OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE: STRUCTURE, AGENCY, TRANSFORMATION

STUDIES IN SYMBOLIC INTERACTION

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OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE: STRUCTURE, AGENCY, TRANSFORMATION

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INTRODUCTION

Oppression and resistance dialectically envelop everyday life, for both the privileged and the oppressed. The disenfranchised live under regimes in which repression ranges from brutal to institutionally subtle. The privileged socially reproduce their rule through ideology that justifies and policy that institutionalizes subjugation. However, rejecting depression, detachment, and disaffection that emerge from surviving ruling-class regimes, many previously dispirited, instead, choose defiance. They engage in subjectivity struggles by crafting critical consciousness and refusing to be dupes to ideology that represents them as inferior. They undertake social struggles demanding policy that dismantles institutional discrimination and that enhances opportunities for learning and achievement. The exploited, as best as they can in regimes of ruling class and white male supremacy, reconstruct their selves and, it is hoped, transform society.

Sociology's foundational concept, social structure, distinguishes the discipline. Agency, however, cannot be disdained or disregarded. Without a concept of agency, sociologists stammer if called upon to explain how the subjugated transform from being obedient to capitalist culture to resisting cultural hegemony; that is to say, how they become motivated to change the meaning, context, and trajectory of their lives. The arc of history does not bend towards justice by itself, as Martin Luther King's life and the Civil Rights movement demonstrated. Social forces, such as the labor process and the market, will, if unregulated or left to ruling-class desire, occasion catastrophe in the vulnerable. Social justice compels purposeful and compassionate agents to shape social forces.

The qualitative studies that comprise this volume, mostly ethnographies from the symbolic interactionist community, present a structure-and-agency perspective, broadly defined, that constitutes the best sociological lens through which to understand oppression and resistance. The authors' research in this volume interrogates various aspects of oppression and resistance, from the personal to the institutional. Some authors explore situations in which the structure of oppression was insurmountable while others illustrate cases in which agency was able to transform either individual or group identity. Notable to this collection, three scholars address indigenous peoples' collective action to resist long-standing state-sponsored subjugation. In organizing the articles, I began with ones in which structures of domination were severe and gradually shifted to ones in which the marginalized succeeded in resisting such structures.

James A. Vela-McConnell's investigation illustrates the overwhelming power of organizational oppression. Drawing on insights from Goffman's concept of

"stigmatization" and "strategic interaction" as well as from the dramaturgical perspective, he examines the sex abuse scandal within the Catholic Church. He reveals how the Church engaged in "information management" to conceal "discrediting information." Stigmatized organizations act in ways analogous to stigmatized individuals, except that such organizations have "structural resources" far in excess to individuals, allowing them to prevent scandal through secrecy and collaboration. In the process of isolating themselves from the outside word, such organizations become "total institutions," necessitating herculean efforts to expose the scandal.

Bryant Keith Alexander presents a film autocritography and personal narrative that juxtaposes his experiences of oppression as a "teacher, scholar, and administrator" with those of other African Americans portrayed in major films. He recounts discrimination in higher education and a harrowing encounter outside of academia, both of which exemplify white supremacy. Alexander undergoes essentialism, his status and behavior ignored while the color of his skin manifests itself, through oppressors' eyes, as all-important.

Jill Taft-Kaufman's study illustrates one of the most devastating crucibles the self undergoes, its alteration when afflicted by illness and injury. Such trials come to many of us too soon, as they did to her husband. Eventually they come to all of us. Illness and injury disfigure physicality, diminish strength, reconfigure abilities, and cloud identity. Lives, "rituals," "routines," and relationships with friends, change. Taft-Kaufman tackles the problem of patients coming to grips with an unrecoverable identity. Through the use of aesthetic strategies and theatre techniques, especially group narrative work, or storytelling, she demonstrates individuals' capacity for identity transformation. Particularly helpful in this transformation are new definitions of health as various forms of "well-being" and not the absence of "sickness." Through storytelling, selves regenerate, building the necessary "autonomy" and "collective strength" to continue on in the "journey that remains." The author delineates aesthetic narrative collaborations as well as a template for storytelling.

Taylor Price and Antony Puddephatt draw on George Herbert Mead's concept of emergence and Lonnie Athens's perspective of radical interactionism to portray the structure of domination of "subscription-based journals" in academic publishing. Editors of open access journals are resisting this structure that circumscribes the lives of the creative community in the academy, especially those who have been "marginalized" by "conventional publishing norms." Based on qualitative interviews, the authors describe the meaning making process within the open access publishing community that centers on resisting "profit motives" and emerging new "structures of power" that dismantle "access barriers" for audiences and contributors.

Laura L. Cochrane's ethnography exemplifies the importance of structure and agency to resistance. The Senegalese have a long history of developing indigenous community-based organizations dedicated to "collective ownership and work." They resisted cooperatives "imposed" by the French colonial

administration and Senegal's independent state. Today, as in the past, through epistemological emancipation and a sense of power, the Senegalese articulate their own "faith-based" philosophies and "community-based principles" that help them build community-based organizations to resist neo-liberal models of global development.

Lisa-Jo K. van den Scott's field work focuses on the Inuit of northern Canada's efforts to resist in "subtle forms" "Western cultural paradigms" of time brought on by "hyper-globalization." The dominant group imposes the stigma of lazy, for example, on the Inuit's refusal to submit to Western culture's nine-to-five work regime. The Inuit, a marginalized group, resist Western culture's rational time constraints through the agency of developing their own temporal norms in which "doing time differently" signifies to them and to the dominant group that they are the makers of their own group identity and community, social practices, and values. The Inuit, by taking time for themselves, cultivate solidarity and resist one of the iron cages of rationalization instituted by Western cultural hegemony.

Jillian Crocker's ethnography focuses on how nursing assistants, many of them single mothers, confront the oppressive circumstances of status inequality and a degrading workplace culture. Nursing assistants' "subversions of authority" center on meaning making and enacting power acts that demonstrate that they are neither dupes nor schemers. Through group identity and solidarity, they devise "collaborative" strategies so that they can simultaneously earn a living and negotiate family exigencies. Crocker's study shows that neither structure nor agency alone, but the interaction between the two, provides the best understanding of oppression and resistance.

Jasmine Armstrong and Brandon A. Jackson's research illustrates the importance of agency to combat epistemological imperialism that is embedded in white supremacy. African American males who join black Greek letter fraternities connect with mentors who provide social capital. Mentors cultivate agency through cultural capital, motivate males to transform their identity from one of inferiority to one of competence, and help males redefine academic achievement. Once African Americans realize that resignation conforms to white supremacy's efforts to relegate them to lives of negation, learning transforms into an act of defiance.

Michael's Spivey's study narrates the struggle of the Pee-Dee, a Native American tribe of South Carolina, who since the 1970s, have resisted invisibility and erasure by gaining state recognition as a tribe. The state's denial of tribal identity has had economic and social consequences for the Pee-Dee tribe. Spivey worked with the tribe beginning in 1994. Through the agency of defining and representing themselves, combined with collective action, the Pee-Dee resisted the state's efforts to annihilate their tribal identity; in 2006 the Pee-Dee were granted state recognition.

Gil Richard Musolf
Editor

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OPPRESSION AND RESISTANCE: A STRUCTURE-AND-AGENCY PERSPECTIVE

Gil Richard Musolf

ABSTRACT

This study addresses resistance and its potential to achieve social justice. Discussion of oppression begins the essay, clarifying the concepts of structure, agency, and the interaction between the two. Next, class exploitation, white supremacy, male supremacy, and epistemological imperialism illustrate forms of oppression. Epistemological emancipation and resistance elucidate agency. A conclusion summarizes the argument that a structure-and-agency perspective best conceptualizes forms of oppression and resistance.

Keywords: Oppression; structure and agency; resistance; social justice; transformation

OPPRESSION

The privileged do not necessarily intend to oppress others, and they may be anything but cavalier in their concern for the social circumstances of the disadvantaged. A socially privileged life usually entails an obliviousness of how one's attitudes and social practices construct and maintain subjugation. Oppression

overwhelms existential conditions and lived experience. The oppressed confront everyday life besieged by an institutional, systemic, and socially reproduced unattainability of power. The marginalized suffer from dominants' unaware privilege. When victims try to make the privileged aware of their persecution, as in the Black Lives Matter movement, some oppressors intellectually awaken, acknowledging their responsibility for structural inequities. Some may even resolve to eradicate personal and institutional discrimination. Unfortunately, many oppressors fail to acknowledge oppression. Instead, they may engage in various forms of backlash. Sometimes the dominant and the subordinated clash in the streets in social protest. Arguments over the nature of oppression, including claims by some that it does not exist, define and shape one's political perspective.

Oppression and privilege institutionalize unearned advantages and disadvantages. Initially, the family divides the world between haves and have-nots. For sociologists, income and wealth inequality, especially as they affect race and gender, command center stage but, in addition, other disparities associated with class, race, and gender absorb sociologists' attention: infant and child mortality, life expectancy, nurturance, health care, education, opportunities for meaningful work and a secure retirement, and safety from crime-infested and carcinogenic environments. Inherited inequities in every measureable human phenomenon between cradle and grave provoke structural critique as do less calculable forms of privilege such as normative judgments concerning looks, behaviors, emotions, and attitudes. In general, social arrangements that impede opportunity for achievement, education, health, well-being, and specifically ones that affect minorities and women, constitute forms of exploitation. Inequities waste the potential of the oppressed and rob the world of the opportunity to benefit from that potential. In addition, a "superiority delusion" (Musolf, 2012) distorts the subjectivity of both the privileged and the marginalized. Both represent the privileged as meritorious and the disadvantaged as biologically and/or culturally deficient, justifying domination and conquest. The myth of a just world of equal opportunity that advances lives of achieved status prevails. No social forces constrain autonomous agents.

Many social scientists concentrate on the denial of human rights, due process, the right to vote, prison incarceration rates, childhood slave labor, and sex trafficking. They work to prevent such crimes and the dispossession of civil rights and liberties − many times perpetrated in brutality, terror, and murder.

A particular group of social scientists, sociologists, address structures of domination. They scrutinize how race, class, and gender influence the distribution of society's valued resources − a concern of distributive justice. Freeman (2016, p. 33), for example, offers a recent statement on this social problem:

> [T]he role of principles of distributive justice is to eliminate the socially destructive effects of gross economic inequalities, mitigate the effects of misfortune, guarantee all citizens the worth of their liberties, and insure individuals' economic independence. Market distributions and large gifts and bequests of wealth are often the product of pure luck or other fortuitous

events such as family lineage, rather than individuals' efforts or comparable productive contributions.

Distributive justice ignites normative and metanormative debates that are irreconcilable. Some social scientists encourage stratification, hierarchy, democratic elitism, and capital accumulation justified by laissez-faire and neoliberal economic perspectives. They do so by advancing policy that socially reproduces inequities. Inequities alienate social relations, extinguish solidarity, ground exploitation, and precipitate crime and violence. That is why sociologists seek to oppose oppression,[1] mitigate misery, and empower agency. Sociologists submit normative arguments rather than solely display dispassionately descriptive metrics. They propose policy to eviscerate inequities from the body politic. Sociologists' desire for social justice causes many social scientists to criticize sociologists as mongers of envy and class warfare. Sociologists counter that they are concerned with a better life for all − the American Dream.

I argue that a structure-and-agency perspective presents the best sociological lens to comprehend oppression and resistance. In order to develop that perspective, I first need to clarify my meaning of structure, agency, and the interaction between the two.

STRUCTURE

Structure influences social action, and it refers to patterned social relations, rules, and resources. The social relations of production exemplify all three. Michael Schwalbe (2008) demonstrates that with the rise of legal-rational authority and bureaucracy "rule makers, rule interpreters, and rule enforcers" dominate social life. Capital − financial, social, cultural, human, and symbolic comprises resources. Structure also refers to the innumerable social facts *external to the individual* and over which the individual does not have much control (Musolf, 2003). Race, class, sex, ideology, institutions, division of labor, organizations, hierarchy, groups, geographical location, period of history, mode of production, generational cohort, family, culture, norms, and roles characterize social facts. In general, structure influences social arrangements, social relations, and social practices that exert enormous power and constraint over our lives. Structure organizes social positions hierarchically in all institutions so that power emanates from those who control the means of administration and violence to make and enforce policy. Policy constrains everyone. Policy makers, interpreters, and enforcers, whether corporate, legislative, judicial, executive, ecclesiastical, or royal, control rules and resources that shape social relations and can devastate lives.

AGENCY

Agency engenders humans' ability to define or interpret a situation and act based on that definition. Knowing a person's interpretation or definition of a situation and/or symbol (subjectivity) leads to an understanding of his or her symbolic and meaningful social action. Understanding human action (behavior with intent and purpose) is the telos of *Verstehen* − interpretive − sociology. Sociologists draw on structure and agency to explain persistence and emergence, stability and change, on both the individual and collective levels (Meltzer & Manis, 1992). Emergence, and even chance, possess an ontological status that cannot be accounted for by structure (Manis & Meltzer, 1994). Sociological comprehension requires a concept of agency.

STRUCTURE AND AGENCY

Without a concept of structure, the romantic but ultimately meretricious Enlightenment and bourgeois myth of the sovereign and autonomous individual remains unchallenged. It's a fatal attraction. Macfarlane (1978, p. 5) has argued that individualism

> is the view that society is constituted of autonomous, equal, units, namely separate individuals, and that such individuals are more important, ultimately, than any larger constituent group. It is reflected in the concept of individual private property, in the political and legal liberty of the individual, in the idea of the individual's direct communication with God.

The myth of the autonomous individual also incorporates the free-market notion that the individual solely determines his or her successes and failures in social mobility. If that is true, then people (especially in America, where everyone is supposed to have equality of opportunity) are completely to blame for their own failures and must resign themselves to political passivity.

Individualism's bête noire is collectivism, epitomized by the Welfare State. Conservatives argue that the Welfare State creates a "culture of dependency" and that social policies for the needy strip workers of the motivation to work. Sociologists retort that conservatives are blind to the effects and consequences of social structure − social circumstances, institutions, the normative order, resources, and patterned social relations, especially the social relations of production. Individuals are socially and culturally constructed, a foundational insight made by Marx stated in his *Theses on Feuerbach*.[2] Individualism clouds and cossets our ostensible autonomy with blithe egocentrism, allowing people to think of themselves, as John Lennon once sang, as "so clever and classless and free" − when in fact, at times, they have little or no control over social circumstances, events, rules, and resources. Structure can be experienced as centrifugal forces that decenter agency, that spin our world to the edge of madness,

far from the center of family, lovers, friends, and work. Just ask anyone with a diagnosis of cancer. That diagnosis, and the absence of health care and/or the paucity of access to capital as a resource to combat cancer, or the rules specified in one's health care policy that determine what kind of medication and care one can and cannot receive, will certainly seem as though social forces beyond one's control have taken over one's life.

Social relations, rules, and resources comprise social structure, but they do not exist independently of human beings. Human beings make, interpret, and enforce rules, including those governing access to resources or capital. Rules and resources circumscribe the type of social relations one can have, especially one's relations to production. Giddens (1979, p. 69) has stated that resources are "the 'bases' or 'vehicles' of power ... drawn upon by parties to interaction." If one has the capital to own the means of production and can purchase the labor power of members of the working class, then one is a capitalist. If one does not own the means of production and has nothing to sell but one's labor power, then one is a worker. Workers' choices are limited. Yet humans constantly resist and change rules, especially the rules that center on access to resources. Throughout history, class conflict emerges over the rules and resources governing the social relations of production, which, for the working class, are far different today than when Marx was writing on capitalism. The rules that govern the social relations of production are endlessly contested because, as Schwalbe (2008) has described, the game of capitalism is "rigged" — as are the rules that construct gender and race relations. Discriminatory rules intentionally deny access to resources or fail to provide opportunities to gain access to resources. Ideologies justify the process and the consequences.

Social relations, rules, and resources set the stage for meaningful social action. Social actors act rather than respond passively. A concept of agency explains action and resistance. Without a concept of agency, disembodied and anthropomorphized social forces appear to animate behavior. As W. I. Thomas stated in the Thomas Axiom, things defined as real are real in their consequences. Sociologists who define social forces as though they are real things independent of the reflection and actions of human beings concoct the sociological fallacy of determinism and reification. If individuals believe and act as though they are autonomous and sovereign, then those individuals obscure the effects of structure. Humans' definitions of the situation and behavior emerge from the experience of structure, whether acknowledged or not. There is no way to remove the impact of patterned social relations, rules, and resources. Structural constraints, whether individuals are aware or unaware of them, do not shelter individuals from their consequences. We encounter structure, as Marx said, an alien force, or as Weber maintained, an iron cage. Yet the power of social forces does not determine individuals. As long as humans are alive and in possession of their consciousness, agency exists.

Sullivan's (1989) ethnographic research on youth crime demonstrates an understanding of structure and agency. Vastly unequal structural arrangements,

such as poverty, overcrowded schools, dilapidated infrastructure, lack of jobs, or any legitimate opportunity, have a major impact on juvenile delinquency in inner cities. If, for argument's sake, 60% of juveniles in City X end up in some type of trouble with the criminal justice system, then sociologists can ask what about the other 40% of youth in the same physical area who are exposed to the identical corrosive structural factors but who did not end up in the criminal justice system? Sullivan (p. 9) answered that question by observing that structures, such as the local community and culture, affect juveniles' lives. The community and culture curb options, narrow opportunities, and limit resources. Yet juveniles possess consciousness, intentionality, and meaning, in short, agency. Actors define situations and act even though they are surrounded by structure. Actors' definitions of the situation will emerge in social interaction with others. The community and its values will influence but not determine behavior. Structural constraints besiege young people − in fact, all people − but juveniles still "'choose' to go to school, to work, and/or to engage in criminal activities …" (p. 9). Material and cultural barriers circumscribe choices but actors define situations and choose behavior.

A structure-and-agency perspective emancipates sociology from the false dichotomy of structure versus agency. For example, the structure of capital − financial, cultural, and social − expands or constricts opportunity and choices, and compounds advantages or disadvantages. An individual's access to capital from his or her family, school system, and community influences his or her definition of the situation but does not dictate behavior. Individuals choose from available choices; they make their own history even when embedded in wretched circumstances.

FORMS OF OPPRESSION

Sociologists' commitment to progressive values has signaled to the academic community that controversy about value-free sociology has vanished. Many sociologists see themselves as part of a collection of progressive scholar-citizens who espouse values and policies to eradicate structures of domination and establish social justice. Transforming the sociological imagination into policy is an obsession, an obsession reflected in sociologists' denunciation of the *distinct and compounding nature* of class exploitation, racism, and sexism. All three illustrate the effects of structure.

Class Exploitation

Social scientists try to avoid vague, meandering discourse on the nature of oppression. A pundit's polemic or a columnist's philippic may not get to the

heart of the matter. Instead, social scientists favor concrete, measurable, empirical referents. This is not to say that arguments among social scientists do not arise over the measurement and description of oppression.

The expropriation of surplus labor from workers in the production process defines class exploitation. Social scientists frequently measure class exploitation[3] by the Gini coefficient/ratio/index.[4] The distribution of income that results from a structurally disadvantaged position in the production process can also be depicted in percentages such as quintiles, or other calculations and frequency distributions. One common metric reports what percent of national income/wealth the top 1%, the top 1/10th of 1%, or even the top 1/100th of 1% possesses.

According to Piketty (2015, p. 26), chronicling the history of class exploitation began with Simon Kuznets's work in 1953, *Shares of Upper Income Groups in Income and Savings*. Piketty (p. 26) asserts that the most academically acclaimed scholar to continue this work has been Anthony B. Atkinson, although Piketty himself now garners global attention. Researchers report that class exploitation "has been growing markedly, by *every major statistical measure*, for some thirty years" (Gardner & Abraham, 2016, p. 1; emphasis in the original). Piketty (2014) marshals massive data and compelling analysis to show that class exploitation expands exponentially in capitalist societies, that capitalism will continue to accelerate the trend because the return on capital outstrips economic growth, and that inherited wealth and the natural processes of capital accumulation chip away at democracy, rousing plutocracies and oligarchies.[5]

Class exploitation contributes to poverty. Poverty amplifies misery beyond the negation of a life-sustaining income; it multiplies degrading hardships such as hunger and eviction from one's home. "Hunger is but one face of poverty; discrimination, poor health, vulnerability, insecurity, and a lack of personal and professional development opportunities are among the many other challenges faced by the poor" (The International Forum for Social Development (IFSD) 2006, p. 1). According to Desmond (2016, p. 299), eviction "is a cause, not just a condition of poverty." Eviction triggers relentless nightmares: "the loss of your possessions, job, home, and access to government aid" (p. 297). Hunger, eviction, and other abject and *avoidable* human conditions encapsulate disenfranchisement; conditions made avoidable by structural solutions.

The United States has piecemeal policies to help the poor, but they are doomed to fail because capitalism, for many workers, is a poverty-making enterprise (Piketty, 2014). Beyond the national landscape, global capital accumulation has exacerbated worldwide misery, leaving sociologists with numerous questions and policy conundrums. How much oppression is bearable by the poor, within any one nation and around the globe, and how much is movement toward social justice tolerable by an international capitalist class who favors economic freedom and capital accumulation? How strong

should the social safety net be? How much should policy redistribute income downward? How much does capitalism redistribute income upward, especially in terms of battening on the surplus value of labor power from worldwide industry? Those questions make the issues and debate over inequities irreconcilable.

Currently, as is evident by Brexit, the working-class wants a divorce from global capitalism along with a mésalliance marriage to nativism and xenophobia. Sociologists want social policy that expands the general welfare: opportunity, rights, equality, and solidarity. "For conservatives, any degree of inequality is justifiable" (Freeman, 2016, p. 33). However, even many conservatives feel abject over the tsunami of inequalities that now engulf the working class; they also share liberals' concern with reconstituting solidarity. As R. R. Reno (2015, p. 1), a Catholic conservative, has argued, "The greatest threat we face is an untethered individualism and an atomized society." Reno believes capitalism has led to the unraveling of the institutional rituals and moral values that have formed the selvage of society. Class exploitation destroys the sentiment of a national "we." Society without solidarity drifts toward estrangement, hatred, and violence.

Superiority Delusions

Class exploitation exacerbates other degradations. An iconic and in-your-face symbol of omnipresent white supremacy has been the Confederate flag that still flies in the South, nowhere more odiously than over the South Carolina capitol. No such flags symbolize or humiliate solely those who suffer class oppression. The flag over the South Carolina capitol was recently brought down after a national outrage over the murder of nine black parishioners at the Emmanuel A.M.E. Church in Charleston.

Kimberlé Crenshaw's now-famous 1989 conceptualization of intersectionality – that white supremacy, male supremacy, class exploitation, homophobia, and other socially constructed miseries simultaneously overlap and compound – significantly advanced oppression studies. Superiority delusions, such as white supremacy and male supremacy, amplify class subjugation. Poverty affects all who suffer from it, but rape and genital mutilation afflict mostly women. African Americans, particularly those who are not affluent, sustain disproportionate harm and death by police brutality. Each minority group, particularly minority women, suffer unique and compound affliction. The severity of oppression varies, and many people who are privileged as members of one group are discriminated against as members of other groups. Of all of the varieties of human-made trauma, racism and sexism especially intensify class exploitation.

White Supremacy

American culture racializes every social problem. White supremacy, unprosecuted and unrelieved, circumscribes the lived experience of minorities. As an ideology of superiority and inferiority, it both upheld and supplanted slavery. Today, this superiority delusion oppresses all minorities, rich and poor. Although white supremacy has always existed in America, its most virulent forms justified slavery and the genocide of Native Americans. Europe also developed the ideology of white supremacy and had no qualms about genocide in Africa. Isabel Wilkerson (2010, p. 38; emphasis, GRM) has written on how the South rejuvenated white supremacy in America after Reconstruction "creat [ing] a caste system based not on pedigree and title, as in Europe, *but solely on race*, and which, by law, disallowed any movement of the lowest caste into the mainstream." That caste system was given intellectual legitimacy by numerous racist social science theorists. It also gained political and legal legitimacy. The post-Reconstruction South institutionalized and the US Supreme Court constitutionalized Jim Crow laws. Even the Great Migration, when from World War I to the 1970s six million black refugees sought asylum in their own country by migrating from the Jim Crow South to the ostensibly less racist North, failed as a strategy to escape persecution.

White supremacy still triggers discrimination and death. Whether an African-American is 14-year-old Emmett Till, a teenager from Chicago who travelled to the South in 1955 to visit relatives and was tortured to death or is an even younger 12-year-old Tamir Rice, a preteen from Cleveland who was shot dead by a white police officer in 2014, geography and time change nothing (Wilkerson, 2016). Just as countless black men and boys were lynched in the South, so is there a growing list of unarmed black men and boys being shot by police all over the country today. Wilkerson (2016) discloses that before the Great Migration "a black person was lynched on average every four days" and that today "an African-American is killed by a white police officer roughly every three and a half days." It does not matter what your social status is, or what you achieve, you are still subject to violence and death solely because of the color of your skin.

Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, p. 9) has eloquently written to his son in *Between the World and Me* about the relationship between race, police brutality, and murder:

> And you now know, if you did not before, that the police departments of your country have been endowed with the authority to destroy your body. It does not matter if the destruction is the result of an unfortunate overreaction. It does not matter if it originates in a misunderstanding. It does not matter if the destruction springs from a foolish policy. Sell cigarettes without the proper authority and your body can be destroyed. Resent the people trying to entrap your body and it can be destroyed. Turn into a dark stairwell and your body can be destroyed. The destroyers will rarely be held accountable. Mostly they will receive pensions.

And destruction is merely the superlative form of a dominion whose prerogatives include friskings, detainings, beatings, and humiliations.

According to Michelle Alexander (2012), this institutional violence against African Americans in the criminal justice system precipitated mass incarceration and the social reproduction of racial caste. Lower-class whites, who themselves suffer from poverty, especially champion white supremacy. Male supremacy intensifies class exploitation and white supremacy. All these entanglements signify that intersectional solutions are needed.

Male Supremacy

Androcentric social structure and culture envelops everyday life. Just as poor minority men and women experience atrocities that do not afflict poor white men, oppressions such as honor killing, enforced wearing of burqa, purdah, and witch burning dehumanize and kill women exclusively. Intersectionality compounds brutality. Kristof and WuDunn's (2010) research on culturally sanctioned murder and rape demonstrate a global war on women. Thousands of honor killings are committed every year in the Muslim world, especially Pakistan, where "many of the executions are disguised as accidents or suicides" (p. 82). Saba Imtiaz (2016) commends the risk taken by filmmaker Sharmeen Obaid-Chinoy who won the 2016 Oscar for best documentary short, *A Girl in the River: The Price of Forgiveness*, which "depicts the survivor of an attempted honor killing who was forced to publicly forgive her family for trying to murder her." The misogynous mentality that fueled this public humiliation typifies Pakistani "right-wing parties [that] have protested a new law enacted by legislators in Punjab Province that offers protection to victims of domestic violence" (Imtiaz, 2016). A legislator in Punjab Province, Maulana Fazlur Rehman, "called the law a 'humiliation of husbands'" and a cleric, Mufti Muhammad Naeem, condemned Obaid-Chinoy as "'an obscene woman'" (Imtiaz, 2016).

Rape as a weapon of war affects untold numbers of women. "[Honor] rapes [are] intended to disgrace the victim or demean her clan. In recent genocides, rape has been used systematically to terrorize certain ethnic groups. Mass rape is as effective as slaughtering people, yet it doesn't leave corpses that lead to human rights prosecutions" (Kristof & WuDunn, 2010, p. 83). The Janjaweed militias in Darfur and all of the various Congolese militias in the Congo daily gang-rape young girls. ISIS uses religious ideology to justify its capture, rape, enslavement, and selling of women. In the United States, rape is daily committed, notably on college campuses. A recent documentary, *The Hunting Ground*, for example, makes painfully evident the fact that many college presidents preside over administrations with a dismal record of arresting rapists and prosecuting rape.

Agency needs to complement the above discussion of structures of domination. Epistemological imperialism and emancipation best conceptualize the dialectical process of subjectivity struggle.

Epistemological Imperialism

Period of history, mode of production, and intersecting social locations root epistemological standpoints. From the Marxist concept of false consciousness to W. E. B. DuBois's notion of double consciousness, many sociologists argue that a form of oppression exists in the promulgation of ruling-class ideas intended to malign the self-esteem, identity, motivation, and morale of the marginalized. Such ideas embody ideology, part of a subtle and intricate process of epistemological imperialism (Musolf, 2012) that helps to construct, justify, and socially reproduce inequitable institutions and social arrangements. The insidiousness of ideology destroys empathy, prevents people from acknowledging the humanity of others, and blames victims for not evoking a humane and humanitarian response in us. Ideologies of inferiority, which serve as elaborate justifications for inequality, comprise a major component of epistemological imperialism. White male supremacy typifies one such ideology. The ruling class regards ideology as valuable merchandise for its efficacy in socially reproducing subjugation. Capitalists reward handsomely those who manufacture ideology. Herbert Spencer was well-paid, for example, during his American tour that touted social Darwinism.

Some beneficiaries of white privilege who lack empathy, social consciousness, or a sociological understanding of the world dehumanize those they dominate and then sardonically represent the dominated as dehumanized in order to justify inequality. The dominated unwittingly internalize false negative representations just as the privileged claim false positive ones. Individuals are socially constructed by role-taking from the perspectives of others — the insight embedded in Cooley's notion of the looking-glass self. The dominated who role-take from and acquiesce to the perspective of the ruling class validate the ruling class' superiority delusion and simultaneously form an inferiority delusion in their own mind, creating a false consciousness. If the subjugated submit to the perspective of the ruling class, if they use the language, concepts, epistemology, and ontology of their oppressors, then they will engage in behavior that socially reproduces their exploitation. Oppressors are not only unreliable narrators but also narrators who intend to manufacture consent and passivity, legitimize domination, and mischaracterize and misrepresent the dominated. From the arsenal of the culture industry, the ruling class invariably selects ideologies of inferiority as their social weapon of choice. Qualitative studies show that epistemological imperialism embodies subjects who are obedient to capitalist culture; however, other qualitative research identifies individuals and

groups who, through subjectivity struggle, achieve critical consciousness and accomplish resistance (Musolf, 2012).

EPISTEMOLOGICAL EMANCIPATION AND RESISTANCE

Narrative can be a social weapon. The first act of resistance is to tell one's own story and the story of others in similar social circumstances − epistemological emancipation (Musolf, 2012). Revolutions are born in solidarity, using language, concepts, epistemology, and ontology in concert with others who share the same pain and desires. Before one can fight one's way out of oppression one has to think one's way out of it − consciousness-raising that leads to identity transformation. Marx famously stated that, in a world of oppression, the oppressed are not allowed to represent themselves; they must be represented. Ta-Nehisi Coates (2015, p. 120) has eloquently applied that insight to race. "I saw that what divided me from the world was not anything intrinsic to us but the actual injury done by people intent on naming us, intent on believing that what they have named us matters more than anything we could ever actually do." Oppressors have not only rigged rules and deprived the oppressed of resources but they also have destroyed the motivation of the oppressed to excel and achieve in activities that express what Marx called qualities inherent in species-being − artistic qualities and practices that empower a process of creative labor.

Seymour (2006, p. 304) argues that resistance requires transcending or transgressing epistemological imperialism, "ongoing systems of domination and subordination that shape people's cultural beliefs and practices so that they become complicit in their own subordination." Overcoming epistemological imperialism, especially when, as Marx famously stated, the ideas of the ruling class are the ruling ideas of society, is not easy. Agency requires critical consciousness, the ability to define the situation so as to unmask ideology, especially the ideologies of inferiority that afflict the disadvantaged. Seymour (p. 304; emphasis in the original) calls for increased attention to subjectivity and agency so that social theorists "address the fundamental issue of how individuals … are *motivated* to act in given ways that are … contrary to dominant powers and beliefs." The meaning of resistance and the motivation to resist emerge through social interaction among the oppressed. Those who develop a counterhegemonic definition of the situation begin to craft critical consciousness and the possibility of a manifesto. Such a manifesto inaugurates an alternative epistemology and ontology to the ruling ideas of society. Manifestos call for foundational change in the rules and resources circumscribing social relations. The *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and *Declaration of Sentiments* are paragons. Social theory associated with feminism, black feminist thought, Critical Race Theory, Afrocentrism, queer theory, postcolonial theory, and the emerging discourses of many other oppressed groups comprise other examples.

One's conviction that one can succeed in spite of ideologies of inferiority and traumatizing structural disadvantages exemplifies epistemological emancipation and resistance. It begins with agency.

Agency redefines the possibilities for self and society, and reconstructs the self as a meaning maker. Kurt Vonnegut wrote that "we are what we pretend to be, so we must be careful about what we pretend to be." We can also become what we intend to be and bring about the society we desire. Agency inspires actors to define selves as incompatible with ruling-class representations, and to envision a more socially just society. Actors mischaracterized as essentialist and society enshrined as natural, inevitable, god-given and unchangeable, reproduce regimes. Agency grounds transformations in identity and subjectivity, resulting in epistemological emancipation. Selves who accomplish linguistic resistance may go on to engage in collective action, building equitable social worlds.

Sonia Sotomayor, the US Supreme Court Justice, for example, has lived a life that signifies epistemological emancipation and resistance. She grew up in poverty in an area ridden with gang violence, bad schools, and a host of other damaging structural factors. Despite those conditions, she achieved spectacular academic and career success because she had a mother who defined the situation as one in which her daughter was going to study and cultivate her human capital. Her mother's hard work helped Sotomayor unmask the ideologies of the ruling class and white male supremacy and deconstruct the mythology that being poor, a minority, and a female constitute an indefeasible status of inferiority. Agency and cultural capital made a colossal difference in Sotomayor's life.

Sotomayor's agency to resist ideologies of inferiority, and the social consequences of doing so, contrasts sharply with the lives of working-class kids who are dupes of ideology. Ostensibly deviant kids, inculcated with narratives of inferiority and an inability to achieve, ironically (and with false consciousness), define resistance as the ability to stay ignorant or define revolt as merely a matter of style (Willis, 1977; Hebdige, 1979). Both Alonso Salazar's study, *Born to Die in Medellin* (1990), and Gwendolyn Brooks's famous poem, "We Real Cool," depict that mentality. The kids are cool, but they die soon. Capitalists need working-class children to repopulate their factories. Repudiating education, recalcitrants end up working as appendages to the machine, bamboozled and exploited by the authority they despised.

Supportive structures such as social and cultural capital and the cultivation of agency motivate people to transform their lives, culture, and society. Resistance achieves social justice, the telos of many sociologists.

SOCIAL JUSTICE AND TRANSFORMATION

Bryan Stevenson states that "[t]he opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice" (quoted in Conover, 2014). Social justice inheres in

the Preamble to the US Constitution by advancing principles that expand the "general welfare;" it resonates in Marx's advocacy of a society devoted to eliminating alienation and developing the potential qualities inherent in species-being. It animates sociology and its emergence as a social science (IFSD, 2006, p. 12).

Failure to achieve social justice worries sociologists. "From the comprehensive global perspective shaped by the United Nations Charter and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, neglect of the pursuit of social justice in all its dimensions translates into de facto acceptance of a future marred by violence, repression and chaos" (IFSD, 2006, p. 6). Societies that ignore inequalities and inequities disenfranchise actors of human rights (2006 p. 8). As is shown in those documents, and the IFSD's 2006 report, *Social Justice in an Open World*, social justice traditionally extends to distributive justice. Currently, intersectionality predominates the discussion.

History illustrates transformative resistance: Chartism, unionism, civil rights, feminism, gay liberation, liberation theology, and many other successes. Yet, resistance is politically risky business and social justice is uncertain. Income inequality perpetually increases. At the same time, however, human rights continue to expand. In addition to the traditional attention on civil and political rights, limited attempts to extend rights to economic, social, and cultural inequities exist. The IFSD reports, however, that for most citizens of the world that latter set of rights "has yet to find general acceptance and to be translated into effective policies" (2006, p. 38).

The 2015 US Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* that made same-sex marriage a constitutional right signifies social justice's most celebrated moment of recent years. The case also illustrates the precarious nature of that transformation. The decision dealt a severe legal blow to heteronormativity and patriarchy. Unfortunately, the struggle for same-sex marriage equality and, more broadly, LGBTQ rights, continues. Religious opponents to same-sex marriage claim "that people with sincere religious objections to it should not be compelled to participate in any acts that are said to validate or celebrate" it (Cole, 2015, p. 34). That objection, if granted, would drive discriminatory policy against gays and lesbians. The objection is convoluted since religion is not "targeted" or "disfavored" by such a law; consequentially, it suffers no discrimination. As Cole (p. 34) states, "[t]he state violates no constitutionally protected religious liberty by imposing laws of general applicability − such as antidiscrimination mandates − on the religious and non-religious alike." Religious objectors argue that because many businesses serve the gay and lesbian community objectors' denial of services causes no harm. However, equal treatment under the law requires all businesses and institutions to refrain from discrimination. Religious objectors assert that granting them the right to refuse service to gays and lesbians protects their religious freedom. Transformation necessitates vigilance.

CONCLUSION

A structure-and-agency perspective provides an understanding of oppression and resistance. Institutions rig the rules reproducing inequality. They bar the marginalized access to various forms of capital, eradicating opportunity. Discrimination diminishes the opportunity the poor have to health, education, and well-being. Forms of subjugation also inhere in epistemological imperialism. The ruling class deploys every conceivable kind of indoctrination and socialization so that the disadvantaged internalize representations of themselves as inferior, blame themselves for their own failure, and resign themselves to lives of alienation, passivity, and nihilism. Individualism repudiates structures of domination. It advances, instead, the ideology that everyone possesses equality of opportunity to achieve the potential qualities inherent in species-being.

Robbed of solidarity and agency, the oppressed sink into a post-apocalyptic world: no solace, no creative labor, no jouissance, no love. The disenfranchised, denied everything, feel that their lives signify nothing. Stripped of meaning and purpose, the subjugated succumb to anomie and alienation, to structurally induced joylessness, to despair. Depression, disaffection, and detachment nurture thinking disorders. Unconnected and unmoored, the disengaged withdraw inward, or present a countenance of blank stares. The insane few, vulnerable to demagoguery, resort to violence or mass murder. Some socially deprived, however, resist through meaning making. Refusing to be victims of ideologies of inferiority, the defiant learn to realize their potential, strive to change social arrangements, and protest to build social justice. Critical consciousness and collective action pump, like ventricles, the body politic with transformation. However, a society in which only a gifted few – or the fortunate who craft a critical consciousness – excel and attain relative mobility, dooms that society to increasing misery. The American Dream promises (mythologizes) that origins do not determine destination.[6] Social justice, for everyone's sanity and safety, requires abolishing inequities and ruling-class ideology. Inattention to inequality forsakes lives to linger in trauma and tragedy.

The disenfranchised need capital – *structure* – to increase their opportunity. They require *agency* to acquire critical consciousness. In the struggle to eliminate inequities, structure-centric social policy must take precedence.[7] Equality is not attainable solely by agency-centric social change, even though radicalizing one's definition of the situation, stripping away epistemological imperialism, and developing a discursive manifesto can help groups transform self and society.[8]

Oppressive social arrangements create dysfunctional cultures. Impaired cultures influence actors to make unhealthy choices. For example, cultures that detest learning will not socialize children who can or care to compete and achieve. Such casualties of culture will not be just "academically adrift" but likely to sink in a regatta of global competition. Not only behavior that solidifies a "learning to labor" mentality but also choices that lead to violence,

drugs, and suicide afflict countless, young and old. Repression will not improve the situation. Working on transforming values, attitudes, motivation, and morale at the individual level, while achievable, is precarious, far less effective, systemic, and radical than dismantling social arrangements that cause maladaptive cultures to arise and socially reproduce. Culture, fortunately, is transformable. Social policy that eliminates poverty and oppression possesses the potential to eradicate debilitative cultures and injudicious behavior.

Social structure constitutes consciousness and culture. Consciousness and culture change practical activity, meaningful social action, and, eventually, social structure. Structure and agency as well as oppression and resistance dialectically interact. We can and do overcome and transform our selves, our social structure, and our culture.

NOTES

1. Matthew Desmond, after a multiyear ethnography interacting with people who were evicted, writes of his visceral reaction to oppression: "I am frequently asked how I 'handled' this research, by which people mean: How did seeing this level of poverty and suffering affect you, personally? …. The honest answer is that the work was heartbreaking and left me depressed for years" (2016, p. 328).

2. I first came across this insight in Gordon Marshall's definition of Karl Marx in his 1994 edition of *The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Sociology*.

3. Jelani Cobb (2016) suggests using the term "class exploitation" rather than "income inequality." The latter "phrase lacks rhetorical zing; it's hard to envision workers on a picket line singing rousing anthems about" it. Income inequality also makes it "possible to think of the condition under discussion as a random social outcome, rather than as the product of deliberate actions taken by specific people."

4. Sociologists might be unfamiliar with Corrado Gini's unsavory background as a supporter of fascism. "This is not to say that every expression of conviction issued by [Gini] was fully compatible with the system of thought we will characterize as the ideology of Fascism − but is rather a preliminary recognition of the fact that [he] contributed substantial elements to the mature belief system that became the ultimate intellectual charter for the exercise of Fascist authority" (Gregor, 1969: 27).

5. Piketty's celebrated themes (that inequality is caused by the differences between the return on capital and the return on labor, that those results are political, and that such inequality undermines democracy) have been made before. "As labour has lost ground in relation to capital for the remuneration of the factors of production, the share of capital income in total income has increased, and this capital has been more heavily concentrated in fewer hands rather than more evenly distributed" (IFSD, 2006, p. 32). Therefore, "the position of the 'haves' in society has been strengthened by the evolution of tax systems that benefit the owners of capital" (p. 32).

6. Three scholars from different political and disciplinary perspectives argue that the American Dream is long gone: Charles Murray in *Coming Apart: The State of White America, 1960-2010* (2012, Crown Forum), Robert D. Putnam in *Our Kids: The American Dream in Crisis* (2015, Simon and Schuster), and Thomas Piketty in *Capital in the Twenty-First Century* (2014, Belknap Press). Piketty's argument documents not only a decline in the American Dream but also a loss of analogous dreams of the working-class everywhere.

7. The next two sentences draw from Musolf (2016), *The Astructural Bias Charge: Myth or Reality? Studies in Symbolic Interaction*, Volume 46.

8. I have been discussing distributive justice and relative mobility, decreasing the income that goes to the top 1%, the top 1/10th of 1%, the top 1/100th of 1%, and other percentages. Structural changes are also needed to increase absolute mobility. What sociologists have known ever since Peter Blau and Otis Dudley Duncan published *The American Occupational Structure* in 1963 is that absolute mobility in the United States is almost completely accomplished by transformations in the economy (Lemann, 2015, p. 26).

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