The Social Justice Project: Purpose

To reclaim Public Health’s role in addressing health inequity through social justice.

To transform public health practice from its strictly regulatory and categorical functions to one that addresses the root causes of health inequity:

- Institutional Racism
- Class Oppression
- Gender Discrimination and Exploitation
Where do we begin?

Social Determinants of Health

The economic and social conditions that influence the health of individuals, communities, and jurisdictions as a whole.

They include, but are not limited to:

- Safe Affordable Housing
- Quality Education
- Job Security
- Social Connection & Safety
- Living Wage
- Access to Transportation
- Availability of Food

Dennis Raphael, *Social Determinants of Health*; Toronto: Scholars Press, 2004
Social Structure

Institutional Racism

Class Oppression

Gender Discrimination and Exploitation

LABOR MARKETS

Power and Wealth Imbalance

GLOBALIZATION & DEREGULATION

TAX POLICY

HOUSING POLICY

EDUCATION SYSTEMS

SOCIAL SAFETY NET

SOCIAL NETWORKS

Social Determinants of Health

Safe Affordable Housing

Living Wage

Quality Education

Transportation

Availability of Food

Job Security

Social Connection & Safety

Psychosocial Stress / Unhealthy Behaviors

Disparity in the Distribution of Disease, Illness, and Wellbeing

Adapted from Richard Hofrichter, Tackling Health Inequities Through Public Health Practice
Why We Must Tackle Racism, Classism, Sexism Explicitly: Two Arguments and a Challenge

Argument #1

Race, class, and gender oppression in their modern forms are pervasive and insidious—each time they are identified, unearned privilege asserts itself to diminish them as concerns.

Argument #2

In order to undo our entrenched ideas of “business as usual,” we must actively create an organizational culture where challenges to privilege and oppression are routinely welcomed.

The Challenge

To tackle modern forms of oppression explicitly, we must find ways to make conversations about race, class, and gender “tolerable” to people who experience oppression daily AND to people who have no awareness that such oppression occurs.
Why We Must Tackle Racism, Classism, Sexism Explicitly: Dialogue as the Vehicle for Change

In Ingham County, we intentionally developed the capacity to conduct intensive, dialogue-based 4-day workshops involving both our employees and interested community members.

The strategic purpose of the workshops was to equip participants to recognize oppression and privilege and their impact on the health of the community…

…and to equip them to engage others in challenging conversations about those impacts.

The workshops were NOT:

CONVERSATIONS about Race, Class, Gender, etc.
DEBATES about Oppression, Privilege, and the role of PH.
TRAINING in Cultural Competency, Diversity, etc.
Why We Must Tackle Racism, Classism, Sexism Explicitly: Dialogue as the Vehicle for Change

Dialogue is different from CONVERSATION

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conversation</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Casual, undirected exploration</td>
<td>Vigorous and directed exploration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Marginalizes difference</td>
<td>Welcomes difference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consensus approach</td>
<td>Collective approach</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Derived from William Issacs, “Taking Flight: Dialogue, collective Thinking, and Organizational Learning”
Why We Must Tackle Racism, Classism, Sexism Explicitly: Dialogue as the Vehicle for Change

Dialogue is different from DEBATE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Debate</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Highlights competing factions</td>
<td>Highlights commonality of purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Best” solution</td>
<td>Multiple, complementary solutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasis on persuading</td>
<td>Emphasis on listening</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Dialogue highlights competing factions and emphasizes persuading, while debate highlights commonality of purpose and emphasizes listening.

Dialogue is a vehicle for change, emphasizing listening and multiple, complementary solutions over competing factions and a single, best solution.
Why We Must Tackle Racism, Classism, Sexism Explicitly: Dialogue as the Vehicle for Change

Dialogue is different from TRAINING

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Training</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unilateral exchange of information</td>
<td>Mutual exchange of information</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Embraces what is known</td>
<td>Embraces what is not known</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teaches new solutions</td>
<td>Discovers new solutions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Revealing Oppression: Definitions
(Health Disparity and Health Inequity)

Health Disparity

A disproportionate difference in health between groups of people.

(By itself, disparity does not address the chain of events that produces it.)

Health Inequity

Differences in population health status and mortality rates that are systemic, patterned, unfair, unjust, and actionable, as opposed to random or caused by those who become ill.*

*Margaret Whitehead
Revealing Oppression: Definitions
(Health Disparity and Health Inequity)

Systemic
Patterned
Unfair
Unjust
Actionable
Revealing Oppression: Definitions
(Social Justice and Health Equity)

**Social Justice**

The absence of unfair, unjust advantage or privilege based on race, class, gender, or other forms of difference.

A world which affords individuals and groups fair treatment and an equitable share of the benefits of society.

**Health Equity**

A fair, just distribution of the social resources and social opportunities needed to achieve well-being.
Revealing Oppression: Definitions
(Target / Nontarget Groups)

**Target Groups**
Groups that are historically “targeted” as *less than* because of their race, gender, sexual orientation, role, class, ability or other type of difference.

**Non-Target Groups**
Groups most likely to receive unearned privileges and benefits because of group membership.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Oppression</th>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Non-Target Group</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Racial</td>
<td>People of color</td>
<td>White people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class</td>
<td>Poor; working class.</td>
<td>Middle, owning class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>Women</td>
<td>Men</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Orientation</td>
<td>Lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual</td>
<td>Heterosexual people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ability</td>
<td>People w/ disability</td>
<td>People w/o disability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religion</td>
<td>Non-Christian</td>
<td>Christian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>People over 40</td>
<td>Young people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Youth</td>
<td>Children, youth, young adults</td>
<td>Older adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rank/Status</td>
<td>People w/or college deg.; low status in org.</td>
<td>People w/ college deg. High status in org.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Military Service</td>
<td>Vietnam Veterans</td>
<td>Veterans of other wars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immigrant Status</td>
<td>Immigrant</td>
<td>U.S.-born</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>Non-English</td>
<td>English</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Adapted from Dr. Valerie Batts, “Is Reconciliation Possible? Lessons from Combating Modern Racism”
Revealing Oppression: What keeps us from seeing privilege?

- No awareness of the reality of oppression
- No awareness of one’s own Privilege
- Consciously protecting one’s own Privilege
- Guilt or Shame
- Fear of being cast as the Oppressor
- “The Culture of Politeness”
- Media reinforcement of stereotypes
- National values: Individualism, Meritocracy, etc.
Revealing Oppression: 4 Levels of Oppression

**Personal**
Feelings, beliefs, values

**Interpersonal**
Actions, behaviors, language

**Institutional**
Rules, policies, procedures

**Cultural**
Collective ideas about what is normal, true, right, beautiful

Adapted from Dr. Valerie Batts, “Is Reconciliation Possible? Lessons from Combating Modern Racism”
Revealing Oppression: Traditional and Modern Forms

**Traditional**

Values, behaviors, norms, policies that treat one group as “less than” another and are **overtly** used to deny them rights, opportunities, etc.

- Overt
- Intentional
- Designed to Harm
- Blatantly demeaning

**Modern**

Values, behaviors, norms, policies that treat one group as “less than” **without overtly identifying them as such**, in spite of legal protections.

- Subtle
- Unintentional
- Well-intentioned
- Patronizing

Adapted from Valerie Batts, PH.D., “Is Reconciliation Possible? Lessons from Combating ‘Modern Racism’”
Why We Must Tackle Racism, Classism, Sexism Explicitly: Two Arguments and a Challenge

Race, class, and gender oppression in their modern forms are pervasive and insidious—each time they are identified, unearned privilege asserts itself to diminish concern over them.

- Explaining it away: “I know racism exists, but…”; “You’re just being hypersensitive.”
- When we focus an intervention on a specific population (e.g. first time African American mothers), the focus often weakens because “we have to help everyone.”
- Prejudicial behaviors between staff or toward clients, e.g. an employee “just not fitting in,” certain groups “just don’t show up for our programs,” or assumptions about safety when dominant culture’s norms are violated.
In order to undo our entrenched ideas of “business as usual,” we must actively create an organizational culture where challenges to privilege and oppression are routinely welcomed.

*What would this mean?*

**PERSONAL:** We would mutually unpack our own racist, classist, sexist assumptions when encountered.

**INTERPERSONAL:** We would invite challenging analysis of interactions that may imbued with racism, sexism, etc.

**INSTITUTIONAL:** We would automatically ask about the consequences of privilege and oppression in any policy discussion.

**CULTURAL:** We would establish a new “normal” for the community, by openly challenging oppression and actively working to eliminate root causes.
Why We Must Tackle Racism, Classism, Sexism Explicitly: Two Arguments and a Challenge

**The Challenge**

To tackle modern forms of oppression explicitly, we must find ways to make conversations about race, class, and gender “tolerable” to people who experience oppression daily AND to people who have no awareness that such oppression occurs.

Non-target group members, when made aware of the oppression of target group members, often feel an urgent need to gain immunity from participation in it.

*If they fail to gain this immunity, their next action is often to leave the conversation.*

Target group members, seeing the failure of non-target group members to grasp the truth of their experience, view dialogue as painful and pointless.

*If this is not reversed, they will understandably abstain from any effort by the organization to change practice.*
Contact

Doak Bloss
Health Equity and Social Justice Coordinator
dbloss@ingham.org