order works best for you.

In addition, the activities presented are based on a classroom size of 35-50 students. It is certainly possible to tailor any exercise to a smaller or larger group, depending on space parameters. Finally, I am not suggesting that all of the strategies and activities in this manual are meant to be absolute or all-encompassing; there is simply no single way to teach these subjects successfully. What is provided here are purely guidelines and suggestions that I have found useful and effective.

BEFORE GETTING STARTED

Self-Evaluation

Teaching about issues of oppression and privilege can be quite challenging. These topics demand a hands-on approach so that students can see their lives and their experiences reflected in the material. In contrast, to teach these concepts from a strictly theoretical approach minimizes their potential to empower students to become agents of change. To be effective as their guides, therefore, we must understand the extremely challenging process in which we are asking students to engage. Before we can successfully facilitate our students' learning in these areas, we must challenge

ourselves as educators, citizens, and human beings, to consider the personal impact of these topics.

We must ask ourselves:

- How do institutionalized systems of inequality affect *me*?
- Which of my own social locations allow me access to benefits that are denied to others?
- Which of my own social locations deny me access to resources?
- How do these inequalities play out in my own daily life?
- How have I been socialized to think about others, based on their social group memberships?
- How do I treat people differently based on those memberships?

We must evaluate how oppression and privilege play out in our own lives to better understand how these systems of inequality are manifested and perpetuated. We must answer these questions honestly regardless of the potential pain it may cause us to do so. This process is imperative if we expect to guide our students successfully.

Managing Emotions

Some courses demand the concentration of students' intellect, yet students are asked to leave their hearts at the door when they enter. A course that focuses on the topics of oppression and privilege, and more specifically, on how these concepts play out in students' lives, is *not* one of these courses. Since everyone has a race, a gender, a

class, and a sexual orientation, everyone (including both student and teacher) comes into the classroom with both positive and negative experiences. More importantly, they come in with the emotions that are inherently integrated with those experiences. To create the best possible environment in the classroom to tackle these difficult subjects, it is critical for teachers to be or become self-aware about their own emotions on these topics. Teachers, too, cannot leave their hearts at the door; it is important to acknowledge, understand, and manage our own emotions before even stepping into the classroom.

A tremendous amount of research has been conducted on the concept of emotional intelligence (EI) and the importance for leaders to go through a process of self-discovery. If educators are self-aware about their own emotions, they are more likely to manage those emotions successfully, especially in times of stress. In other words, not only is it important to manage the emotions of students in the classroom as they learn about these potentially volatile concepts, but also it is imperative that I, as the facilitator of the class, am aware of my own *triggers*: those topics that bring about a physiological and thus an emotional response in me.

EI has been critical for my work in the classroom. For example, I am aware that one of my triggers in class occurs when white students complain that they are oppressed because they don't have access to as many scholarships or jobs as people of color do. When I hear this, my first reaction is frustration, anger, and a resulting fast heartbeat. I might get a bit red in the face and want to verbally react without thinking. I have to remind myself that students have been socialized to believe this is true, regardless of the facts that prove otherwise. In reality, white students have access to the same

number of scholarships as people of color, and certainly a much larger pool of jobs than people of color, especially when most jobs are awarded to people the employer already knows. Since most employers in the U.S. are white, it is much more likely that job opportunities will be given to a white person than to a person of color. I find it helpful to take a deep breath and mentally remind myself that this is one of my triggers. For if the goal is for students' learning to take place, an aggressive or defensive response from the teacher could be demoralizing and destructive. It could produce lasting consequences not only for the student who made the comment, but also for the rest of the class in terms of their future willingness to participate.

Possessing self-awareness about our own triggers allows us to calm down in the face of these challenging moments, and permits us to teach in a productive, rather than a destructive way, perhaps making it a *teaching* moment. Being self-aware allows us to manage the emotions that arise. Ask yourself: What are my triggers? Understanding our own triggers helps us to acknowledge and be more compassionate when other people experience a trigger-response (a concept to which we will return in Chapter 4 of this Instructor Manual).

GETTING STARTED: THE FIRST DAY OF CLASS

There are several strategies that can be implemented to create an environment that invites discussion and most importantly, respect among students. Incorporating some or all of these into your teaching plan can increase participation as well as minimize resistance to the material.

Classroom Environment

It is possible to teach content courses about oppression and privilege in a lecture format. I have found that the most transformative experiences, on the other hand, occur when students are not only allowed, but also encouraged to share their personal experiences with other students. To increase participation then, it is helpful to create a welcoming, respectful, open, and relatively safe environment that promotes open discussion and dialogue.

One way to encourage discussion is to consider the actual setting of the classroom. I always request a classroom that has moveable chairs with desk-attachments. When students come in the first day, I ask them to put their desks in a circle – even when the class has 40 students in it. I also bring large index cards (4x6 or 5x7) for them to create name tents, with their name on the front *and* on the back (so those next to them can see their name). Being able to see each other and each other's name immediately gives students the impression that this space is different from many of their other classes. It is an effective way to immediately break down barriers between students. This is not a class where they will necessarily be competing with each other; it is one where they will be learning about each other. Students often tell me that these two techniques help them feel more comfortable participating in class.

Classroom Norms

Another way to encourage a relatively safe environment is to establish classroom norms, or *ground rules*, on the first day of class. Ground rules are critical for any class that includes discussion so that students know what is expected of them. There are several ways to create these ground rules. One of the editors of *The Matrix Reader*

starts off by asking students to recall their worst experiences in other classes and to think about what ground rule they would like to set in this class so as not to duplicate that negative experience. These can go on the (white/chalk) board and be typed up and distributed at the start of the second class meeting. Another editor asks students to recall their best experiences in other classrooms to have students consider what made them so. I typically start out with the ground rules that I have accumulated over the years (see below). After we as a class have reviewed and discussed each one, I ask them, “What’s missing? What do *you* need to make this class more comfortable for you to participate?” I then ask them as a group to fill in #12 with whatever they would like to add, and proceed to #13 and so on until the list is complete according to this group of students’ needs.

Ground Rules:¹

1. Acknowledge that sexism and racism exist.
2. Acknowledge that we are all systematically taught misinformation about our own group and about members of other groups. This is true for everyone, regardless of our group(s).
3. Agree not to blame ourselves or others for the misinformation we have learned, but to accept responsibility for not repeating misinformation after we have learned otherwise.
4. Agree to respect others. This includes honoring other students’ experiences by being sensitive to them.

¹ Some of these classroom norms come from Lynn Weber’s (2002) *Understanding Race, Class, Gender and Sexuality: A Conceptual Framework*, McGraw Hill.

5. Agree to raise your hand when you want to speak unless otherwise specified.
6. Keep in mind that no one should be required or expected to speak for their whole race or gender. . . They couldn't if they wanted to!
7. Take responsibility for and accept the consequences of your words.
8. Be willing to keep an open mind: it is *likely* that some of your beliefs will be challenged in this class.
9. Take risks. Comfort is over-rated - dare to engage yourself.
10. Agree to participate in the creation of a "safe" atmosphere for open discussion.
11. Equality pertains to all people with NO exceptions.
12. (leave blank)

A note about #10: I often ask students why I put the word "safe" in quotation marks. What they come to realize is that because of some social identities and/or personal experiences, some students rarely feel safe in *any* room. This is an opportunity to get all the students to start thinking about how our identities define who we are, affect how we feel about ourselves, and how we feel about others.

Ground rules are an important aspect of creating a respectful environment. Getting a verbal agreement from every student that they will abide by these norms is a productive start to the semester. Also, as co-editor of *The Matrix Reader* Abby Ferber suggests, we as educators are also implicated in the learning process and consequently must also

adhere to the ground rules that we set in class. This reminds students that although we may be at different levels of knowledge and experience, we are all on a path of learning and growth.

A Different Kind of Classroom

As mentioned above, ground rules let students know that when they come into this classroom, they are entering a different kind of space, different from many other classrooms. Ground Rule #6 above provides many students, especially students of color, the opportunity to participate with the knowledge that they are speaking only from their own experience, and not from the experience or perspective of their whole race. This is critical in that many students convey that in other classes, when they get to an issue about race (slavery, for example), everyone in the class turns to the one African-American student in the class to see his/her reaction. In fact, these students often mention that it is usually the teacher in the class who turns to the one student of color to get “*the African-American perspective*” or “*the Asian perspective,*” or “*the Hispanic perspective.*” This puts students who might already feel targeted in a classroom (where they might be the only student of color) in an uncomfortable position. It is not students of color’s responsibility to educate others about their race or their race’s collective history. Further, white teachers or white students never seem to ask a white student for “*the white perspective.*” Explaining this phenomenon to the class can be especially helpful so that all students understand that when they speak, they are speaking from their own experience and no one else’s.

Syllabus/Course Requirements

Another way to create an inclusive environment is to consider what we choose to put in our syllabi. Some questions to consider:

1. Do the readings that we've chosen to assign represent diverse identities, cultures, groups?
2. Do the authors of the readings come from diverse backgrounds?
3. How have we chosen to assess our students? Is participation graded? If so, is there more than one way to participate?
4. How do we privilege some in the class (those who are extroverts, for example) and oppress others (those who are introverts, or who have had previous traumatic classroom experiences, or who have been targeted in other classes)? Is it fair, for example, to *require* that everyone in the class participate in class discussions?
5. Do our assignments accommodate different learning styles?

These are a few ideas to consider when creating a syllabus. If this course focuses on embracing our differences, and not privileging some at the expense of others, our requirements for the course should support this emphasis.

Journals & Small Group Work

One way to encourage everyone's participation is to include journaling as part of the class experience. There are many ways to incorporate journaling. I ask students to use

a standard exam “blue book” as a journal in my class. It seems to be the right size, and is easy to collect to review throughout the semester.

Periodically during class, I ask students to take out their journals. I then ask them a specific question dealing with the topic at hand, most often asking them to reflect on how the information or the topic relates to them personally in their own lives. I then give them three to four minutes to write their answer.

When they are done, I break them into pairs, or small groups of 3, to share what they wrote in their journals. I always give students the option of saying, “Pass” if they have written something they do not want to share with their classmates. This strategy demonstrates respect for their privacy and encourages them to write very personally without fear of being required to share something intimate with others. After another 3 to 4 minutes, we come back together as a class and I ask students if they would like to share with the whole class what they wrote, and a lively discussion usually ensues.

The benefit of asking students to write their answers first gives them time to reflect on what they want to say. Asking them to share in small groups gives everyone the chance to be heard and specifically, to share something about themselves. This is especially important for those who have difficulty speaking up in class. Some students confess that they don’t think of their answers as quickly as other students, so by the time they have framed their answer and raised their hand, others have already spoken up and the class has moved on to another topic. With journaling, on the other hand, these students are given the time to think through their answer, to write it in their journals, and to practice sharing it in a small group. They then tend to feel more

comfortable sharing their answer with the whole class, and consequently feel good about participating.

A Note about Confidentiality

The topics covered in this course are difficult and challenging. I try to encourage students to discuss the topics we have covered in class with their friends and family. It will help them process the material, and it also will help them to become effective at talking about these difficult subjects. I require, however, that in talking about something that was said in class, they share the information without sharing the classmate's name who made the comment. This allows students the opportunity to process the material and at the same time, protect their classmate's confidence.

Frontloading

On the first day of class, it is important to differentiate between what the class is and what it is not. Ground Rule #1 above asks students to agree that sexism and racism exist. The reason this is a ground rule is to establish that fact right away. We don't want to spend precious class time arguing this point. I tell students that we will not contest this fact and that if any student is unsure whether or not this is true, that s/he should do one of two things: 1) as co-editor of *The Matrix Reader* Andrea O'Reilly Herrera suggests, "suspend your disbelief." In other words, bear with me until you see the statistics and the information presented in this course, and stay open to the possibility that these inequalities do, in fact, exist; or 2) if you vehemently disagree that racism and sexism exist before any information is presented, and refuse to be open to the possibility that it does, this may not be the right course for you.

Having this conversation not only lets the students know that this is not a debate class (discussion, yes; debate, no), but also gives students who fall into the #2 situation above, the opportunity to disenroll early. This is important for the overall effectiveness of the course. If one student has tremendous resistance to the material during every class meeting, every student suffers. Doubt and animosity become the norm rather than trust, and you are left to deal with arguments, and thus no forward progress, every class meeting. It is better to be up-front about where you stand, and then the class as a whole can move forward. The statistics provided by this reader unequivocally demonstrate that oppression exists; debating this fact is simply not productive.

Finally, actually disseminating handouts with statistics about oppression on the first day of class is one way to minimize resistance on these topics (see Appendix A for a handout compiled by Abby Ferber and myself). As soon as students become aware of some of the inequalities and injustices that exist in society, they are much less likely to argue about them. This also would be an opportune time to review the difference between societal trends (the facts and reality provided by the statistics) and anecdotal evidence (students', or their friends', experiences, which sometimes mirror and sometimes contradict societal trends). Going over these concepts also serves to minimize resistance because often students whose experience does not correspond with societal trends want to reject the trend as untrue. It is helpful to point out that their experiences are not wrong but merely anomalous. This topic is covered in more depth in the section, *Potential Challenges*, at the end of Chapter One of this Instructor Manual.

Confronting Stereotypes

Introducing the “elephant in the room” on the first day also helps to break down barriers and stereotypes in the classroom. Oftentimes, when students walk into a classroom, they make assumptions, sometimes unknowingly, about the instructor teaching the course. As Michael Kimmel (2000) points out, a white male’s opinion is considered “objective.” Everyone else has to prove themselves. I have found it helpful to bring this up on the first day so that students become aware of their capacity to stereotype. I immediately ask them to challenge themselves on this issue. We can challenge the notion, for example, that because I am white, I must know nothing about race or racism. And without asking students to raise their hand if they were thinking this, I can point it out and let them know my qualifications for teaching about race. This also allows them the opportunity to reflect on how these assumptions can cloud their ability and willingness to learn. Moreover, by talking about my own social identities, I can serve as a model for them to do the same.

For the fact is, as a white person, I, too, have a race, and my life has been inexorably impacted by it. Students need to understand that this course analyzes the systematic inequalities that exist in society not just from the perspective of those who have been victimized by the inequalities, but also from the perspective of those who have benefited, often unknowingly, by them. This fact makes this course different from most courses on race and gender around the country. Rather than focusing only on those who have been traditionally oppressed by societal inequalities, this course includes everyone. We are all implicated by the patterns of injustice. Students need to know that they are learning about these topics in a progressive, even cutting-edge, way.

Furthermore, the stereotype about a course on gender is that it will be a male-bashing course and will only cover women's issues. I find it helpful on the first day to challenge these assumptions by letting students know that it will cover topics such as masculinity, heterosexuality, and whiteness. And that bashing males will do nothing to bring about social change or equality. In fact, we need everyone to challenge inequalities, so why would we want to alienate males?

Ice-Breaker

Getting to know each other on the first day of class sets the tone towards building a warm, compassionate classroom community. Of course any ice breaker can work, but try and find one that will guide students and be useful for your objectives of the course. A simple activity to get started is to go around the classroom and ask students to introduce themselves and say something about themselves that they think might surprise the rest of the class. This is helpful in immediately starting to break down stereotypes about others; a key component of the course.

Course Goals and Objectives

Finally, it is imperative that students know that the goal of the course is not to *change* them or their value systems, but rather for them to *actively engage* in the ideas and concepts covered. They should spend time considering their socialization: How did they get to the point they are now? Who/what has influenced them? Letting students know this on the first day is helpful especially for those students who might start to fixate on their belief systems and are afraid to reflect on other perspectives. I even include this statement in my syllabus: "Students are required to *consider* different perspectives in

this class. This is not a debate class, but rather a place to share different perspectives for the purpose of sensitivity, learning, and growth.”

Some other questions the course covers are: What impact do categories of difference have on our lives? How does the social construction of difference lead to inequalities? What role do norms play in perpetuating inequalities? How do these social constructions affect our view of society and impact our relationships? Moving back and forth between social systems and how they relate to our lives is the objective of the course.

Only talking about inequalities, however, would be extremely discouraging for everyone. We can instead inform students from the outset that the course will, in fact, provide insight into how inequalities play out, but more importantly, what we can do about them. A central goal of the course is for students to understand these inequalities and to empower them to find ways to become agents of change.

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Appendix A

Just the Facts: A Few Inequalities in the U.S.

Compiled by Abby Ferber and Dena Samuels

- In the nineteenth century, American women had the legal status of children or slaves: their income, inheritances, property, and their children were all the sole property of their husbands. They required husbands' or fathers' permission to sign contracts, make wills or investments, or file lawsuits.
- New Zealand was the first country to give all women the right to vote, in 1893. Women did not gain the right to vote in the U.S. until **1920**; 1944 in France; 1968 in Ireland; 1974 in China; and 1985 in Bangladesh.
- In the U.S. today, women who work full time earn about **77 cents** for every dollar men earn. Compared to white men, African American women make 67 cents on the dollar (African American men make 75 cents); Hispanic women make almost 58 cents (Hispanic men make almost 66 cents).
- At every educational level, women and people of color seeking employment are more likely to be unemployed than white men.
- The vast majority of women leaving welfare do not have jobs that will pay them enough to bring them out of poverty (in 2007, the US government defines the poverty line as \$20,650 per year for a family of four).
- Following divorce, the standard of living for women with children drops 33%, while for divorced fathers it **increases 13%**. American fathers owe **\$24 billion in unpaid child support**.
- **47%** of families headed by single women live in poverty. Women with children comprise the fastest growing proportion of the homeless.
- **Over 90%** of the victims of sexual harassment are women. Between **40-60%** of women experience sexual harassment at some point. **15%** of all women have been sexually harassed in the past year.
- A woman is battered **every 15 seconds** in the U.S. alone. Every five years, more women are killed by domestic violence than the total number of Americans killed in the Vietnam War.
- **Over half** of all married women will experience violence in their marriage.
- **25%** of all pregnant women are physically abused.
- **Half** of all homeless women and children are fleeing domestic violence.
- In the U.S., **one out of every eight** women has been raped. Among college-aged women, **one out of every four** has been raped.
- **Over 90%** of those with eating disorders are female. **50%** of 4th grade girls and **90%** of 11th and 12th grade girls are dieting (only 10% are overweight).

- **75%** of U.S. toxic waste dumps that do not comply with Environmental Protection Agency regulations are found in predominantly African American or Latino communities.
- **Family income**, not race, or parents' academic achievement is the variable that most closely predicts how high someone will score on the SAT test.
- Only **3** of every thousand senior level male managers of Fortune 1000 companies are Asian or Asian American.
- The two richest people in the U.S. own more personal assets than **the 60 poorest countries combined**. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, there are **roughly 3,500,000** millionaires in the U.S.
- Powder cocaine (largely used by wealthy white people) and crack cocaine (largely used by socio-economically disadvantaged Latino and African American people) contain roughly the same amount of the drug per gram. Under federal law, it takes **500 grams of powder, but only 5 grams of crack cocaine** to be sentenced to a mandatory minimum of five years in prison.
- Children raised by single mothers attain, on average **the same level of education as children raised by two parents**.
- 97% of all students in public high schools regularly hear homophobic comments from peers. **53%** report hearing homophobic remarks from school staff or faculty.
- Only **2-3%** of the world population regularly accesses the Internet.
- According to the National Survey of America's Families, non-elderly Hispanic adults are **three times as likely** to be without any health insurance than non-elderly white adults.
- **Less than 1%** of the U.S. Government budget goes to **welfare** and **20%** goes to **Social Security**.

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SECTION 1: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITIES AND EXAMINING INTERSECTIONS

Learning Objectives

1. To introduce students to basic concepts and create a common understanding of terms
2. To examine the ways in which identities are socially constructed and to facilitate students' understanding of the ways in which society affects the individual
3. To complicate the issue of identity

1A: CONSTRUCTING IDENTITY

Students often come into a course about race, gender, class, and sexuality with fixed ideas about these topics. Some may have experiences that coincide with national trends, and others may have opposing experiences. Most come in believing what they were socialized to believe: that we are all individuals and are solely responsible for our own actions. Either way, it is important to give students the opportunity to recognize how their individual experiences are shaped by society.

Sociological Imagination

One way to begin this process is to teach students about C.Wright Mills' concept of the *sociological imagination* (Mills, 1959). Although the concept is sociological, it can be applied to any field in terms of making a connection between public and private spheres. In a nutshell, the *sociological imagination* is taking one's personal experiences and relating them to society as a whole. The example most often used in textbooks is divorce. An individual might go through the difficult process of a divorce, experience all of the associated emotions, and have to deal with the consequences of that divorce socially, economically, etc. But until that individual connects what they are going through with the larger society's trends, they may feel completely isolated

and as if they are the only ones who have ever had to bear the ordeal. Once an individual makes the connection to what is occurring on a larger scale, s/he is able to access resources that might not have previously been available, including law firms that specialize in divorce, support groups, religious organizations that might be of service, etc. As little as fifty years ago, assistance for families going through a divorce were virtually unheard of, until individuals started using their sociological imaginations, connecting the personal with larger societal divorce trends, and realized something larger was going on. That connection provides support and links each of us in society to others.

Moreover, the sociological imagination often allows us to see that there might be larger factors occurring that influence our individual behaviors. So taking this example of divorce one step further, we can see that once the divorce rate began to increase in the 1970's and 80's, more and more struggling couples realized they had another option besides staying married. In addition, it became marginally more socially acceptable to get a divorce. As this example is illustrated in class, students become aware that an individual's actions, in fact, can be influenced by society. Asking them to come up with other examples challenges them to think about how they are often personally influenced by social norms and trends.

Social Construction Theory/Social Constructionism

The discussion of the sociological imagination leads right into another critical concept to address: that of Social Construction Theory (also called Social Constructionism). This concept is the foundation for understanding the framework of *The Matrix Reader*. In fact, co-editor, Abby Ferber, explains the concept in detail in her Introduction for Part I. *Social Construction Theory* states that the ways in which we live, behave, dress, and act, are dependent upon the culture and timeframe in which we live. We can usually tell if something is socially constructed if we

can point to a different timeframe or a different culture and see that it was/is constructed differently.

In her Introduction to Part I, Ferber also explains the other side of Social Construction Theory: Essentialism. Essentialism is the idea that genetics and biology have everything to do with who we are and how we live. As we focus on social change in *The Matrix Reader* as well as in our courses, we put forth the notion that if something is socially constructed one way, it is possible then to construct it a different way. That is certainly not to ignore biology or genetics, rather to consider them as (only) part of our understanding of individual behavior.

The question for students is not: nature *or* nurture – which explains human behavior? Rather, it is important for students to understand what they personally have been taught on this issue. As Ferber states, how we understand ourselves and our biology, even *what* we decide to study, are situated in a cultural context; inseparable from that context. As was stated in the Introduction to this Instructor Manual, the goal of the course is not to get students to ignore what they have been taught, or to force them to change their minds on this or any topic. The goal instead is to challenge them to think about where they stand, and how they have come to think the way they do. A discussion on this topic could facilitate this process. Only through self-reflection can they apply what they are learning to their own lives.

Social Construction of Identities

The Matrix Reader provides many different examples of the way identities are socially constructed in society. This is a great place to begin in terms of the content of the course. I usually start the semester focusing on gender, since I find it to be a subject that students are less afraid to delve into at the beginning. That is *not* to say, however, that we focus on gender by itself. Even from the first class it is important for students to understand that different identities intersect and are completely intertwined. Every reading and subsequent discussion

must incorporate multiple social locations so that students start to learn to consider and analyze these intersections.

In the first article by Jamison Green from his “Becoming a Visible Man,” he challenges the notion of how we know what sex and gender we are. This selection provides wonderful fodder for discussion in that students typically start the course thinking they know for a fact what sex and gender everyone is, including themselves. But when asked, they are often at a loss to put into words how they know this. The idea that gender, and even sex, is a social construction, is typically new to many students.

Jamison Green’s article is a wonderful way to introduce the concepts of transgender and intersex and lead a discussion on these topics. Specifically, he talks about how it would feel to know what sex you are, but look down and physically be a different sex. [For more information and definitions to use for class discussion, go to:

<http://www.glsenco.org/Resources/definitions.htm>]. Asking students about their own gender markers and gendered behavior helps them to connect to gender ideologies on a personal level.

A useful exercise from Paul Kivel of the Oakland Men’s Project, which has been presented by Michael Kimmel and many other educators in the field of masculinity studies, is the Boxes of Masculinity and Femininity. This activity makes it clear what exactly our gender ideologies are.

Activity: Boxes of Masculinity and Femininity

1. Ask students to define femininity and masculinity
 - a. Formal definition: A cultural model of attitudes, behavior, dress, and image that every woman/man in our society is *measured against*
 - b. Informal definition: what it means to be a woman/man in our society
2. Ask students what some of these attitudes and behavior are for men?

- a. On one side of a whiteboard, write “Masculinity” and underneath it, write down student’s examples of “what it means to be a man in our society”
 - b. Answers are usually: tough, strong, independent, provider, heterosexual, white, etc. (if they don’t add the last two, ask about sexual orientation and race)
 - c. When one side of the board is relatively filled, move on to:
3. Ask students what some of these attitudes and behavior are for women?
 - a. On the other side of the whiteboard, write “Femininity” and underneath it, write down student’s examples of “what it means to be a woman in our society”
 - b. Let them know that you are not necessarily looking for opposites of masculinity, but rather what their ideas are for what a woman is supposed to be (like)
 - c. Answers are usually: fragile, caregiver, mom, strong, thin, heterosexual, white, etc. (again, be sure to add sexual orientation and race (to guide them, you can ask them to consider the covers of most magazines, for example))
 4. When the board is filled, I draw a solid box around each side of the board and tell students “THIS is our gender ideology: what it means to be a man in society, and what it means to be a woman in society”
 5. Questions to Ask/Points to make:
 - a. Where did these ideas come from? Students usually have no trouble realizing these images are from 1950’s TV, namely, *Leave It to Beaver*, and other similar shows
 - b. Has anything changed in either box since that time? Usually students will notice some changes in the Box of Femininity (strong, educated, intelligent, etc. are relatively new ideas). It’s important to point out that these have changed specifically because of the impact of the 2nd Wave of the Women’s Movement in the 1960’s and 1970’s, which will be a future focal point of the course.

- c. Who is missing from these boxes? Students realize that just about everyone is left out, but nevertheless, the ideologies are somehow not weakened by this fact.
- d. Focusing on the Box of Masculinity: what happens when males step outside this box? They are considered to be gay and are called derogatory names. This is one important example of the ways that gender and sexual orientation intersect. The ways in which gender is played out impacts other's assumptions about a person's sexual orientation, when in reality, sexual orientation is based specifically on attraction to others. Regardless, these boxes are strictly policed by society. As Michael Kimmel points out, what it means to be a man in our society is: NOT to be a woman.
- e. Women are fairly free to express any emotion they wish, but men are only allowed to exhibit one: anger. There are certainly implications here for domestic and other forms of violence when men are not taught or allowed to show any other of the myriad of human emotions.
- f. Take-home point: When we create limiting, rigid gender boxes (or race boxes, or sexuality boxes, etc.) that people are supposed to fit into, we squash men's and women's humanity and their emotional health and well-being. People learn to hide any aspect of themselves that does not fit into these narrow definitions. We keep ourselves and others in these boxes by the language we use, the way we dress, the way we behave, and even, the choices we make in our lives. And the consequences can be devastating.

Once the class has established our gender ideologies, it makes sense to follow-up with some examples of how these ideologies play out in society and in students' lives. Simple examples like boy vs. girl toys in fast-food restaurants demonstrate how these ideologies start forming from birth. These toys are great visual aids and by asking students to describe the toys, they

get the idea that one is usually active, has to be put together, and its focus is on doing; while the other is usually passive, often based on imagination rather than action, and focuses on dress, hair, or some other image-based trait. It becomes abundantly clear which is the “boy’s toy” and which is the “girl’s toy;” how we are taught these ideologies; and how we are socialized to believe them. Students then begin to think about their own socialization and how they have come to believe and often perpetuate these gender ideologies.

Once students have begun to analyze gender ideologies, it becomes much easier to initiate discussions about heterosexuality as the societal norm. Articles by Katz (“The Invention of Heterosexuality”) and Kimmel (“Masculinity as Homophobia”) in this section of *The Matrix Reader* provide an excellent framework from which students can start to critique the social hierarchy that benefits heterosexuals at the expense of the LGBT community.

Activity: Gender Norms

1. Ask for two male volunteers in the class.
2. Ask them to come into the middle of the room and sit down at desks.
3. Ask one to put his hand on the other student’s forearm.
4. Ask them to tell you when they begin to feel uncomfortable. Time this.

Usually, within seconds, both volunteers and most of the students in the class start to feel uncomfortable. This is a great way to launch into a discussion about gender norms in general, where they came from, who they benefit, and what messages they give us about gender hierarchies.

Once this foundation has been set, the following activity helps students to reflect on how they contribute to this ideology. The goal is not to blame students, but rather to help them connect to the problems that the ideologies foster.

Journal Activity: Perpetuating the Box of Masculinity

1. Describe a situation in which you contributed to keeping men or boys inside the Box of Masculinity.
2. What might be the consequences of your doing so.

Break students into groups of two or three and give them the opportunity to share what they wrote. They are free to say “Pass” if they do not wish to share.

After 4-5 minutes, bring them back together as a class and ask if anyone would like to share what they wrote. This allows students to participate in class once they have already practiced sharing in their small group.

Then ask them to get back into their groups and brainstorm what each of them might do next time if they were in the same situation. Be sure they write down a response in their journals for their own future reference.

These activities can help students understand how systems work to discriminate, and more, how we each have been taught to perpetuate discrimination. It is important to point out that although we have been talking about the Box of Masculinity, that that does not mean that men are oppressed in society. Rather, men are coerced into acting a certain way just as women are. This helps students to understand on a personal level that a problem exists in society, and they can be a part of changing it.

1B: EXAMINING THE INTERSECTIONS

Despite the fact that it is clear to most, if not all, scientists that race is a social construct, many students walk into class believing that it is not. Because students have been taught that race is biological, they operate under the assumption that they can look at someone and know what race s/he is. I like to get students to think about these assumptions with the following activity.

Activity: Similarities and Differences

1. Be sure students have their name tags out and visible.
2. On a piece of notebook paper, ask students to write their name
3. Ask them to look around the room and then write the answers to the following questions:
 - a. To whom do you think you are *most* genetically similar? Why?
 - b. To whom do you think you are *least* genetically similar? Why?
4. Ask them to turn their papers in and then ask if anyone wants to share what they wrote.

Most often students will use race as a way of assuming similarities and differences. Because another student is a different race than they are, they assume that that student must be most genetically different from them; whereas, because a different student is the same race as they are, they assume that that student must be most genetically similar to them.

This exercise is a great lead-in to the PBS film: *Race: The Power of an Illusion* (Adelman, 2003). All three parts of this DVD are excellent, but Part I really gets students to see that racial categories have no genetic basis. It states, “Not one characteristic, trait or even gene distinguishes all the members of one so-called race from all the members of another so-called race.” In addition, most of our differences are *within* a single so-called race, not *between* “races.” Students learn, often for the first time, that a much better way to think about different groups of people is geography rather than genetics.

The reality is that these categories are all socially constructed and no one is “pure” anything. As Omi and Winant point out in “Racial Formations” in Section IA of *The Matrix Reader*, the One-Drop Rule is a fitting example that shows that the boundaries defining white and black are *politically* created. The true borders around each category: male, female, white, black, etc. are all porous and ever-changing based on the fact that they are social constructs. Our ideologies

about these categories, however, teach us to police the borders and maintain an illusion that they are pure and fixed.

After the film and discussion, most students, when asked, would like to change the answers they gave to the activity above. They start to realize that underneath our skin, we are all human, an extremely important lesson. If we left it there, however, students might think that since race is human-made, then it is not real. They might make the mistake of thinking that colorblindness is the solution to race problems. As will be discussed in Section III of this Instructor Manual, that is not the case. Moreover, the subject of colorblindness is eloquently discussed at the end of Part I and in Part III of *Race: The Power of an Illusion*.

What is clear is that race has very real consequences for both white people and people of color. Race privilege and oppression frame how we see ourselves; how students define themselves and especially, how they define others. This section of *The Matrix Reader* focuses on the complicated identities we each possess.

Embracing Differences

As the U.S. becomes more and more multicultural, we must learn to embrace our differences. Several of the articles in this section of *The Matrix Reader* highlight this idea. In addition, a way to demonstrate this concept to students is by using popular media personalities. For example, most if not all students have heard of golf-expert Tiger Woods. He provides an excellent example of a person who embraces all of the various cultures and races in his background. So much so, in fact, that he came up with his own word to describe his racial identity: Cablinasian, which incorporates the first 2 letters of each of his different racial identities. He has stated publicly that he created his own word because there is no common language to represent the full extent of his background, and he does not want to neglect either of his parents or any of his cultural heritage.

This example demonstrates the fact that we don't even have the language yet to talk about multiracial identity. If there is no language to use, we are forced to pick one race/ethnicity over another, which only serves to reify the notion that races are "pure." Using examples helps students to understand the ways in which racial identities are categorized in the media, perpetuating the idea that race is definable and discrete based solely on skin color. Tiger Woods, for example, is only one-eighth African-American, but because his skin tone is brown, he is often referred to in the media as African-American.

For more examples of celebrities who have publically recognized their multi-racial status, go to: International Interracial Association: <http://www.i3n.net/ia/resources/celebs.html>.

Journal Activity:

The following journal entry can give all students, regardless of their race, the opportunity to connect with this problem. Ask them to answer the following question:

1. Which identities do you possess that others might not see you as? (consider your complex identities: multi-racial, religion, gender, class, sexual orientation, etc.)
2. How does it feel to be seen differently from how you identify yourself?

Then ask students to share their responses in small groups of two or three, and then with the class, if they choose.

This gives students the opportunity to share the ways in which they are not seen fully for whom they are. Moreover, this activity allows students to consider the complexities of everyone's identity: their own as well as others' and more importantly, how we treat others based on what we *think* we know about them.

This activity also reiterates that these categories all intersect in our lives and interact in ways that make our identities extremely complex. No single identity can be understood on its own;

our experience with one identity is entangled with other of our identities. What it means to be white, for example, is different for a man than a woman; a lesbian than a heterosexual woman, etc. This is a critical point to make to prepare students to start thinking about how their various identities operate in their lives.

Many students whose “racial category” is not “obvious” to others based on the pre-conceived notions we are taught about race, express their frustration with being asked, “What ARE you?” as though they are not human. It is important to point out that we are socialized to believe this question is acceptable. Without blaming students in the class who might have asked this question of others in the past, this discussion can teach them other ways to get to know someone.

Some key points to challenge the question, “What ARE you?”

1. Think about WHY you’re asking
 - a. Is it to check off a box? – “Aha, I was right!”
 - b. Or to get to know someone better
2. When you meet someone, make sure it’s not the FIRST thing you ask
3. HOW to ask:
 - a. “How do you identify, racially?”
 - b. “What is your racial background?”
 - c. “Where are your ancestors from?”

Journal Activity: End of Class Period

As often as I have time for it, I try to end the class period with a journal entry. It can be one of the following:

1. Write a sentence about one thing you have learned today.
2. Write a question you have that was sparked by something that was covered in class today.
3. Write about your experience in class today (or in general).

Often, I'll ask them question #1 above. This helps them to consider their own take-home point for the day. It also allows me to keep track of the central themes they found especially important or to which they connected, which is useful for teaching the course in the future. The answers to question #2 above might prompt me to add a topic into the course I hadn't previously planned on including. If I ask them question #3 above, I find out a lot about their experiences that I might otherwise never have known. Sometimes, for example, I find out that there are students having side-conversations of which I was unaware. This is an opportunity for students to share such information without feeling like they are betraying other students, and then you have the opportunity to address such behavior (referring to the Ground Rules when necessary) in the next class without using names.

Journal Activity: Outside of Class

As mentioned in the Introduction to this Instructor Manual, part of the course revolves around the fact that students can engage in the course by initiating conversations about these topics outside of class. Another idea is to ask them to create an Awareness Journal. This is a journal in which students can write their experiences over the course of the semester that relate specifically to concepts from class. For example, they can write about witnessing a conversation or occurrence of oppression or privilege and their reaction to it. Or they can pay attention to what they are thinking when they see someone they don't know: What ideas pop into their head? What assumptions did they make? Critically analyzing their own thoughts is one way for students to become aware of their own socialization on these issues.

Potential Challenges

One way students sometimes try to challenge the material (or the messenger of the material) early on in the course is to present anecdotal evidence that conflicts with national trends. They often believe their anecdotal evidence proves the truth, rather than seeing it for what it is. Disputing their claims early on can make students feel like their experiences are being invalidated. This can lead to distrust and lack of participation, sometimes for the remainder of the semester. On the other hand, we do not want such claims to go unchallenged, as the rest of the class may mistake those claims as true.

In this situation, I have had success with explaining the difference between anecdotal evidence and societal trends, and letting all students know that although anecdotal evidence is real and important, it doesn't necessarily mean that it is real and true for everyone. Depending on the subject, I also might add that we are not ready to have a discussion about this topic yet. If the topic is something I know we will cover in detail later in the semester, I ask students to please "hold that thought" and I promise them that we will return to it when we cover the topic later in the semester. At that time, I assure them they will have the background to have a well-rounded discussion about it. Having a discussion about it today, without the history and knowledge-base, may not be productive. We then move on to the next topic at-hand.

References

Adelman, L. (Executive Producer). (2003). *Race: The Power of an Illusion* [Film]. United States: California Newsreel.

Mills, C. W. (1959). *The Sociological Imagination*. New York: Oxford University Press.

SECTION 2: UNDERSTANDING OPPRESSION AND PRIVILEGE

Learning Objectives

4. To facilitate students' understanding of systemic inequalities
5. To facilitate students' connection not only to some of the oppressions they may experience in society, but also to some of the privileges they possess

It is often a source of dismay for students to learn that social locations affect everyone.

Typically, in learning about social inequalities, we focus on those who fall into the less dominant side of each category. It is important to emphasize to students that even if a person is a white middle or upper class heterosexual male, his reality is shaped by race, class, sexuality, and gender. Systems of domination are most often perpetuated unknowingly by members of the dominant groups in society, and are most often played out through notions of entitlement and “invisible” privilege (privileges of which most people of dominant groups are unaware they possess, but have a great effect on the way they are able to live their lives). As Collins points out in “Toward a New Vision” in Section IB of *The Matrix Reader*, privilege and domination are the result of being part of an oppressive societal structure.

Anyone who teaches about the inequalities in society is probably familiar with the challenging work of getting students to identify with the various oppressions that exist. Based on our social locations in society, we are all privileged in some aspects, and oppressed in others. It is important for students to identify their own social locations, and how the concepts of oppression and privilege affect their own lives. Therefore, the following activities are presented here that serve to facilitate this social justice journey (Samuels, 2007). It is advisable to do all of the exercises in consecutive class periods. They provide a progression that can be valuable in terms of creating unity in the classroom as you begin to discuss more personal issues.

It is also beneficial, whenever possible, to have classes that deal with these kinds of sensitive issues meet once a week for a longer time period so that students have time to discuss issues and concerns during class. If this is the case, educators can facilitate the first two activities discussed below in one class period, and the second two activities in the next class period.

Connecting to Systemic Oppression

Before the first activity, students should have an understanding of the concept of social locations (i.e., one's status in society based on their social group memberships). They should consider various social locations (e.g., race, class, age, gender, sexual orientation, ability, etc.) and in their journals, write down their own status for each. This will be useful in preparation for the upcoming exercises. In addition, they should have a working definition of oppression, such as "being denied access to resources based on one's social group memberships." The first activity helps students begin to connect with and understand their own experiences of oppression. It tends to be a bonding experience for class members and an effective way for them to begin to see their status in society.

Journal Activity: Oppression

Students begin by thinking of a time when they have felt oppressed (i.e., when they have been denied access to resources based on one or more of their social locations). They then write or draw a picture about the situation in their journal, and how it made them feel. (Giving them the option of drawing a picture helps those who learn more visually to express themselves in a different and creative way.) After about five to seven minutes, they can either get into groups of two or three to share their "stories", and/or share with the class as a whole.

At this point, students remember what it feels like to be discriminated against based on some aspect of their appearance, behavior, social location, or some combination of the three.

Sometimes, there are one or two students who can't recall ever having felt oppressed, and that

in itself is an interesting aspect of the discussion (e.g., what are the social locations of those who can't recall an oppressive experience, and consider themselves not to be oppressed in any way?) This discussion leads into the following exercise in the hopes of students' further understanding how systemic oppression operates in society based on different social locations.

Activity: Silently Standing in the Face of Oppression

Various versions of this activity have been facilitated by many scholars, activists, speakers, and educators throughout the country. Although it has been given various names such as: the Crosswalk, the Power Shuffle, and the Race for America, I choose to call it, "Silently Standing in the Face of Oppression." The name does not get revealed, however, until the activity is completed, in the hope of keeping students' minds open and unbiased before beginning.

Along with the various names this activity has been given, there are probably just as many variations as to how to best facilitate it. The following is the version I prefer. The ideas for the prompts below are based on Peggy McIntosh's article, "White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to See Correspondences Throughout Work in Women's Studies" which starts off Section II in *The Matrix Reader*, and some of them are from the Intercultural Dialogue Program at the University of Maryland.

Preferably, the room is set up where chairs and/or desks are in a circle format. Participants are informed that a series of prompts will be read, and that as they hear each prompt, if the situation applies to them, they should stand up. If students' ability to stand is an issue (perhaps one or more students are in a wheel-chair), you can request that everyone move forward one or two feet if the prompt applies to them. Participants should also be told that this activity must be done in complete *silence* (and students may need to be reminded of this throughout the exercise). Silence shows respect for students' courage to acknowledge the ways they are oppressed.

As each prompt is read and some of the students stand up by their chair, the facilitator says, "Please everyone look around the room and *notice who is standing and who is sitting*," and then those who are standing may sit before going on to the next prompt.

Prompts:

- If people routinely mispronounce your name . . . please stand up
- If you have ever been the only person of your gender in a class or place of employment . . .
- If you have ever been asked to fill out a survey that asked for your "race" but did not include an option that accurately described your racial identity . . .
- If you worry semester to semester about whether you'll be able to afford your college tuition. . .
- If you represent the first generation of your family to attend college . . .
- If you ever felt pressured to alter your appearance, mannerisms, or language to avoid being judged based on your race . . .
- If you have a physical, psychological, developmental, or learning disability . . .
- If an educator, counselor, or other authority figure ever discouraged you from pursuing a particular field of study or profession . . .
- If you are often expected to attend classes on your religious holidays . . .
- If you have ever had a job where you received less pay than somebody for doing equal work . . .
- If you have been sexually harassed in your workplace or elsewhere . . .

- If you know someone who has been the survivor of sexual assault or attempted sexual assault (rape) . . .
- If there is any dimension of your identity that you have to hide from most people in order to feel safe . . .

Once the prompts are completed, the students are asked to answer the following questions in their journals:

1. How did it feel to stand up?
2. How did it feel to be sitting while others stood?

Then you can facilitate a discussion of their impressions with the entire group. Besides a feeling of discomfort at participating in the task at hand, most often students express an overwhelming sense of solidarity in terms of their feelings of oppression. To know, for example, that a school counselor discouraged a student from continuing his/her education is different from finding out that this same sexist or racist scenario has played out in other schools in other cities and states. Again, this activity helps students to situate themselves in society, and to use a sociological imagination to understand that their experiences can be analyzed as a systemic problem, not just as an individual issue.

This exercise can be eye-opening for students who stood to acknowledge some aspect of oppression that they never considered before. It is important to remind students that the point of the exercise is in no way to make them feel oppressed, but rather for them to connect with and more fully comprehend the systems of inequality that exist in society. Only when we understand our connection to the problem of inequality can we begin to consider how we can work towards social justice.

Connecting to Systemic Privilege

Specifically at this point, before the next two activities, it is essential to assign Peggy McIntosh's article in Section II of *The Matrix Reader*. Now that students have begun to understand the concept of oppression, it is extremely helpful for them to see McIntosh's lists which show aspects of privilege that they might now better understand. Once they have read McIntosh's article, they are often overwhelmed and start to become aware of the realities of privilege and oppression. They begin to unpack their own "invisible knapsacks".

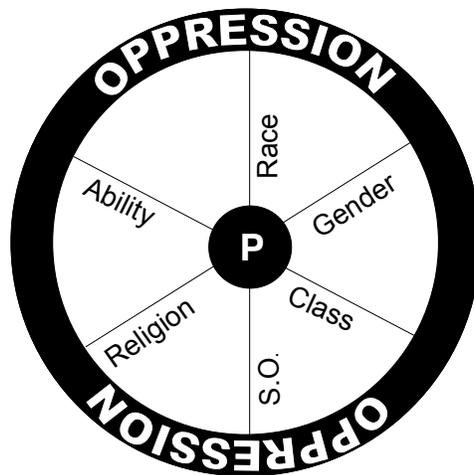
In terms of better understanding privilege, Audre Lorde's article in Section II, "Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference" is also extremely useful. Lorde explains that we are all at times oppressed and at other times, or in other realms, oppressors. As is mentioned in the Introduction to Section II, Lorde speaks of a "mythical norm:" and describes it as : "white, thin, male, young, heterosexual, christian, financially secure." It is important to remind students that this norm is mythical because it is a social construction: that the particular traits in that myth arguably do not inherently represent power, rather it is only because we have been taught to believe that they do, that those who hold power in our society tend to possess those characteristics. This discussion is important in terms of preparing students for thinking about the possibilities of social change. Moreover, even those few in society who actually fit the mythical norm will eventually grow out of it based on their age, demonstrating the illusiveness of this "norm." Examination of the mythical norm is extremely useful in analyzing the hierarchy of power that exists in society.

Activity: Connecting to the Matrix of Domination

Now that students have an overview of how privilege plays out in society as well as the statuses that constitute an unearned benefit, it is time for students to put themselves into the picture, and figure out how these dynamics operate in their own lives. Patricia Hill Collins' Matrix of

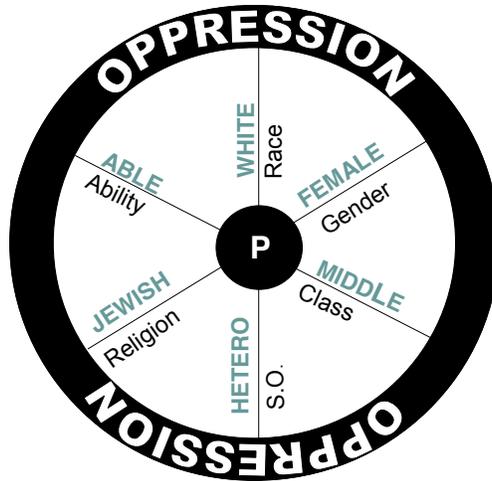
Domination is a useful tool in helping students do this. The Matrix of Domination has been taught in various ways, but here again, is the method I have found most useful. This method has the added benefit of providing a visual model for understanding the concept, and it demonstrates the intersections of our social locations which work together to privilege us in some ways and oppress us in others.

The first step is for students to draw the following model in their journal. This is a revised version of a model McIntosh (2006) refers to as the Wheel of Oppression.

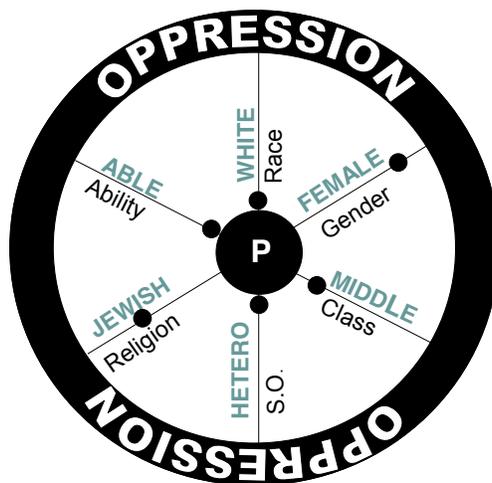


Each spoke in this wheel represents a social location. Below each spoke is the name of a social location, and there is room above each spoke for a student to fill in her/his status in that social location, which will be the next step. In the center of the wheel is a “P” for Privilege. Moving toward the outside of the wheel is where the brunt of the weight of oppression is experienced, as the wheel turns. The “P” in the center of the wheel represents those who possess unearned benefits, who are often unaware of the burden that is carried by those who are situated further away from the center.

Students are asked to place themselves into this wheel by adding their own statuses. The following is one example of this step.



It is helpful here, to remind them of the “mythical norm” because the next step involves comparing themselves to it. If every category in the mythical norm is a privileged category, then how does each of the students’ social locations compare to it? For example, if a student is white, then s/he matches the mythical norm in the category of race. If a student is a lesbian, then in terms of sexual orientation, she is further away from the center of the wheel in that category. Ask students to make a mark on each spoke of their wheel to indicate whether they are closer to or further away from the mythical norm. The following is how the previous example might look:



It is important to remind students here that it is not a matter of how they feel, but rather their comparison to the mythical norm. In other words, a female student might feel extremely *privileged* to be a woman, but this sociological exercise refers to the patriarchal aspect of society where being male holds more status (financially, socially, spatially, etc.) than being female, so the mark would fall further away from the privileged side of the spoke. On the other hand, if we view gender as a continuum, then the gender spoke must also include transgendered people, whose mark would be even closer to the oppressed side of the spoke. Thus, a female's mark would not be all the way to the oppressed side of the spoke in comparison. Again, the purpose of this activity is to demonstrate where we each fit in comparison to the standard of the mythical norm to which we are all compared.

Finally, I use this Wheel of Oppression to illustrate the Matrix of Domination. By connecting the dots on their wheel, students create a two-dimensional model of how their statuses intersect and work together to privilege or oppress. Below are two matrices. The first is the outcome of the prior example, and the second is what the mythical norm would look like.



Again, using this Wheel of Oppression to help students visually connect to the Matrix provides the opportunity for them to situate themselves in society, using their sociological imaginations.

Now that students have a visual, theoretical understanding of the Matrix of Domination, the next activity allows students to see how some of their unearned privileges play out.

Activity: Silently Acknowledging the Face of Privilege

Again, this activity has been facilitated in many different forms, and given many different names. Like the earlier prompts, these are based primarily on McIntosh's article, and have proved extremely useful in helping students to think about invisible privilege and how it plays out in society and in their own lives.

Once again, be sure to remind the participants that the activity must be done in silence. This shows respect for other students and acknowledges the courage it often takes to claim one's privilege. In addition, once students are standing for a prompt, remember to ask them to notice who is standing and who is sitting.

Prompts:

- If you can reasonably assume that a general American history class will include the voices and experiences of your racial group . . . please stand up
- If you can reasonably assume that someday you will be able to rent or purchase a home in an area which you can afford and in which you would want to live. . .
- If you have *never* been followed around in a store . . .
- If you do not have to worry about your own daily physical protection. . .
- If *most* of the people holding political office in your home town were racially similar to you . . .
- If *every* U.S. President or Vice President has shared your gender and racial identity . . .

- If you are able to read directions to get anywhere you want to go; or read instructions on medications; or read to a child . . .
- If you were given encouragement to succeed in whatever endeavors you chose to pursue, by your parents/caregivers, family, and teachers . . .
- If you ask to talk to the "person in charge," that most often you will be facing a person of your gender . . .
- If a traffic cop pulls you over, you can be sure that you haven't been singled out because of your race . . .
- If English is your first language . . .
- If you know that no matter how far away your parking space is from where you're going that you are physically able to handle the walk . . .
- If you can choose *not* to think about how race affects you on a daily basis . . .

(A note about the prompts below: these prompts can relate to heterosexual privilege or the privilege of being in a unicultural relationship – rather than asking participants to stand, I ask them to stand only if they choose to, or to just think about the privilege that is associated with these prompts):

- If you can walk down the street hand in hand with your partner without fear of being harassed or attacked . . .
- If your marital aspirations or arrangements are looked upon with positive anticipation or acceptance by your family . . .

Once the prompts are completed, students answer the following question in their journals:

- How did it feel to acknowledge your privilege?

Then students are asked to discuss their impressions with the entire group. This activity is commonly the one that is the most remarkable for students. Most students admit that they have never heard or thought of these ideas before, and never realized their own privilege in society. Feelings of guilt, anger, anxiety, nausea, and general discomfort are quite common. Writing in their journals and discussing/debriefing this activity is essential. The following are some ideas and suggestions for points to include while debriefing this activity.

It helps to let students know that all of these feelings are not only common but understandable, given the fact that it is new to them, and has been invisible for most of their lives. There are many articles written about effective ways to handle these kinds of emotions in the classroom. It is highly recommended that facilitators conduct further research in this area so they can be better prepared to handle what can be a fairly stressful yet enormously educational experience in the classroom.

It is crucial to acknowledge feelings of anger and guilt that many students face. After sorting through those feelings, they can be encouraged to view them as stepping stones on the journey to a more multi-cultural approach to life. Further, we can remind students that they did not cause the inequalities that exist in society; inequalities have existed for centuries. However, as Allan Johnson (2001) points out, once we know these inequalities exist, we do have a responsibility to do something about them. Rather than getting stuck in the mire of self-loathing, they can use those feelings as motivation for social and interpersonal change.

Another interesting response to this last activity is that some students say that although they are beginning to understand the privilege and supposed power that they possess, they do not *feel* powerful. In Kimmel's article, "Masculinity as Homophobia" in Section IA, he explains this

paradox. He argues that people with privilege (most often white men) as a *group* feel a sense of entitlement to that power (e.g., the expectations they have for their futures, the way they expect to be treated by others, etc.) regardless of their individual feelings of powerlessness. Like Lorde's "mythical norm," the power is taken for granted, and then masked because it is considered the norm, so it never needs to be mentioned. Students who claim a sense of powerlessness are usually unaware of this process, so addressing can be constructive.

Another common response is for students to deny that they have privilege. It is valuable to point out that denying or ignoring privilege is in itself a privilege. Not having to think about one's privilege is a luxury that people who are discriminated against or oppressed on a daily basis do not possess. A related and interesting response comes from those students who have experienced discrimination on a daily basis are often surprised that they possess any privilege. This provides another source of discussion, and demonstrates again that the Matrix is inclusive of everyone, and does not simply concentrate on certain groups in society.

Finally, it is productive to finish the discussion with a focus on social change. Johnson (2001) does an exceptional job explaining the risks of ignoring the concepts of oppression and privilege. In discussing personal and social change, he states:

We don't have to think sexist or racist thoughts in order to participate in a system through which sexist and racist trouble happens. Participating is all it takes to involve us. It's also all it takes to give us the potential to be part of the solution, for when we see how we're connected to the problem, we can also see how we can make a difference by choosing differently as we participate in making systems happen (141).

Time permitting, it is helpful to ask students to make a list of ways they can make a difference in their own personal lives to become part of the solution. This is usually completed at the end of

the semester, but introducing the idea at this point helps students to see beyond the guilt and frustration of an unfair system.

Benefits

As educators, we need to understand our own connection to oppression and privilege, and how they play out in our own lives. Those of us who choose to do this work in the classroom are all on a path toward social justice. We must remember that along the way, we cannot force students to see and acknowledge their privilege, we can only serve as facilitators in the process of their doing so. Students need an outlet to discuss this newfound knowledge, and we can give them one. A benefit of using all of the activities provided is that as a unit, they speak to everyone. In other words, rather than focusing only on victims of oppression, these activities focus on everybody. Most people have felt or experienced some sort of oppression in their lives, and many have acted as oppressors, even unknowingly. Through these activities, most people, no matter where they fit in the Matrix of Domination, discover some aspect of their identity for which they fall in the privileged category, whether it is race, sexual orientation, age, physical ability, etc. This inclusivity lends itself to students' full participation in these activities.

Another benefit to using all of these activities is that they foster feelings of solidarity (especially when discussing oppression), and then allow students to recognize their privilege in a relatively safe space. As previously stated, many have never considered these ideas before and find them to be overwhelming. Incorporating all of these activities provides a comprehensive model for facilitating that process of awareness and acknowledgement. It makes what can feel for some like a harsh reality, a bit less devastating. The hope is that students conclude the activities more aware, and empowered to act for change.

Finally, the prompts in the activities are flexible and can be tailored to any social locations you might want to emphasize, depending on the course you are teaching. These exercises are

quite personal for students in that they require students to perceive their own relationship to an unfair system. The experience brings with it the potential for long-term growth and involvement in social justice endeavors.

Potential Challenges

In everyday life, white people often use people of color as their “comparison group.” In fact, Toni Morrison (1992) in her book, “Playing in the Dark”, theorizes that white people exist only in contrast to their neighbors of color; their identity is formed and represented only as a comparison to “the Other.” Unfortunately, the activities in this paper perpetuate this idea. During the activities that entail standing up, those who are standing up are being asked to compare themselves with those who are sitting, and vice versa. The hope is that it makes clear the connection between domination/privilege and oppression. Although this can be a valuable realization for all, it is especially powerful for people who are more privileged.

In contrast, the activities have the potential to make people who are less privileged feel their oppression more acutely as they are compared to those who possess more privilege. Any resulting feelings of alienation mark the antithesis of the purpose of this work. Working through these issues with students might be one way to alleviate any negative responses from these activities.

On the other hand, many people who represent oppressed groups (e.g., people of color, women, etc.) have found these exercises to be a refreshing change from being placed in the spotlight in other courses on social inequalities. Although learning about the experiences of oppressed people is extremely valuable for the purpose of social change, many people of oppressed groups feel uncomfortable in classes where they feel they must speak for their whole group. Alternatively, the focus of the exercises in this paper tends to be on all students’ making connections between themselves and society.

Recognizing privilege is difficult work. If students understand the experiences of others in regard to oppression and privilege, they can begin to gain insight into how difference is treated in our society. All of these activities can help to ground students in viewing difference with compassion and appreciation. Thus, they might be more open-minded and willing to learn about their own role in maintaining and perpetuating inequalities in society.

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SECTION 3: THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Learning Objectives

6. To provide students with an historical context for understanding oppression and privilege
7. To challenge students to consider how history applies to their own lives

3A: UNDERSTANDING THE HISTORICAL CONTEXT

In considering the historical context of oppression and privilege, what stands out is the skewed history most students have been taught. It goes almost without saying that most K-12 history courses even today focus on stories of white males. If a student is lucky enough to get some element of diversity in their courses, it is most often a paragraph or two at the end of a chapter, a footnote in the annals of history. Of course looking at this from a critical perspective, we must ask: who is left out? One goal of *The Matrix Reader* is to give a context to oppression that grounds students in understanding at least part of the answer to the questions they always ask: How did we get here? Where did all of this racism, sexism, heterosexism, etc. come from? It is critical that they are given a basis for understanding what was left out of their education. And another thread that can be carried through this section as they learn more is: why don't we know this? Why haven't we been taught this important history?

Historical Origins of Institutionalized Sexism and Racism

The articles in Section III of *The Matrix Reader* provide excellent sources from which students can begin to grasp the gender and race ideologies that emerged centuries ago. It is especially useful to review in class the writings by Gustav LeBon from 1879 and Carolus Linnaeus' description of races. Noted historical scientific scholar Stephen Jay Gould (1996) quotes LeBon as follows:

In the most intelligent races...there are a large number of women whose brains are closer in size to those of gorillas than to the most developed of male brains... All psychologists who have studied the intelligence of women...recognize today that they represent *the most inferior forms of human evolution* and that they are *closer to children and savages* than to an adult civilized man. *They excel in fickleness, inconstancy, absence of thought and logic, and incapacity to reason.* Without doubt, there exist some distinguished women, very superior to the average man, but they are as exceptional as the birth of any monstrosity, as, for example, a gorilla with two heads... (pp. 136-7).

Largely as a result of the printing press, and the fact that science was the new voice of authority (as opposed to the church), these ideas about women became widespread and what many considered to be the truth. This ideology has been perpetuated over time and despite science that has proven otherwise, the effects of this ideology are still in place today.

Linnaeus' description of races is another example of an ideology whose ramifications are still being felt. In his classification of different peoples, he clearly connected physical attributes with how he perceived their character. He grouped them into four categories as follows:

- Africanus: black, phlegmatic, relaxed; hair black, frizzled; skin silky; nose flat; lips tumid; women without shame, they lactate profusely; crafty, indolent, negligent; anoints himself with grease; governed by caprice
- Americanus: reddish, choleric, and erect; hair black, straight, thick; wide nostrils, scanty beard; obstinate, merry, free; paints himself with fine red lines; regulated by customs
- Asiaticus: sallow, melancholy, stiff; hair black; dark eyes; severe, haughty, avaricious; covered with loose garments; ruled by opinions

- Europeaeus: white, sanguine, muscular; hair long, flowing; eyes blue; gentle, acute, inventive; covers himself with close vestments; governed by laws.

The Matrix Reader provides many other examples of these gender and race ideologies. They were fairly common in the eighteenth century. There are several take-home points about these ideologies:

1. These so-called “scientists” made what we can consider today an egregious connection between a person or group’s physical characteristics and their character. These stereotypes can still be seen today.
2. Although this was considered modern science in the eighteenth century, it is NOT what we consider science today. What these so-called “scientists” did was to take what they believed to be true and tried to prove it: the antithesis of the goal of science. The scientific method today is based on the creation of a hypothesis and testing it.
3. Most students have never heard this history before. Even if students have taken courses in Anthropology and perhaps have even heard of Linnaeus and others, they rarely have learned this aspect of his work. Why not?
4. In reviewing the descriptions, it is clear that a hierarchy was created by white Europeans and is still maintained and perpetuated today.

Moreover, reviewing the images in Section III of *The Matrix Reader* provides a visual image of the perpetuation of this hierarchy. One activity (outlined below) that can get students to share knowledge about the history of institutionalized oppression and privilege is by making use of the

article in Section III called, “Thirteen Key Supreme Court Cases and the Civil War Amendments,” by Rosenblum and Travis.

Activity: Learning and Sharing History

1. Ask students to get into groups of 3 or 4.
2. Assign each group one of the 13 Supreme Court cases by Rosenblum and Travis.
3. Ask them to write a brief synopsis of the case and to answer the following questions:
 - a. How did this case institutionalize oppression and privilege in the U.S.?
 - b. How does the case perpetuate inequalities in terms of the rights of citizenship that were afforded some and not others?
4. Ask each group to present their synopsis and responses to the rest of the class.

This activity allows students to share ideas about these case studies in an interactive way. In addition, incorporating the notion of citizenship in this way demonstrates how historically some individuals have been bestowed with a sense of belonging while others have been marginalized. This goes a long way in answering the question of how we got to where we are in terms of a social hierarchy.

Another way to get students involved in this process is with the following activity about democracy. When asked, most students would agree that we live in a democracy, but as co-editor Christina Jiménez points out in the Introduction to this Section in *The Matrix Reader*, democracy is a theoretical concept; how has it played out in practice in our past as well as today?

Activity: Democracy?

1. Ask students to define democracy.

2. Ask students: Considering the readings in Section III and the previous activity, is everyone included in this democracy? In other words, have all groups experienced democracy equally? How?

In addition to asking students to critically analyze oppression and privilege in an historical context, and asking them to read critical history that many have not been exposed to, there are plenty of films that provide excellent information about various cultural histories. Some documentaries that give specific histories of racism are:

1. **How the West was Lost**
2. **Historic Jewish Discrimination, Racism & Antisemitism Films DVD: Post Holocaust Videos of Prejudice against Jews & the Religion of Judaism**
3. **Japanese Prejudice, Racism & Discrimination Films DVD: History of WWII Japanese Culture & Diversity**
4. **Historic Civil Rights & Black History Films DVD: African American Racism & Prejudice Movies w/ Martin Luther King (MLK) & Maya Angelou Footage**
5. **The Bronze Screen: 100 Years of the Latino Image in Hollywood**

Activity: Ethnic Notions

One of the films I especially like to present in class is: *Ethnic Notions* (Riggs, 1986). It depicts how African-Americans have been portrayed in the media throughout the twentieth century. It is difficult to watch, but an outstanding resource. It also engages students and provides a history lesson that is new to many students. Discussion questions given to students before the movie starts help them to focus on specific aspects of how and why African-Americans have been portrayed the way they have.

Some recommended discussion questions are:

1. Describe the primary images of African-Americans during slavery. What ideologies did these images perpetuate? What purposes did each of these images serve?
2. How did the imagery change once slavery was abolished? Why did it change?
3. Do you see any parallels between these images and images prevalent today? Give examples.
4. The narrator of the film stated that these images both "mold and mirror racial tensions" and did "as much harm as any lynch mob." What does this mean? Do you agree with these statements?

Before reviewing these questions with the class, it is helpful to simply debrief the film. There are so many powerful ideas and images presented; students are often overcome by what they have seen. Allowing them the opportunity to voice their disgust and often, surprise, can be beneficial before moving on to reviewing these discussion questions.

3B: THE CHALLENGES OF U.S. HISTORY

Another aspect of history that few students have had the opportunity to learn about is movements for social change. This is important to include not just because it is essential history, but also because it teaches students quite a bit about what it takes to create change, and most importantly, that it is possible.

Again, there are many effective educational films on the topic of social movements.

A few are:

1. **Eyes on the Prize**
2. **Chicano!**
3. **After Stonewall**
4. **America's War on Poverty**
5. **A Force More Powerful** (on nonviolent action in the 20th century)

For the sake of time, I usually pick one social movement to focus on to use as an example, partly to discuss the history portrayed, but mostly to discuss the concept of social movements in general. Several films adequately portray the first wave of the Women's Movement, but I prefer the documentary, *One Woman, One Vote* (Pollak, 2005).

Activity: *One Woman, One Vote*

Some discussion questions/points to make in terms of this film and the movement are:

1. How long it took for women to gain the right to vote: from 1848 to 1920: 72 years.
2. What does this movement teach us about how social change occurs?
3. What was surprising about the suffrage journey?
4. Why don't we learn about the Women's Movement and suffrage?
5. What are the consequences of not learning about this journey?

Students often come away with the idea that social change can take a long time. And they are often surprised to find out that many women died for the cause of suffrage, that there were men fighting for the cause, and that there was racism and classism involved in the movement. What is most remarkable, however, is students' reaction to learning about the Women's Movement at all. They are often angry and frustrated that they never learned this before. They are adamant that if they had known, they would have been much more likely to vote in the last election.

This discussion leads right into the second wave of the Women’s Movement. Again, many students have learned about this movement cursorily. Betty Friedan’s article, “The Problem that Has No Name” in Section III of *The Matrix Reader* is valuable in helping students understand the challenges that faced women on the heels of this social movement. Every semester I find students who feel similar to Betty Friedan: they are getting an education, but they have been taught that their ultimate goal is supposed to be marriage. For these students to become aware of the history of this expectation is invaluable.

It is important, too, to critique the movement, making sure students are aware that it was not solely under the auspices of white middle class women, but rather that many cultures in the U.S. spent this time period working towards equality. Several articles from this section of *The Matrix Reader* present this history.

A final journal entry helps to connect this history with students’ own lives.

Journal Activity: The Women’s Movement

What impact did the Women’s Movement have on your life?

Most students had never considered this question before. It is exciting to hear what they come up with. Most women say they would not be sitting in class today. Many men say their mothers would have lived very different lives. It is enlightening to go around the room and have each student share what they wrote so that the entire class is aware of the profundity of the Women’s Movement in particular, and social movements in general.

Getting students to start thinking about social change at this point in the semester is beneficial. Many students find the information they are receiving, often for the first time, rather depressing. To be aware that social change can and does happen, gets them to consider how *they* can be a part of social change, a topic that will be considered in depth in Section V.

Potential Challenges

A common outcry of students when they learn about oppressive history, regardless of the social location that is highlighted, is: “Well, that was *then*, thank goodness things have changed and everything is better now.” Many students cite the too-oft quoted Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s / *Have A Dream* speech: “I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.” And they declare that isn’t it great that we’ve finally got there. Most students believe that the goal is a colorblind society. They make statements about “not caring” about what color a person is, that we are all *the same*.

It is essential that students be made aware of the fact that although things have changed in the U.S. thanks to the myriad social movements, we are *not* a colorblind society. There are several articles in *The Matrix Reader* that address this issue. In particular, Charles Gallagher’s “Color-blinded America or How the Media and Politics Have Made Racism and Racial Inequality Yesterday’s Social Problem,” which can be found in Section 5A, sheds light on this topic.

What is important to acknowledge is that we have been taught *not* to notice color; or more accurately, not to *mention* that we notice color. An excellent depiction of this can be found in Beverly Daniel Tatum’s article, “Defining Racism: Can We Talk?” in Section II. She talks about how when we were young and asked questions about race, our parents, not knowing how to speak about race, not having the language even, *Shh’d* us, promising to discuss it later. Most of them never kept that promise. So we learned not to bring it up; that it might even be considered racist to bring it up.

The reality is there is nothing racist about talking about the melanin in one’s skin. In fact, *not* talking about it implies that there is a problem with the fact that people’s skin tones vary. We are *not* all the same. And to make this point to students, I often ask them: “Out of whose mouth

do you usually hear the words ‘we’re all the same’?” They begin to realize it is most often from the mouth of a white person. Most people of color know they are not treated the same as white people. This is an important piece of the puzzle in terms of appreciating differences rather than fearing them or being afraid to talk about them.

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SECTION 4: CONTEMPORARY INSTITUTIONALIZED OPPRESSION AND PRIVILEGE

Learning Objectives

8. To demonstrate the vast institutional inequalities that exist in society today
9. To challenge some of the myths perpetuated in society which reinforce these inequalities

As students have gained a sense of the history of oppression and privilege through Section III of *The Matrix Reader*, Section IV focuses on current forms of institutional inequalities. The list of cultural institutions one could analyze to reveal how inequalities are maintained and perpetuated in society is endless. For the purposes of teaching this subject in a relatively brief timeframe, I recommend choosing several institutions and demonstrating how their impact is both broad and deep, and how institutions work extremely well at benefiting some at the expense of others.

This section, like Section III, can be a bit depressing for students, especially those who are new to these topics of oppression. It is helpful to remind students even from the start of this section that we must understand how inequalities are inculcated in society so that we can be aware that they are occurring, and we can consider ways in which we can work to create change. Students need to understand and connect to the problem of inequality in a very personal way without their feeling personally blamed. They need to be empowered with a constant message of hope and inspiration to act so that they don't get stuck on the inequalities that sometimes (even often) appear hopeless.

To begin, the statistics that co-editor Abby Ferber cites in the introduction to Section IV are valuable to review in class. The fact is: inequality exists. Another simple, yet potent example to start off with is racism and classism in the media.

Activity: Racism in the Media

Ask students:

1. How many of you have heard of JonBenet Ramsey?

As everyone knows, she was a 6-year old white girl who was killed on Dec. 25, 1996.

2. How many of you have heard of Toya Currie?

No one knows, but she was a 9-year old black girl who was raped, beaten, choked, poisoned with insecticide, scrawled on with gang symbols, and left for dead 15 days after JonBenet Ramsey's body was found. Toya's body was found in the 7th floor stairwell of a housing project in Chicago. Miraculously, she lived, but was blinded by the attack.

3. How many of you have heard of Elizabeth Smart?

Everyone knows she was a 7-year old white girl who was abducted from her parent's million-dollar Salt Lake City home in June of 2002. She was found alive, 9 months later.

4. How many of you have heard of Alexis Patterson?

No one knows that she was abducted walking to school one day, almost exactly one month before Elizabeth Smart was abducted. Alexis Patterson was also 7-years old, but she was black and from a poor area in Milwaukee.

Clearly race and class come in to play when we think about why you have heard of JonBenet and Elizabeth, but have never heard of Toya and Alexis. Here's what the privilege of being white and wealthy gets you – Elizabeth Smart's family used the media to find her. Alexis Patterson's family and friends tried hard to do the same, but their requests were met with inaction. As far as I can tell, Alexis has never been found.

This is a powerful exercise that clearly shows racial inequality in the media. It is helpful to use photos to demonstrate these points since JonBenet Ramsey's face has been plastered on television and newsprint so that even so many years later, usually every single student recognizes her face. Obviously, feel free to update these examples with more current examples of inequality. Unfortunately, they are not difficult to find on the Internet today.

Activity: Inequalities on DVD's

One activity many students do on their own on a regular basis is to browse their local DVD store. Ask them to bring in a DVD cover (either a real one or a cover downloaded from a movie's website) that perpetuates racism, sexism, heterosexism, or poverty, etc.). When they bring them in, display them and have students review each other's DVD images.

One common reply from students when asked about their experiences finding their DVD to bring in is, "I couldn't believe how EASY it was to find an image perpetuating stereotypes – they are everywhere!"

There are many films and documentaries that show various forms of discrimination, but I have found none to be more effective than *ABC's PrimeTime* documentary, "True Colors."

Activity: True Colors

For any student who is still on-the-fence about how racism plays out on a daily basis, this film is essential, and is excellent for demonstrating how colorblind our society is NOT. At only 19 minutes, it packs a powerful punch. After debriefing the film, some useful discussion questions/points are:

1. In the film, Diane Sawyer mentions the fact that as a percentage of the population, there is more crime among African-Americans than other races. Unfortunately, she does not follow-up on this comment. It is important that this point not go unchallenged. This

statistic is simply another consequence of racism: racial profiling and the subsequent inequalities in the handling of court cases in the legal system, length of convictions, etc. This is a valuable springboard for discussion about institutionalized inequalities in the judicial system, and ties in with John Lamberth's article in this section of *The Matrix Reader*, "Driving While Black."

2. Would the car salesman or the apartment owners in the film consider themselves to be racist? Why or why not?
3. How does society/the media portray "racists"? Why?

This provides a great example of how we are ALL taught that being racist means to be a part of the White Power movement in the U.S., rather than realizing that racism (and sexism, heterosexism, classism, etc.) exists in *society*. Moreover, by being part of this society, we are constantly bombarded with racist, sexist, heterosexist, etc. messages. We cannot escape these messages of inequality, so they become normalized, and we often internalize them, often unconsciously. The consequence of this is that as we proceed to perpetuate the stereotypes and inequalities we have learned, we do not realize that we have become part of the problem. Moreover, if we are taught to separate ourselves from *those* "racists" who burn crosses, etc., then we do not have to recognize our own contributions to an unfair system.

4. Do *you* consider the car salesman and the apartment owners to be racist? Why or why not?
5. In a conversation between John (the white tester) and one of the apartment owners, the apartment owner made the comment, "But they're moving in . . . I just spoke to one of them a while ago . . ." in reference to Glen (the black tester). In this segment of the video, John doesn't say anything to the apartment owner challenging him on his racist

ideas. What might John have said to make a difference, to challenge the apartment owner's assumption that John was part of his racist white social group?

6. Focus on Diane Sawyer's means of challenging racist notions. She can be a role model for students who are frustrated and angry by what they see on this video.

Another powerful video that is available on the Internet is Kiri Davis' "A Girl Like Me." This 5-minute video shows young African-American children choosing between black and white dolls based on questions they are asked by Ms. Davis. It is a re-creation of a similar experiment created during the "Brown vs. Board of Education" trial. The question to ask students is, "In all of these years, have we made any progress?"

Body Image

It is quite obvious to students that the media has an impact on the way we see ourselves as well as the way we see others. I often start off the discussion about body image by asking students:

1. How many of you have been or currently are on a diet?
2. How many of you wish you looked differently or that some part of your body was different than it is?

These simple questions often provoke the most intense discussion. Almost every student raises her/his hand for BOTH questions, and each student is most often *stunned* to see the large percentage of students who have also raised their hands. Because of our socialization, we are taught to think we are the only one who is unsatisfied at best, disgusted at worst, with our bodies. The visceral reactions students have, especially female students, are quite telling of society's impact on our concept of body image.

Becky Thompson's "A Way Outa' No Way" in Section IV of *The Matrix Reader* provides a powerful qualitative analysis that goes beyond the effects of the media on eating disorders.

Thompson includes other contributing factors such as sexual abuse, poverty, heterosexism, and racism, to name a few. She also broadens the subject of anorexia and bulimia beyond the traditional rhetoric of their being a “white girl’s problem.” Even students who have studied eating disorders before have rarely learned this aspect.

A history of fashion that has affected women’s health is also helpful for students to understand the connection between social norms/social control and body image. An overview of the corset, for example, or foot-binding, provides a framework for students to start thinking about whether or not anything has changed in today’s fashion arena. In other words, although it was the Women’s Movement that helped rid society of the corset, there are still social norms that control our bodies.

Activity: Advertisements

Ask students to bring in 2 advertisements that must include images. They can get them from a magazine, newspaper, or on-line, but be sure that they are image-based ads, not articles. They should bring in:

1. An ad that perpetuates inequalities in our culture: that conforms to stereotypes
2. An ad that challenges inequalities in our culture: that disrupts stereotypes

Then, in groups, ask students to share the ads that they brought in and explain why/how the first one perpetuates stereotypes and the second one challenges stereotypes. I then ask the class as a whole to hold up their first ad so that the rest of the class can see them. And I ask them, “What do you see?”

Students are sometimes surprised to find common themes in almost all of these ads: white, thin, women who conform to society’s beauty norms. They also find that women are typically in stereotypical roles selling “gendered” products: household cleaning supplies, facial products that

are meant to make women look younger, products that help women lose weight. Males are portrayed as muscular and masculine, usually in suits, often in an office. This discussion covers gender, race, sexuality, and class; and covers forms of oppression (women's expected social roles, for example) and privilege (heterosexuality as the expected sexual orientation, for example).

I then ask students to hold up their second advertisement. Students are often amazed at the diversity in these ads in terms of body size, race, sexual orientation, and class. Even so, in analyzing some of these ads it becomes clear that although there are specific aspects of the ads that depict less dominant images, there are other aspects that still conform to stereotypes. For example, if a student brings in an ad that portrays a woman of color, the woman in the ad is still usually thin, and most likely of a middle to upper SES which we can tell based on her accessories and/or her surroundings. This analysis challenges students to closely examine the ads they view on a regular basis, and also demonstrates the pervasiveness of stereotypes.

Finally, I ask the students:

1. Which ad was more difficult to find: the one perpetuating stereotypes or the one challenging stereotypes? Why do you think so?
2. What effect do you think advertisements have on either perpetuating or challenging the status quo/inequalities in our society?

Students are often incredulous that their second ad took so long to find. It becomes abundantly clear that every student had an exceedingly difficult time trying to find the ad that challenges stereotypes. That alone gets the point across that we live in a society that bombards us with racist, sexist, heterosexist, and classist images daily. The discussion ends with brainstorming ways to challenge these notions of inequality. Writing to magazines or newspapers is one way to take action; also, suggesting that students consider what they to choose to spend their

money on, is another. Most importantly, when they see ads, they can make themselves aware of how stereotypes are being perpetuated. Thinking critically about images and information in general they are subjected to, and discussing these ideas with others, empowers students to become agents of change.

A concluding exercise on the topic of body image that also revolves around challenging what students have been taught is as follows:

Journal Activity: Rethinking Body Image

Ask students to silently think about a woman in their own lives that they love, admire, and has qualities to which they aspire. Ask them to think about that person for a moment. Then answer the following questions in their journals:

1. What qualities does she have that you admire?
2. What does she look like?
3. Which is more important?

I don't show students all three questions at once, but rather reveal each subsequent question after they have had a chance to answer the previous one. When they have had time to answer all three questions, students are invited to share what they wrote. This can be done in groups first and then with the class, or if time is a concern, then simply with the class. The point of this exercise becomes quite clear. We are socialized to focus on peoples' appearance, yet in this context the answer to question #2 seems irrelevant to most, if not all, students. What I especially value about this exercise is students sharing such beautiful sentiments about someone in their lives that they truly admire and love. I often ask them if this special person knows how they feel, suggesting they think about communicating this to her, if they choose to do so.

There are many films available on the topic of body image. Two of my favorites are:

1. Killing Us Softly (Part I, II, or III)
2. Reviving Ophelia

Also, there are websites that are useful for demonstrations in class. Here are two suggestions:

<http://demo.fb.se/e/girlpower/retouch/>

<http://www.campaignforrealbeauty.com/flat4.asp?id=6909>

Education and Family

Another institution with which all students are familiar is the system of education. For students who have been brought up in the U.S. especially, most come from a uni-cultural neighborhood and a uni-cultural school. This is a topic that is discussed in depth in Jonathan Kozol's "The Shame of the Nation" which is excerpted in this section of *The Matrix Reader*. Asking students to consider how multicultural their upbringing was is the focus of the next exercise. Paul Gorski has created several multicultural quizzes which can be found at:

<http://www.edchange.org/multicultural/quizzes.html>. One of these quizzes focuses specifically on multicultural awareness, and another focuses on poverty. Answers are provided as well. Any of these quizzes present statistics and information that can be the fodder for rich class discussion.

It is also helpful to discuss students' personal experiences in their schools and classrooms. For example, how has gender affected their education? Well-known classroom researchers Sadker and Sadker (1995) found that girls are treated very differently from boys in the classroom. Boys are given more time to answer questions and are called on more often, for example.

Frequently, the result is that girls learn *not* to speak in class. Do your students' experiences mimic Sadker and Sadker's research? If so, how has that played out in their studies today? Do

female students feel comfortable speaking up in class or not? What about in *this* class specifically?

Students often believe their personal experiences to be anomalous, especially those who have been treated unfairly in the classroom. Most are unaware that teachers are not usually trained to bring up issues of race and gender in class (Howard, 2006), and many teachers erroneously believe their classrooms to be equitable [for an interview about classroom inequalities with David and Myra Sadker, see:

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa3617/is_199402/ai_n8711584].

Language Use

Students are aware that language can be a powerful weapon for demeaning others. When asked, they often confess to having used some sort of derogatory term at some point in their lives. However, they often think of those who use these terms regularly as racist or sexist. Most often, they do not connect their own language use to racism, sexism, classism, or heterosexism. As is pointed out in the article, “Sounds and Silences of Language” in Section III of *The Matrix Reader*, “Offensive language often permeates society surreptitiously, preparing its young members to be homophobic” or racist, or sexist, etc.

Activity: Analyzing Language

Divide students into groups of 3 or 4 and ask them to come up with:

1. A list of words or phrases they use regularly that, upon consideration, could be considered offensive to others
2. A corresponding list of other words they might use instead
3. Have the groups present at least a few items from both their “offensive” and “transformed” lists

Most likely, students will not have a difficult time coming up with either list. What might be surprising is that before this exercise and discussion, most students had not connected their own language use with the larger concept of institutionalized oppression (and subsequent privilege).

Activity: The Heterosexual Questionnaire

Many offensive words and phrases are discussed in the article, “Sounds and Silences of Language.” One phrase that is especially familiar to students is, “that’s so gay,” which is often used to describe something in a negative way that usually has nothing to do with sexual orientation. To challenge students to consider the consequences of their language on this issue, I often refer to The Heterosexual Questionnaire. This questionnaire is available online at:

<http://monster-island.org/tinashumor/humor/quest.html>

The questionnaire asks a series of questions directed at heterosexuals that are most often asked of lesbians and gay men. The questionnaire asks students to reflect on such inquiries as: what do you think caused your heterosexuality? And: when and how did you first decide you were a heterosexual?

I have found the questionnaire to be extremely useful in helping students to understand the insensitivity that is inherent in many of the questions. And rather than focusing on blaming them if they have asked questions like these of others in the past, we focus instead on why and how we have learned that these questions are acceptable to ask anyone.

Further, for a similar list about non-transgender privileges and associated unacceptable questions people often ask, see: <http://nbtsc.org/~ftmichael/privilege.html>.

Affirmative Action

Often, students make comments throughout the course about how a minority person has more benefits than a white person. Perhaps they use the example of a white friend of a friend who says they didn't get into college (or receive a scholarship, or get a job, etc.) *because* they were white. As mentioned earlier, this is a subject I always table, letting students know that later in the semester we will discuss this topic in depth. So at this point in the semester, they are often excited to learn that the time for that conversation has finally arrived.

I usually start out by asking students about their perceptions of Affirmative Action. What stories have they heard about it? What do they think it means? Many students respond by saying they heard it was a "quota system designed to hire unqualified minorities over white males." This answer provides the basis for understanding the handout in Appendix A. Compiled by co-editor Abby Ferber, it provides facts and statistics about the myths and realities of Affirmative Action.

Activity: Affirmative Action Handout

See Appendix A

These myths and realities help give students the background information they need to understand that affirmative action was never meant to be a quota system. Rather it was set up to level an uneven playing field. Most often, the media is cited as the source of information against affirmative action. And the anecdotal evidence students bring to class against affirmative action, upon further analysis, turns out to be imprecise and incomplete, i.e., the friend of a friend really didn't know the qualifications of the person who was hired/given a scholarship/given a job over them. This information is also useful for students to use in their discussions with others outside the class, because Affirmative Action is one of the topics that people use most often to challenge this material.

Usually by this point in the semester, students are clear about the inequalities that exist in society. Regardless, I often end this discussion about affirmative action with the following quote by Jane Elliott of the *Blue Eyes/Brown Eyes* exercise. In a PBS *Frontline* interview, she said:

Invariably, when I do a presentation anywhere in this country, the issue of affirmative action comes up. People say that white males are the ones who are being discriminated against in this country today. So I say, "Fine. OK. Will every white person in this room who would like to spend the rest of his or her life being treated, discussed, and looked upon as we treat, discuss, and look upon people of color, generally speaking, in this society, please stand?" And I watch. And wait. And the only sounds in the room are those made by people of color as they turn in their seats to see how many white folks are standing. Not one white person stands. And I just let them sit there. Then I say, "Do you know what you just admitted? You just admitted that you know that it's happening, you know that it's ugly, and you know that you don't want it for you. So why are you so willing to accept it for others? The ultimate obscenity is that you deny that it's happening."

I think white people aren't aware that racism isn't just wearing white hoods and burning crosses. It's also fixing the system so that black votes don't get counted. It's refusing to open the polling places in precincts where most of the eligible voters are people of color. It's outlawing affirmative action at the state level even though it has proven successful. It's building more prisons than we build schools and guaranteeing that they will be filled by targeting young men of color with things like the "three strikes" legislation in California, and the DWB -- "driving while black." These are problems encountered by young black men all over this country. It's the fact that there are more children attending segregated schools in the U.S. today than there were previous to *Brown vs. Board of Education*. It's

white flight and red-lining by financial institutions. It's television programming that portrays people of color as villains and white people as their victims. It's ballot-security systems, which are used to intimidate minority voters and so result in the very activities which they are supposedly designed to prevent.

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/divided/etc/crusade.html>)

This quote reviews so many of the ways in which oppression and privilege are institutionalized in the U.S. It also highlights the insidious ways that these inequalities play out.

Potential Challenges

Students often have difficulty processing all of this information because first, many have never analyzed institutions in this way before, and second, we as a society have been taught to ignore many of these inequalities so it often hits students hard. It is critical to acknowledge and deal with the emotions that arise during this part of the course. As discussed in the Introduction to this Instructor Manual, we as educators must be aware of our own *triggers*: those subjects that invoke a physiological response in us that we have to acknowledge and process before being able to continue teaching. Often, when students analyze how inequalities play out in society, they, too, might experience physiological responses that must be acknowledged and processed. Usually their responses to these topics are visceral. Watching these documentaries or discussing body image often brings up frustration, anger, and can sometimes remind students of past traumatic experiences.

For managing strong emotions in the classroom, I have found meta-analysis to be invaluable. In order to navigate this often rocky terrain, it is imperative to periodically stop during class and ask students how they are responding to the material. This forced break gives them the opportunity to step back and focus not on *what* they are learning, but on *how* they are learning. What emotions arise from learning this? Are they uncomfortable? Are they experiencing stress or

other physiological symptoms? Why is this so difficult to hear? Are they willing to continue to move forward with the topic at hand? This “break” gives students the opportunity to process not only the information, but their reaction to it. Discussing their reactions either in small groups and/or with the whole class helps them put their feelings into words and process their emotions.

Further, a meta-analysis also gives me the chance to think about how hard I am pushing the students, and whether I need to adjust my techniques in order to facilitate the best learning experience for this particular group of students. This also exemplifies the need for adaptability in the classroom. An awareness of the environment and willingness to adapt to the needs of students is critical. If the goal is to facilitate students’ learning, an effective teacher must be confident enough to inquire whether or not students are learning, and if they are learning, how much? And do I, as the facilitator, have to adjust my course of action to maximize the result?

This is not simply an academic exercise. This is often the point in the semester when I get reflection papers that are filled with confessions: substance abuse, eating disorders, suicidal thoughts, stories of rape, incest, domestic violence; the list goes on. It is horrifying to read what students have been through, but usually at this juncture, they are ready to unburden themselves, realizing that they are survivors of an unfair system of inequality, and they finally will consider getting the help they need to move forward with their lives.

It is important to note that as an educator, it is not necessarily my responsibility to counsel students myself. It is imperative that we set boundaries so we don’t end up burning ourselves out when it comes to troubled students. Most often, I refer them to the campus Counseling Center and sometimes ask the head of the Center to come into my classes to give a short presentation on their services. This goes a long way in reassuring students that although society still tends to stigmatize anyone who goes to counseling, it is perfectly acceptable. If the campus didn’t think it was important and in great demand by students, faculty, and staff, it would

not exist. Whether they go to counseling or not, it is clear that processing these emotions even briefly in class is imperative for students to become empowered to create change in their own lives and in their communities.

References

Howard, Gary. (2006). *We Can't Teach What We Don't Know: White Teachers, Multiracial Schools*. NY: Teachers College Press.

Sadker, Myra and David Sadker. (1995). *Failing at Fairness*. New York, NY: Scribner.

Appendix A

Affirmative Action: Myths and Realities

By Abby Ferber

1. Myth: Affirmative Action is an unfair quota system

Reality: quotas have been illegal for many years

Affirmative action programs establish goals, plans and timetables in occupations and workplaces where there has been discrimination historically, and women and people of color have been excluded. Goals simply mean that the workplace attempts to achieve a minimum level of diversity, timetable means over a specified period of time. Workplaces are expected to make efforts to reach these goals, and there are no penalties or consequences for not doing so.

2. Myth: Jobs and college acceptances should be given to people based on merit only

Reality: Few hiring decisions are based on merit only

Most open positions are never advertised and open to the public, but filled by word of mouth to personal or political friends and relatives. 80% of job openings are filled without advertising the position. For 200 years prior to the Civil Rights Act of 1964, we had, in effect, de facto affirmative action for white men. Even now the majority of the jobs with middle to high income are offered to white men, who only represent 37% of the population.

Reality: Colleges commonly consider factors other than merit

Colleges take many factors into consideration, including region of the country/state that applicants come from; athletic ability; other extra-curricular talents and abilities; and class and parents status. Many children of alumni are given preferential treatment by colleges and universities, especially the most prestigious Ivy League schools. Legacies: 1/5 of Harvard's students receive preferential treatment because their parents went there. These overwhelmingly white, upper-class offspring are more than three times as likely to be accepted to Harvard as those whose parents did not attend. Yalies are 2 1/5 times more likely to be admitted than those without connections. Schools commonly defend these plans, claiming that legacies were more qualified, however, the U.S. Department of Education found that legacies are significantly less qualified than the other applicants. In any given year at Harvard, the number of legacies admitted due to preference far outweighs the number of *all* minority students combined. Admission to these exclusive Ivy League schools guarantees high status jobs and high income careers, providing upper-class white adolescents with a huge head start denied to others.

3. Myth: Only economic need, not race or gender, should be used as a basis for affirmative action

Reality: Job inequities occur at all economic levels

In fact, the least progress has been made in positions that pay the highest salaries and have the broadest supervisory responsibilities.

4. Myth: Affirmative action leads to reverse discrimination:

Men believe they face more job discrimination than women: Men are more likely to believe that a woman will get a job or promotion over an equally qualified man, than they are to believe that a man will get a promotion over an equally qualified woman.

Whites believe they face more job discrimination than people of color: When asked whether African-Americans or whites were at greater risk of discrimination at work, respondents named whites twice as often; 2/3 to 4/5 of whites surveyed thought it likely that less qualified African-Americans won jobs or promotions over more qualified whites; and 70-80% of white people surveyed believe that affirmative action sometimes discriminates against whites.

Reality: Relatively few whites experience job discrimination

Only 5-12% of whites believe their race has cost them a job or promotion, compared to 36% of African-Americans; only 3% of whites report they have experienced discrimination in pay or promotion, versus 16% of African-Americans and 8% of Latinos; of the 451,442 discrimination complaints filed with the EEOC between 1987-1994, only 4% charged reverse discrimination, and only a fraction of those were found credible upon investigation; less than 2% of cases reaching the courts charged reverse discrimination, and almost all of these were dismissed by the courts for lack of merit.

5. Myth: Affirmative action is a liberal/democratic program

Reality: Many of today's affirmative action standards were implemented by the Nixon administration, which was Republican.

Affirmative action now faces a strong republican backlash that is attempting to redefine the programs as liberal, and to turn back the clock on our nation's commitment to equality.

6. Myth: Affirmative Action is no longer necessary

Reality: Affirmative Action is still necessary to dismantle past and ongoing discrimination.

Affirmative action plans have been in place only since the 1960s. Over 200 years of legal, government sanctioned race and gender discrimination can hardly be remedied with 30 years of modest, limited, hiring goals and timetables.

Reality: Discrimination against women and people of color is still widespread, in both education and the world of work.

At every educational level, there is a racial and gender unemployment gap, income/wage gap, and poverty gap. We still do not have a level playing field.

(Sources: "Why Are droves of Unqualified, Unprepared Kids Getting Into Our Top Colleges? Because their Dads are Alumni" by John Larew, in *The Meaning of Difference*, 1996; *The Realities of Affirmative Action in Employment*, by Barbara Reskin, American Sociological Association, 1998; Ms. May/June, 1995; *Reverse Discrimination: Dismantling the Myth*, by Fred L. Pincus, 2003)

SECTION 5: BE THE CHANGE

Learning Objectives

10. To provide students with an understanding of resistance to social change, and how to overcome it
11. To challenge students to become agents of change and provide ways to do so

SECTION 5A: RECOGNIZING RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

At this point in the semester, students are more aware of the institutionalized oppression and privilege that exists in society. It is critical at this juncture that they become aware of how resistance plays out in society and in their own lives. Only when they are aware of the challenges they face in creating change are they truly prepared to get started.

There are plenty of examples of resistance to change in U.S. history. The example I choose to use is the topic of feminism. I start out by asking students to raise their hand if they would even consider calling themselves a feminist. I have rarely had more than a handful of students raise their hands. I take note of this count on the board. I also ask if they think men can be feminists, and there is usually a mixed response from this question. It is interesting to see where they stand at the beginning of the discussion on resistance, because it emphasizes what they have been taught to believe. The following activity provides an opportunity to consider and critically analyze their perception of feminism.

Activity: What is a Feminist?

Start out by asking students:

1. What is a feminist?
2. Where did you get these ideas?

I can usually fill up the board with their responses to question #1. Their responses correspond with Allan Johnson's "Feminists and Feminisms" in Section V of *The Matrix Reader*: negative portrayals they have been taught to associate with feminists: anti-feminine, anti-family, male-bashers, radicals, etc. Most students cite the media as their source of information. We then discuss the truth about feminists and feminism.

The goal of mainstream feminism as expressed by the National Organization for Women, the largest women's organization in the U.S., is: "to share equal rights, responsibilities and opportunities with men, while living free from discrimination." I then ask students three simple questions:

1. Do you believe in equal pay for equal work?
2. Do you believe that women should be considered for any job in which they are qualified?
3. Do you believe in ending violence against women?

All hands go up in response to these questions and my response is: "Then, guess what?" And they often finish the thought. I also make it clear that mainstream feminism represents choice. In other words, in the past, women did not have the choices women have today. Thanks to the Women's Movement, many women have been given choices. Mainstream feminism is not only for women who work outside the home as most students have been taught to think, but rather that women should now be free to choose what they want to do, just as men can, even if it means the choice is to become a stay-at-home parent. This fact is important to reiterate because many students have been told otherwise.

So we are left with a contradiction: how the media portrays mainstream feminism vs. the actual goals of mainstream feminism. The question is, how and why does the media present feminism and feminists so negatively? Usually a student or two have been to a rally for women's rights and can share their experiences, but if not, I share mine. The reality is, most people (both men

and women) at a rally are peacefully standing, listening to the speaker at the event, perhaps holding a sign. For a media photographer, this does not create a very exciting image. When loud groups of people, such as Dykes on Bikes, who typically attend such rallies in full leather attire on thunderous motorcycles, show up, they make much better media images. So for those sitting at home watching the news, they hear that a feminist rally has taken place and see footage of radical feminism. Moreover, there are other well-known personalities who perpetuate these same ideas about feminists and feminism. The question for students is: Why? What are the consequences of this negative representation of feminism?

In Pulitzer-Prize winner, Susan Faludi's (1992) well-known book, *Backlash: The Undeclared War Against Women*, she explains that there is a counter-assault on the rights of women; an effort to challenge the achievements made by women from the Women's Movement. The goal of this counter-movement, or backlash as she called it, is to try to convince the public that women's equality is to blame for the social, economic and political problems in society. It is literally a movement to *resist* change.

Again, the question is why? What is the purpose of fighting change? By this point, students often recognize the need and desire of those in power to remain in power. Women's equality threatens the status-quo, so it makes sense that those who are afraid to lose power would fight against women's equality. The consequence of perpetuating these negative ideas about feminism is that fewer and fewer people (both women and men) would feel comfortable associating themselves with the concept. When that happens, the feminist movement loses support. The phrase, "I'm not a feminist, but . . ." comes to mind in terms of a way to express ideas in support of women's equality, while at the same time distancing oneself from feminism. In a nutshell, the backlash has worked!

This critical thinking allows students the opportunity to reflect on the messages and often, propaganda, to which they have been exposed. I then ask them to consider what being a feminist might mean for them and invite them to write a short paper creating their own definitions of feminism for extra credit if they choose. Finally, I ask them the same question I asked at the beginning of class: if they would even consider calling themselves a feminist now that they know the truth? Almost every single hand goes up. These are motivated students who are willing to take action.

Now that students have had a chance to analyze how resistance takes shape in society, the next step is for them to see how it plays out in their own lives.

Activity: Threats to Equality/Resistance to Change

On the board, I list students' responses to the query: "What keeps us from challenging inequalities? What keeps us from challenging someone when they say something that we believe is racist or sexist or heterosexist, etc.?" Responses are thoughtful and abundant. Most often I hear:

1. Fear of repercussions, including: being ostracized, getting fired, losing friendships, etc.
2. Discomfort in a challenging situation
3. Fear of change in general
4. Their own ignorance: not knowing enough or having enough information to argue for equality
5. Fear that others will see *them* as the problem rather than inequality (I call this "shooting the messenger")
6. Believing the stereotypes we are taught to believe; buying into the messages we are bombarded with
7. Apathy

8. Thinking that anything we do won't have a large enough impact to make a difference
9. Physical safety in certain situations

The list goes on . . . in fact, more ideas on this topic can be found in Allan Johnson's (2006) book, *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. Once this list has been created, the most important point to make is how *real* these threats are. They truly keep us individually and cumulatively from working towards equality. We cannot brush them off as inconsequential or unimportant, but must instead recognize their power to stop us from acting. So the next question for students takes the form of a journal entry.

Journal Activity: Personal Resistance

Ask students: Which of these threats on the board applies to you personally? In other words, which keep you from being a force for change? Which has kept you from speaking out or challenging inequalities?

I also let them know that if they have other ideas that are not listed on the board, they can feel free to include them in their own journals. Then, after giving them ample time to write down their own personal resistance, I reiterate how powerful these factors are in keeping us from acting. I ask them to silently reflect on what they just wrote and then to answer the following question in their journals:

If it is so difficult to change, then why should we bother trying?

Once they have answered this question, it is incredibly powerful to go around the room and ask each person to share what they wrote in answer to the last question. It is truly inspiring to hear a room full of people explain each in their own words why working for social justice is important, necessary, and has become a personal imperative.

Gaining a thorough understanding of the concept of resistance is critical not only for students to analyze their own resistance, but also to help them deal with resistance from others when they have conversations about social justice with their family, friends, co-workers, etc. It takes a tremendous amount of patience, good listening skills, and compassion to be effective in talking with others about these sensitive topics.

If they would like some practice discussing some of these issues, try the following activity that co-editor Christina Jiménez suggests:

Activity: Discussing Controversial Topics

Start out by coming up with some controversial topics (abortion, the war, etc.) and write them on the board. Then have students pair up. One student will be Student A and the other, Student B.

1. Have each pair pick a topic from the board and then say that all Student A's will take the *pro* stance for whatever topic they've chosen (regardless of their personal beliefs)
2. Give all Student A's two minutes to argue the pro-side of that topic (Student B should be listening and silent)
3. Then all Student B's take the *anti* stance on their topic and argue that side for two minutes
4. Then debrief: Ask students, "What was hard about speaking about/arguing your topic?" and facilitate a short discussion
5. Then ask, "What was hard about listening to your classmate speak about this topic?" and facilitate a short discussion

This is a short exercise (about 10 minutes total) that gets students to think about what it means to listen to views that may be different from their own; and how even if you don't agree; you still owe the person respect and dignity to speak their mind.

Even better would be to have Student A speak about the side of the issue that Student B DISAGREES with when it's Student A's turn to speak. Then have Student B speak about the side of the issue that Student A DISAGREES with. That will really get them thinking about how difficult it can be to hear the viewpoints that challenge us to be compassionate and understanding regardless of our own belief systems.

A phenomenal film on the topic of resistance is, *The Color of Fear* (Lee Mun Wah, 1994). One of the questions that is asked in the film is one I often share with my students. It is asked of David, a person in the film who is resistant to the topic of social justice and simply does not want to acknowledge or accept his own privilege. The question is:

What would it mean for you for this to be true?

This is a powerful question because it strikes at the heart of the matter. For some, it takes a true paradigm shift to recognize and understand these difficult concepts about privilege and oppression. This question is valuable for any student who might still be resistant to these topics, but also serves to model how students can deal with resistance in their own conversations.

SECTION 5B: INSTITUTIONALIZING SOCIAL CHANGE

As oppression and privilege play out on both the institutional and personal level, we ask students to consider their role in making a difference in both. Articles in this section of *The Matrix Reader* focus specifically on examples of social change at the community, and sometimes national, level. These examples empower students to understand that change can and does happen. This is especially important for those who think that inequality in society is too great a problem for them to affect.

To bring it to a personal level, at the beginning of the semester, I assign students a Social Action Project and Presentation. They can work on this project throughout the semester and I hold one class period for each of them to present what they have done. In this way, they become role models for others – and students are left with lots of ideas of how they can make a difference, and how much easier it was to make a difference than they first thought!

Activity: Social Action Project and Presentation

In order to make a difference in the world, we need social action. Social action is any activity that helps to create change on a societal or institutional level. Tell students:

For this project, you will choose one of the activities listed below, or one of your own (based on Instructor's approval), and follow it through. You will then present your activity to the class, and explain why you believe it will make a difference in the world.

The primary objective of this project is to take action in the world and to share that experience with others. As you teach us about how you made a difference in the world, you become a role model, inspiring and motivating others to follow your lead.

Your presentation should include:

1. WHAT you chose to do for your project

2. WHY you chose the project you did
3. HOW you did your project
4. WHY you believe your action will make a difference
5. WHAT you learned from the experience/personal insight

Possible activities:

1. write to a newspaper or company protesting an ad, article, or discriminatory policy; or complimenting an ad, article, etc.
2. research a woman's, men's or multicultural organization and join it
3. create a piece of art representing a theme from this class
4. interview someone who is approximately 25 years older or younger than you, who is also a different sex and a different race than you; ask questions about their experiences with themes from this class
5. help get out the vote for a candidate who is a voice for multicultural change
6. write to a principal of a school, the superintendent of a school district, or to a president or dean of a university explaining why you think classes on issues of race/gender/sexuality should be required
7. write to a high school principal or superintendant explaining the need for an LGBT-Straight alliance at every high school
8. create a forum on campus to discuss issues of race, gender, sexuality (bring in a speaker; start a club; or talk to your Resident Advisor about getting students in your dorm together to discuss these topics)
9. write and perform a song, poem, or spoken word in class

10. you choose: be creative! BUT: If you decide to do a different activity than those mentioned here, please obtain Instructor's approval first!

The day students present these projects is typically one of their favorite classes. They are proud to share what they have done/created, and they are amazed by what other students have accomplished. That said, there are usually one or two students in the class who are on the verge of a panic attack just thinking about presenting their projects to the class. As that is not the goal of the assignment, or the goal of the course, I always give students the option of handing in their projects rather than presenting them. I discourage this as much as possible since it is to their benefit to practice speaking up on these issues, and it benefits the rest of the class to hear what they have to say. I usually only get one student per semester who chooses this option. Even so, if the purpose of the course is to be inclusive of everyone's learning abilities, it is important to provide alternatives.

Assigning a social action project provides many advantages. As mentioned, it gives students the opportunity to let their voices be heard. In a course that centers on how oppression and privilege play out, it is important to hear everyone speak out. Those who have just begun to realize their own privilege are able to voice their frustration with an unfair system in a very productive way. Those whose voices have been regularly silenced in society are given the time and space to let themselves be heard. Most of all, after a semester of learning material that students find unsettling at best, depressing at worst, this project is especially empowering in that it lets students know they can, in fact, make a difference in their communities.

SECTION 5C: WHERE DO I BEGIN?

Now that students are aware of social inequalities and how they play out in society, their question is always, "What do I do about it on a personal level?" I purposefully leave the brunt of the answer to that question for the end of the course. The reason for this is that as creative as

students are, it is important that they take ownership of the problem in their own lives and figure out ways to challenge inequalities on their own. It is a learning process for everyone, and if students are hoping to become agents of change, they are going to have to experiment and see what works for them and what doesn't. I like to share this reasoning with them as well. After all, it's no secret, and it lets them know that I respect their initiative and creativity.

Once they have experimented with creating change on a community or national level with the social action project, they are eager to consider change on a personal level. A good place to start is to challenge students to think about their own role in perpetuating oppression. This is not about blaming them at all, but rather, asking them to *connect to the problem* as Allan Johnson (2006) suggests. We live in a society that bombards us with racist, sexist, heterosexist messages. Often unknowingly, we might buy into these messages and use language or behave in ways that perpetuate them. Ask students to consider their own actions using the following question:

Journal Activity: Perpetuation of Stereotypes

What are some ideas or behaviors that you possess that perpetuate the inequality of others?

Write about a time when you used your privilege for your own advantage.

Whenever possible, I find it helpful to use personal examples so that students know we are *all* implicated by these systems of inequality. I often tell students stories about my own journey in learning about privilege and oppression. This not only helps them understand the process, but also lets them know it is not about blaming them, but rather taking responsibility for our own role in maintaining this system.

I ask students to share what they wrote in small groups. Then, while still in those groups, I ask them to brainstorm answers to the following question:

What could you have done differently to make a difference?

I then ask them each to write an answer to this question in their journals so they can refer back to it in the future.

More Ways to Make a Difference

Once they have started to think about ways they can create change, having read any of the articles in Section V of *The Matrix Reader*, it is time to provide them with some ideas and suggestions that they can directly make use of. They are outlined below and some are further detailed following the outline.

1. Educate yourself: it is not the responsibility of people with minority status to educate everyone else. Only after you have done your own reading and research on a particular race, religion, ethnicity should you go ahead and ask questions. The questions likely will be better received if the person you are asking knows you are truly interested.
2. Continue to write letters to editors, organizations, etc.: both positive and negative
3. Consider how you speak to both girls and boys: What language are you using? What topics are you focusing on?
4. Don't stay silent: As Audre Lorde states in "The Transformation of Silence into Language and Action:" "your silence will choke you."
5. Be an Ally: use your power to challenge inequalities and create change
6. It is never too late to make a difference: if you realize you could have spoken out and didn't, find a way to talk to that person or group later.
7. Challenge others by educating calmly; anger and frustration will only increase their defensiveness, whereas gentle discussions lead to effective change

8. Know when to say “when:” don’t waste your energy trying to make a difference over and over again with a person who is clearly uninterested at best, antagonistic at worst. You will burn out. Keep in mind that you can’t reach everyone and that’s okay.
9. Get support: this work is difficult enough to pursue in a group, but alone, it is nearly impossible.

Silence

David Wellman (1993) suggests that when we think about racism, we should go “beyond prejudice to include sentiments that in their consequence, if not their intent, support the racial status quo” (p. 211). In other words, in order to challenge inequalities, we have to consider all the ways in which we might perpetuate them with our language or action; or conversely, our inaction. Allan Johnson (2006) suggests that “what counts isn’t just what [we] do, but even more what [we] *don’t* do” (p. 106). Silence itself can be considered a way of encouraging the status quo, as depicted in the following passage:

. . . I imagine a scene in which a gang of white men are beating a person of color in broad daylight on a city street. I’m standing in a crowd of white people who are watching. We aren’t hurting anyone. We feel no ill will toward the man being beaten and may feel sorry for him. We aren’t cheering the attackers on or showing any outward signs of approval. We’re just standing in silence, “minding our own business.” And then one of the men stops, looks up, and says, his eyes panning across our faces, “We appreciate your support. We couldn’t do this without you” (Johnson, p. 106)

Johnson refers to this scenario as *passive oppression*: allowing discrimination to happen simply by not stopping it. This is an important aspect of making a difference. Many students believe that if they don’t laugh at a racist or sexist joke, that is enough to challenge inequalities. The

reality is, silence often goes unnoticed, so the consequence is that the teller of the joke still thinks it is acceptable to tell such jokes. No change has occurred.

Furthermore, many people think it is all right to tell racist, sexist, or heterosexist jokes as long as they *think* none of the “targeted” audience is nearby. However, doing so creates a *hostile environment*: an often unspoken, but accepted, tolerance of hurtful, inappropriate behavior that brings with it a cloud of oppression. This behavior reifies both privilege and oppression and is contagious as well. As participants are not challenged, they often think this behavior is acceptable and consequently the environment becomes even more hostile.

Privilege and Allies

In thinking about creating change, sometimes I hear students say that they wish that everyone had the same privileges they have. It is important that they understand that this is not only impossible, but nonsensical.

Allan Johnson (2006) describes this succinctly, and I often share this quote with students:

A common form of blindness to privilege is that women and people of color are often described as being treated unequally, but men and whites are not. This, however, is logically impossible. *Unequal* simply means “not equal,” which describes both those who receive less than their fair share *and* those who receive more. But there can’t be a short end of the stick without a long end, because it’s the longness of the long end that makes the short end short. To pretend otherwise makes privilege and those who receive it invisible (p. 120).

As discussed in Section II of *The Matrix Reader*, privilege exists at the *expense* of others. To do away with oppression means doing away with privilege as well. Privilege and oppression exist at an institutional level, so at this point, it is not possible to “give up” one’s privilege. For

example, if you are white, you cannot single-handedly change the way others see you, and you cannot take off white skin. But you can use the power you gain from privilege to become an ally to others.

The role of an ally is described in detail in Andrea Ayvazian's "Interrupting the Cycle of Oppression: The Role of Allies as Agents of Change" in Section VC of *The Matrix Reader*.

Being an ally means using your privilege to support someone who is not privileged in that same category. So white people can be allies for people of color; men can be allies for women; heterosexual people can be allies for the LGBT community, etc. This is *not* to say that people who fall into categories of oppression do not have the power to support themselves and each other. But the concept of being an ally implicates and empowers everyone. After all, I remind students, everyone in the class has acknowledged that they possess some type of privilege, whether it be heterosexual privilege, physical privilege, religious privilege, etc. That means everyone has the ability to be an ally for someone else; to "have their back."

If a woman hears a sexist joke, for example, and she challenges the joke teller, the joke teller might think or say, "Well of course she didn't like the joke; she's a woman." If a man hears a sexist joke, on the other hand, and challenges it, his male privilege affords him the power to be listened to because presumably he wasn't offended for himself but for others. Using privilege for positive change is a welcome solution for students who have been fretting about their unearned and unfair privilege for much of the semester.

Challenging Others

Students often ask how to start or maintain a productive conversation with their friends, family, co-workers, roommates, etc. This is an opportunity to provide them with some guidelines to follow:

1. Try to understand where they are coming from

- a. Culturally, they have been exposed to the same stereotypical messages we all have been, so be compassionate and understanding about that
 - b. Emotionally, it is important to examine how they are feeling: if you start gently asking questions about what they just said, for example, and they are extremely angry with you, then perhaps it would be better to discuss the topic later
2. Check yourself before speaking
 - a. If you are frustrated and angry with something they just said, perhaps you need to calm down before having this discussion
 - b. When you are ready, consider every discussion on this topic an opportunity to educate
3. Work to reduce their defensiveness
 - a. Be mindful of your tone of voice and your body language: pointing your finger at them and telling them how ignorant they are, for example, will likely be ineffective
 - b. Again, educating calmly often leads to productive discussions
4. Personalize it with yourself or them:
 - a. “That doesn’t sound like something you would normally say – what’s up?”
 - b. “I feel bothered by what you just said; can we discuss it?”
5. Defensiveness is usually about the subject, not you
 - a. I call this “shooting the messenger” – when they get angry or frustrated that you brought up the topic of inequalities, it is likely that they don’t think they can have any effect on the situation, and often, they direct that frustration toward you
 - b. Keeping this in mind if they get angry is helpful so you don’t take it personally
6. Every interaction with others becomes a choice
 - a. either to challenge or perpetuate the status quo
 - b. if you choose to be an agent for change, you become a role model for others

In addition to these strategies, I recommend distributing the handout called “Six Steps to Speaking Up Against Everyday Bigotry” which is available on-line at www.tolerance.org.

Getting Support

Having information readily available for referring students to organizations both on campus and off that support this kind of work is vital in their continued journey. Reminding them that this is only the beginning can motivate them to find avenues to continue on this path toward social justice.

Making a Plan

Now that students are aware of some general strategies and techniques for creating change, it is time to challenge them to consider how they can make a difference in their own lives. I start off with the following general question:

Journal Activity: Taking Action

What are you willing to change in your life in order for equality to be possible? Make a list of 5-10 things you can do in your own life to challenge inequalities. Please be SPECIFIC.

I remind students that every time they challenge inequality or stereotypes they are using their power to create change. They usually come up with ways in which they can use their privilege to become an ally; offensive language they can stop using; discussions they want to have with specific people in their lives, etc.

As Allan Johnson (2006) suggests, I then ask students to rank the items on their list from the least risky (#1) to the most risky. I then ask them to share a few of the items on their list with their neighbor so that they have the opportunity to verbally commit to implementing their intentions. Then I recommend that they start with the least risky items and once they have

gained some experience, move on to the more risky items (Johnson, 2006). I also suggest they keep the list and continue to add to it as they progress through their social justice journey.

I often conclude with a quote from the movie *Spiderman* (Raimi, 2002) that is spoken by Peter Parker's uncle: "With great power comes great responsibility." It is an appropriate send-off for students because it reminds them that they have the power to make a difference. To ignore that power is to perpetuate the inequalities they have spent all semester learning about.

Conversely, if they feel empowered (have been made to feel empowered), they will take on that responsibility willingly and with great passion. The goal is not necessarily for them to *make* a difference, but rather for them to "plant seeds" with the people in their lives and see where they blossom. I am often surprised by what students who were quite resistant at the beginning of my class are willing and able to do by the end of class and what jobs they end up taking on in the community post-graduation. Those of us who have chosen to teach issues of oppression and privilege in the classroom take on a great burden, but the rewards can be equally profound.

Potential Challenges

Sometimes students are completely on-board with one aspect of oppression and privilege, but not another. For example, some thoroughly understand and appreciate the plight of those who experience racism. They may not, however, be as sympathetic to the cause of heterosexism, for example. A key component of this work is to help students understand the intersectionality of all systems of oppression and privilege. Oppression for one means oppression for all because of the connecting privileges that are attached to those oppressions.

Social justice means every single person in a society should have the opportunity to participate in it (Ore, 2006), whether they be poor, part of the LGBT community, non-Christian, physically challenged, etc. Working towards this goal necessitates that we become cognizant of all the ways in which we are privileged and work to redefine what it means to possess privilege. Rather

than perpetuating the idea that white skin, for example, necessarily entitles the bearer to respect, trust, and financial security, or that a person of color necessarily engenders the opposite, we have the power to challenge these assumptions on every front. Social justice work means finding creative ways to spread information, education, compassion and understanding between and about different groups of people. It is truly an honor as an educator to use the space of the classroom to promote dignity and respect for all.

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ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Films

The Essential Blue-Eyed (B. Verhaag, Director) California Newsreel

In Whose Honor? (J. Rosenstein, Director) New Day Films

No Loans Today, color, 56 min., 1994. Directed by Lisanne Skyler. First Run/Icarus Films

A Place of Rage, color, 52 min., 1991. Directed by Pratibha Parmar. Women Make Movies.

Websites

The following websites are just a sampling of those that exist to promote and provide information about teaching inclusively:

<http://www.edchange.com/multicultural/>

<http://www.nameorg.org/>

<http://www.uccs.edu/~wpc/>

<http://www.tolerance.org/>

http://www.oswego.edu/~prusso1/teaching_for_social_justicemain.htm

<http://www.glsen.org/>

<http://www.education-world.com/preservice/learning/multicultural.shtml>

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/inclusive/>

<http://www.teachingaboutreligion.org/>

<http://www.teachingforchange.org/>

<http://www.bodieslikeours.org/forums/>

<http://www.pbs.org/race/>

Other Recommended Books/Articles:

Adams, Maurianne, Lee Anne Bell, and Pat Griffin, eds. (1997). *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook*. Routledge.

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