

Brand X Pictures

Cultural and Social Justice Competency

Chapter Concepts

- **Key definitions**—An overview of such concepts as diversity, inclusion, and integration is included.
- **Cultural competency**—Cultural competency can be defined as a congruent set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals, thus enabling effective work in cross-cultural situations.
- **Social justice competency**—Social justice competency focuses on engaging in questions of justice and taking action to better the world on both an individual level and an organizational level.
- **Risk management**—Risk management should be included in any discussion of cultural and social justice competency. Both physical risk and emotional risk need to be approached in a culturally competent manner.

"The arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

The chapter concepts relate to the following core competencies:

- **Self-awareness and professional conduct (CC-2)**—Possessing self-awareness and awareness of others and understanding how our cultural and social positions impact our professional practice is key to effective outdoor leadership. Developing cultural and social justice competencies provides outdoor leadership professionals with opportunities to promote equity and inclusion.
- **Environmental stewardship (CC-5)**—Social justice issues are intertwined with environmental ones. Outdoor leaders have the opportunity to serve as environmental stewards, promoting environmental justice.
- **Safety and risk management (CC-7)**—Developing cultural and social justice competency can help promote participants' physical and emotional safety.

Grace was a trip leader working for an outdoor program that recently had hired her. The first part of the program focused on the development of camping skills in order to prepare participants for a backcountry trip later on. During the instruction phase, participants joined in traditional camp-based activities, including arts and crafts, a ropes course, and waterfront activities. One all-camp activity that was a long-standing tradition of the program was making dreamcatchers. Ojibway people would tie sinew strands in a web around a small round or tear-shaped frame made of bent willow and hang it up as a charm to protect sleeping children from nightmares. The legend is that the bad dreams will get caught in the dreamcatcher's web (Oberholtzer, 2014).

The all-camp dreamcatcher activity involved making a hoop of willow and decorating it with fake feathers and beads. The activity was introduced with a skit in which one of the girls lay on the ground in a restless state while someone held a premade dreamcatcher over her head. The bad dreams got caught in the web, and the girl was able to sleep. All of the participants were then invited to make their own dreamcatchers, and a step-by-step demonstration was given.

Grace sat quietly in the back of the room with many thoughts racing through her brain. She reflected back two decades to when she was a camper. At that time, using aspects of Native American tradition was a normal part of summer camp. She had participated in a sweat lodge after a long canoe trip, and the campers were placed into age groups referred to as *tribes*. Many of the songs she sang at camp had some association with Native lore. Grace also had since learned that many of these practices were co-opted from indigenous traditions and not often used in a manner that was culturally appropriate or that honored indigenous peoples. She was uncertain about what to do in this instance given that she was new to the program, but it was unsettling to not have her beliefs and values align with her practice as an outdoor leader.

This chapter is positioned at the beginning of the text because it provides theoretical knowledge that is fundamental to outdoor leadership. This chapter, which provides key information relevant to cultural competency, likely will challenge the reader to think deeply about their individual influence on any leadership endeavor as well as how others may experience such endeavors. The ideal is for the reader to consider this information and apply it to their own leadership practice in an effort to promote socially just leadership. In the spirit of bell hooks (2003), discussion of these topics should not lead to despair, fear, guilt, or alienation but rather should lead us toward hopefulness about the possibilities for a more just world.

Key Definitions

In the outdoor leadership profession, facilitators regularly encounter situations similar to the one Grace encountered. Leaders work with people who are different from them in terms of socioeconomic, racial, cultural, and embodied factors; gender; sexuality; and educational opportunities. **Diversity**, the

term often used to describe these types of differences between individuals and groups, refers to the human qualities that are present in others but are outside the groups to which we personally belong (Hironaka-Juteau & Crawford, 2010). **Inclusion** is an attitude and approach that seeks to ensure that every person can meaningfully participate in all aspects of life regardless of ability or background; it represents a process of creating environments for meaningful engagement (Hironaka-Juteau & Crawford, 2010). **Integration** is the act of combining individuals to make a unified whole. There are seven steps to inclusion and integration (Lais, 2001):

1. Respect each person's dignity.
2. Open lines of communication.
3. Establish patterns for inclusive decision making.
4. Emphasize the value of effort and nonphysical accomplishments.
5. Focus on group challenges and activities.
6. Delineate and delegate tasks.
7. Develop symbiotic relationships among participants.

Much early leadership training focused on accepting and tolerating diverse peoples and approaches. However, the lived reality of outdoor leaders often involved misunderstandings and awareness that was insufficient to truly facilitate inclusive experiences for participants.

Consider one scenario involving Hmong (Miao ethnicity from southern China) youths on a wilderness outing in the upper Midwest of the United States with highly skilled, culturally sensitive leaders. On the second day of the trip, the leaders prepared penne pasta and pesto and were pleased that they had remembered the tasty touches of pine nuts and shaved parmesan to accompany dinner. When presented with the food, the youths protested that they had not had “real” meat in 36 hours. Much to the leaders’ horror, the youths returned with frogs from the lake, skewered through with a stick and ready to roast over the fire. In this instance, the leaders consented, but not without concern and puzzlement. A lot of experiential learning took place on that trip! The leaders learned the most, recognizing that their awareness training was not truly up to par with the demands of culturally sensitive leadership practice. Training for diversity and inclusion alone lacks relevancy in today’s society given the constant flux of lived realities, which call for a less bifurcated and less reductionist mode of training (Breunig & Rylander, 2016). Outdoor leaders need to develop pluralistic leadership with a focus on egalitarianism and cultural and social justice competencies.

Cultural Competency

Culture refers to patterns of human behavior that include the language, thoughts, communications, actions, customs, beliefs, values, and institutions of racial, ethnic, religious, or social groups. Competency implies having the capacity to function effectively as an individual or organization in the context of the cultural beliefs, behaviors, and needs presented by people and their communities. Cultural competency refers to a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system or agency or among professionals, enabling effective work in cross-cultural situations (McManus, 1988). The term *cultural competency* originated in the field of health care and has expanded into the realm of education (Diallo & McGrath, 2013). The term *cultural competency training* increasingly is used in the field of outdoor education and leadership (Warren, Roberts, Breunig, & Alvarez, 2014).

Cultural competency involves developing a set of attitudes, awareness, knowledge, and skills (Sue & Sue, 2002) that enhances an individual’s

- awareness of assumptions and values as well as other prevailing attitudes toward culture, both domestically and internationally;
- understanding of privilege;
- respect for others’ values, beliefs, and expectations;
- acknowledgment of culture as a predominant force in shaping behaviors, values, and institutions;
- understanding of the role of hegemony in valuing certain dominant cultural norms over less dominant ones; and
- development of prosocial relationships.

Developing Self-Awareness

How might a burgeoning leader further develop self-awareness? Self-awareness involves knowing who you are, what you value, your personal history and background, and how those inform your present-day attitudes and actions.

Epistemology, roughly translated to mean “ways of knowing,” is the branch of philosophy that studies the nature, sources, and validity of knowledge. It considers such questions as “What is true?” and “How do we know?” Epistemology therefore is rooted in an understanding of truth. Truth and goodness are determined, in part, by our way of knowing and seeing the world. The lens through which we see the world is established by our values and early influences, including our upbringing.

Burgeoning outdoor leaders can cultivate awareness by exploring their own individual epistemology. National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS; 2014), one of the leading sources of outdoor leadership education, provides one viewpoint for doing so (see figure 4.1). Learning activity 4.1 provides a structured activity that analyzes the lens through which an individual views the world.

Understanding Privilege and Assumptions

Developing self-awareness also involves the recognition of privilege. **Privilege** is a special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available to a particular person or group of people.

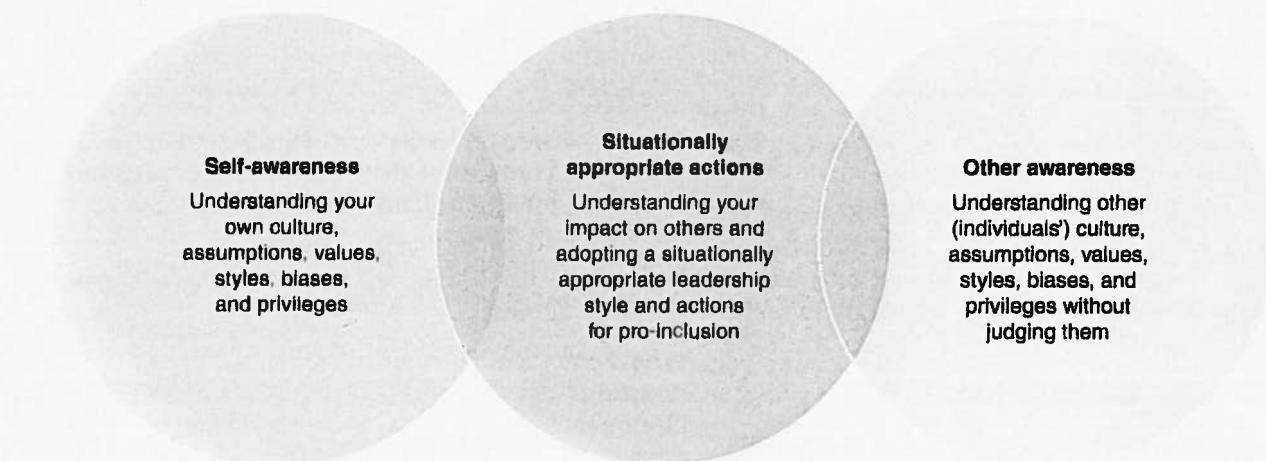


Figure 4.1 Cultivating awareness and situationally appropriate actions.

Talking about privilege and oppression is never easy. In “White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack,” McIntosh (1989) concludes that privilege is like an invisible, weightless knapsack of unearned assets—special provisions, maps, passports, code books, visas, clothes, tools, and blank checks, some of which she is oblivious to even carrying—that she can cash in on every day. Karen Warren (2009) builds on the idea with an activity that she performs in her outdoor leadership. She brings in a backpack of unearned privileges that are outdoor specific. These may include clear bandages, an energy bar, an outdoor magazine, layers of expensive activity-specific clothing, a blank check (with sufficient money in the bank) to pay for an expensive outdoor program, a water bottle affixed with stickers, an iPhone, a GPS, and a Fitbit.

Acknowledging privilege as unearned benefits helps frame this inevitably challenging conversation. Recognizing that certain individuals and groups hold more privilege than others is essential in outdoor leadership. It is also important to be aware of the assumptions, coded language, and implicit norms inherent in any culture. Drinking out of a water bottle covered with stickers of cool outdoor companies, wearing the most current Arc'teryx or Patagonia clothing, driving a Subaru with a roof rack, talking about hanging out at the climbing gym, and discussing which energy bar provides the best supplemental nutrients are all examples of coded language that is culturally specific to outdoor leadership.

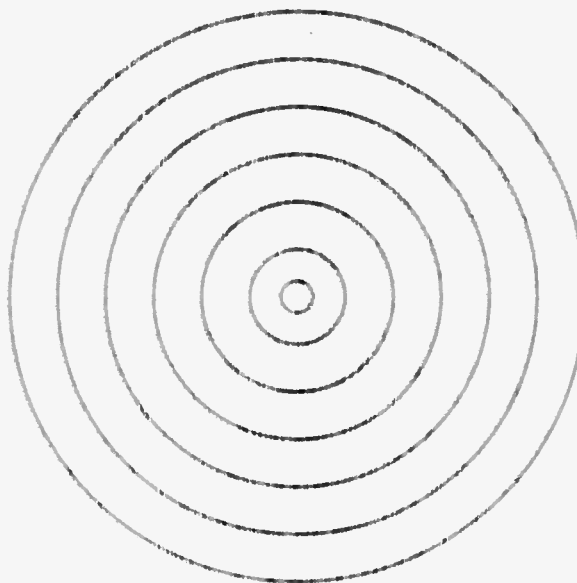
Hidden Curriculum

In educational circles, culturally specific language that carries group assumptions is referred to as the *hidden curriculum*. The **hidden curriculum** consists of the unspoken or implicit social and cultural messages, perspectives, and values that are communicated to individuals in any given community. Students learn these in school and society and then adopt them themselves, often unintentionally. A recent study on the hidden curriculum in outdoor education found messages that value physical and technical skills over intellectual, social, emotional, and moral development (Mitten, Warren, Lotz, & d'Amore, 2012). It also suggested that gendered images in media favor males over females in hiring, promotion, and assigning leadership roles. One example is the revised Boy Scout zero tolerance policy that was unwelcoming of gay youths (O'Connell, Cuthbertson, & Goins, 2014). The authors ask, “What did the zero tolerance policy communicate to young people about who were included and who were excluded, and what did it communicate about ‘right’ and ‘wrong’?” (p. 105). Another example of the hidden curriculum in outdoor leadership can be found while flipping through most outdoor-oriented magazines such as *Outside* or *Climbing*. Who and what gets represented? Are there images of people of color and representation of a range of ages and abilities? Examples such as these indirectly but powerfully communicate impressions about the experience and who most often experiences it.

Learning Activity 4.1

In order to better understand values and their influence, people need to develop an understanding of the lens through which they see the world and interpret sources of truth. Draw the pictured circle on a piece of paper. This circle represents an individual's epistemological lens. Consider as many socially identifying factors as you can (e.g., home environment, family composition, education, religious belief, sexuality, gender expression, peer group, ableism, and socioeconomic class). Work from the inside of the circle outward. Write personal and specific early influencing factors (e.g., *nuclear family, middle class*) in the inner rings of the circle and present-day life factors (e.g., *university student*) in the outer rings. (There will, of course, be some co-occurring events that can be bundled into one concentric circle.)

Compare your lens with the lens of someone else in the room. How might your lenses influence how you perceive, react, and interact in a group setting, on a wilderness trip, or alongside others? How might your lens inform and affect your understanding of others? How can you apply it toward respecting others' epistemologies and adapting to differences?



Understanding the Role of Hegemony

Hegemony is the political, economic, or military domination of one group over another (Chernow & Vallasi, 2012). In the 19th century, hegemony came to denote the social or cultural predominance of one group in a society, and this meaning holds today. **Cultural hegemony** describes the ruling cultural group's domination over and manipulation of the overall culture of a society. The norms, principles, values, and beliefs of the ruling class become the worldview that is imposed and accepted as the societal norm. For example, university administrators tend to inhabit large office spaces, often with a view and in the nicest building on campus, and have an assumed respect and power in the university and the community. A particular administrator may not solicit or even welcome this power, but given the role of hegemony in postsecondary institutions, implicit dominant norms stratify the various members

of that community. Hegemony occurs in society, schools, and on outdoor trips.

Hegemony also functions in outdoor leadership. One example is the article "Fatties Cause Global Warming: Fat Pedagogy and Environmental Education." Russell, Cameron, Socha, and McNinch (2013) problematize the dominant obesity discourses and weight-based oppression and the ways in which outdoor and environmental education privileges able, "fit" bodies. Using personal narratives, the authors present stories and analyses of their experiences about "size matters" (p. 31) and dominant discourses about the ideal body for outdoor and environmental pedagogy and leadership. In *Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder*, Richard Louv (2005) declares that childhood obesity partially is caused by children spending less time playing freely in natural areas. Mention of obesity as an "epidemic" and a "crisis" is sprinkled throughout and even is used on the back cover and on Louv's

Learning Activity 4.2

To better understand how hegemony works on an institutional or school level, head off on a hegemony treasure hunt (Breunig, 2005; Fawcett, Bell, & Russell, 2002). Walk around a campus building and examine assumptions about the purpose of schools and the school structure. Hunt for observable artifacts that are relevant to some of the commonly held institutional assumptions of a university. What did you observe? What assumptions do those observations contain about who holds power and who has a voice? In what ways do your observations inform your understanding of the purpose of schools, school structures, and school culture? Consider other elements of the university that are relevant to curriculum, textbooks, administrative office space, university senate chambers, and so on. What do you observe? Consider an array of other institutional assumptions, including environmental issues, gender issues, issues related to the accessibility of the institution, and issues of hierarchy and power. How does hegemony function on an institutional level?

website to promote the book (Russell et al., 2013). This type of commentary amounts to fat oppression, and this kind of hegemonic thinking about the “right” body type for outdoor leadership needs to be problematized. Problematizing an assumption involves critically reflecting on the stereotypes that have led us to a certain conclusion and actively engaging in disrupting society’s—and our own—normative thinking about such matters. Fitness can come in different body sizes.

Developing Prosocial Relationships

Clearly, the hidden curriculum underpinning the outdoor leadership discipline and the role of hegemony need to be understood and critically questioned. Developing knowledge of this and developing one’s self-awareness are steps toward developing cultural competency. NOLS explores this development through a continuum of social relationships (see figure 4.2). Prosocial relationships—those that promote social justice—are identified on the rightmost side of the continuum. This continuum can serve as a tool for self-awareness related to interactions with fellow students, with family members, or in outdoor leadership practice. The ideal is to continue to develop prosocial relationships that go beyond simply tolerating differences of opinion and people. NOLS

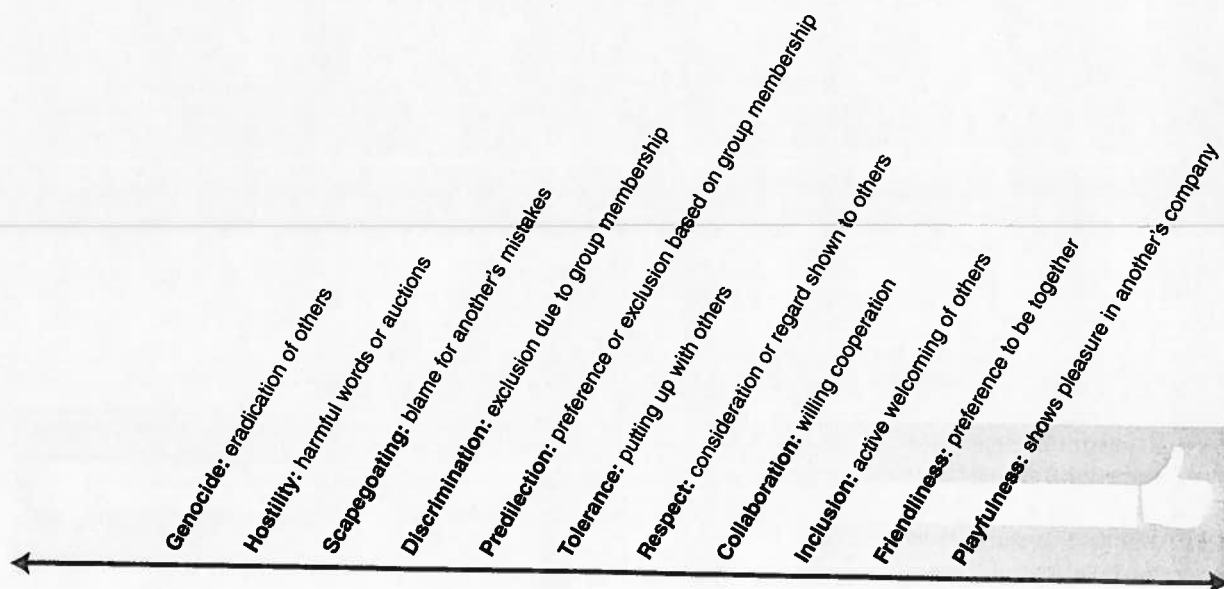


Figure 4.2 NOLS continuum of social relationships.

Adapted from Peace Corps World Wise school lesson plans at peacecorps.gov/wws.

alternately refers to prosocial relationships as *good expedition behavior*, which is explained in more detail in chapter 10.

The continuum of social relationships offers one orientation for considering the effect, either explicit (direct) or implicit (indirect), of an individual's values, beliefs, and actions on any leadership initiative. Epistemology and privilege inform where individuals position themselves on this continuum, as does previous educative experiences, including aspects of individuals' ways of being and engagements that they are not even aware of (i.e., the hidden curriculum). Might individuals unintentionally be acting out in discriminatory ways?

Microaggression is another subtle form of discrimination. The term *microaggression* was coined in 1970 by Chester Pierce (cited in Sue, 2010) to describe insults and dismissals he regularly heard directed toward African Americans. The term came to encompass the casual degradation of any socially marginalized group (e.g., women, individuals of low socioeconomic status, people with disabilities, specific cultural and racial groups, people who are aged). Sue defines microaggressions as brief everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to certain individuals on the basis of their group membership. They often occur below the oppressor's level of awareness. Common cultural microaggressions include "We Americans," "Your English is so good! Where are you from?" "Look me in the eye when I am speaking to you," "Grow a pair," and "Man up." Consider the following microaggressions that are specific to outdoor leadership: "Don't worry; I don't see your disability," "That heavy chick can really crank on the rock," "You know, I am amazed that you're a mom and still go out on trips. That is so cool," and "I had no idea you were gay. It's okay; it doesn't bother me. I just don't think you should bring it up with the participants." These microaggressions in many ways are even more dangerous than outright racism or oppression. Imagine a wilderness trip participant who is being regularly dismissed or othered through microaggressions.

Social Justice Competency

Social justice explores issues of culture but also considers such issues as social privilege, race and ethnicity, gender and gender identity, **preferred gender pronouns**, age, ability, religion, and socioeconomic status (Warren, Roberts, Breunig,

Learning Activity 4.3

Think–Pair–Share involves writing down your thoughts, pairing with another individual to share your thoughts with one another, and then grouping with another pair to hear their insights and share yours. Think–Pair–Share in response to the questions in figure 4.2. Where on this social relationship continuum would you position the leaders in the opening scenario and the Hmong youth trip example?

& Alvarez, 2014). Social justice competency embraces the idea that social identities such as race, class, and gender exist in intersectionality rather than as individual constructs (e.g., *a black woman*) and that social identities act in relationship with each other rather than independently. This view of competency impels leaders and educators to consider social justice issues in this era of Tweets and instant messages—the era in which *The Daily Show* is the primary news source for many people (Ladson-Billings, 2013). Individuals no longer fit neatly into the rigid categories of race, class, gender, sexuality, or national origin that have been used to make distinctions, create hierarchy, and compare the privileged against the less privileged. Today's youths are invested in social justice in a manner that previous generations were not, emphasizing the need for teaching and leadership to be relevant, responsive, emerging, and ever adapting (Ladson-Billings, 2013; Tilley & Taylor, 2013). Maxine Greene (1998, cited in Hytten, 2013, p. xxix) asserts that social justice education and leadership is that which arouses "vivid, reflective, experiential responses" that move students to seriously engage in questions of justice and to take ameliorative action in the world around them. This spirit of hope and enthused action compels outdoor leaders to proactively engage in leadership practices that can help bring about a more socially just world.

The outdoor industry would benefit from engaging in the topic of social justice competency in a more fervent manner. Breunig and Rylander (2016) query what an outdoor leadership training curriculum might consist of if as a profession we sought to educate leaders for social justice competency and to have leaders outwardly demonstrate those characteristics to program participants and the external world. How might a burgeoning outdoor

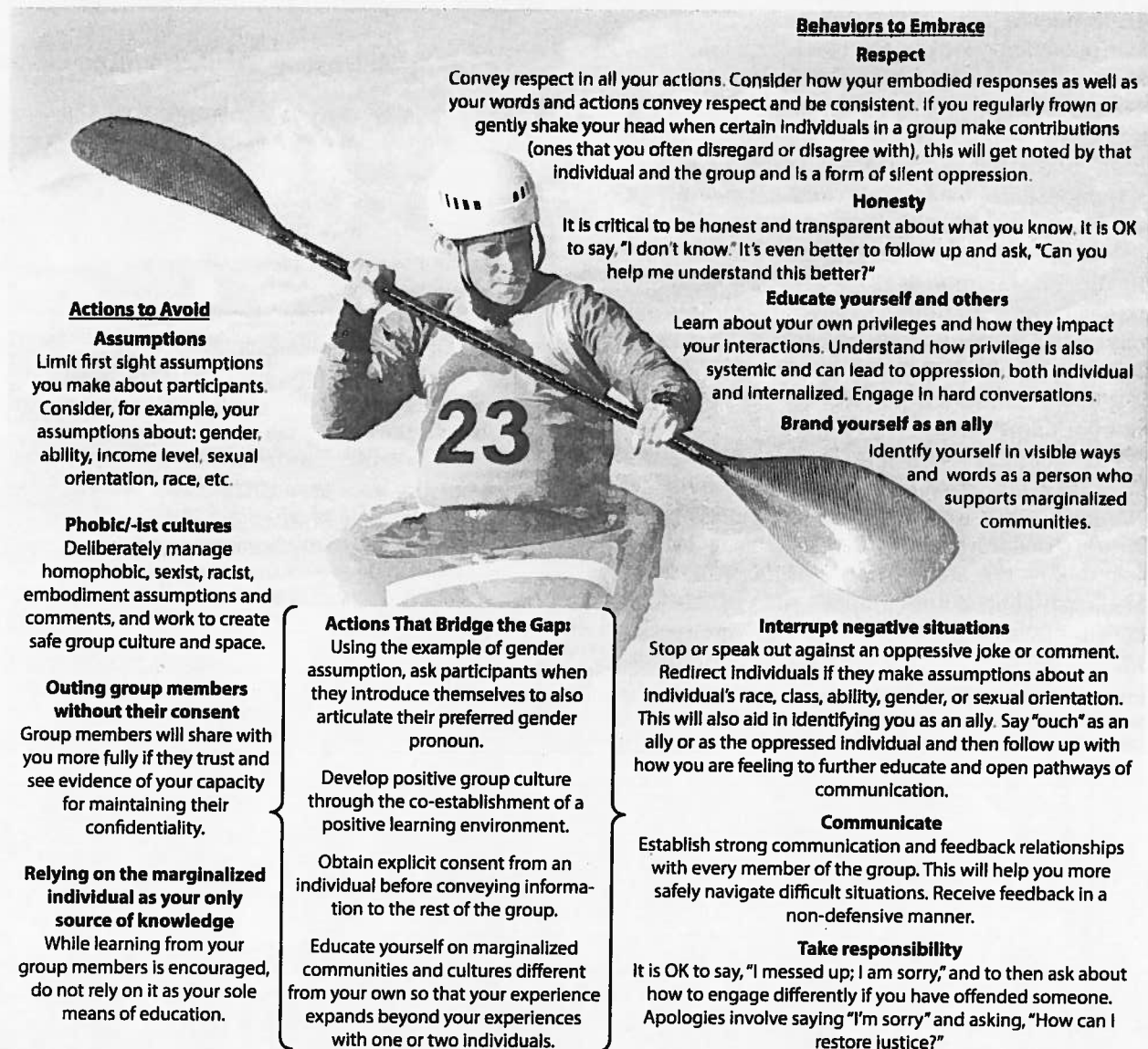


Figure 4.3 Navigating the rapids of social justice competency.

Adapted, by permission, from M. Breunig and E. Rylander, 2016, *Beyond training for tolerance in outdoor experiential education: More than just leadership*. In *Routledge international handbook of outdoor studies*, edited by B. Humberstone, H. Prince, and K.A. Henderson (London: Routledge), 168-177.

leader navigate the rapids of social justice competency? Figure 4.3 helps outdoor leaders further grow and develop in this regard.

Organizational Competency

The challenge of social justice competency becomes even more profound and holds transformative potential from an organizational perspective. One common organizational approach to inclusion has been to provide scholarships to "underprivileged" program participants. Although

this monetary support may help with aspects of program access, it neglects the underlying issues of inaccessibility (e.g., programs that cater to strong, able bodies; Breunig & Rylander, 2016). Simply reducing cost barriers for access to the wilderness is insufficient. More systemic organizational change is needed, including creating and sustaining policies that foster respect and value for all differences, developing programs that actively work to alleviate exclusion and race- and class-based isolation, and enhancing communication between practitioners and academics to

Learning Activity 4.4

Where do your social justice competency strengths lie? What are your deficits? Set two social justice competency goals for yourself for the coming semester. Check in with yourself at the end of this course to see whether you met these goals.

better inform the creation of policies and programs (Roberts, 2013).

The success of a program relies on practical aspects of service, such as the following (Chavez & Weisinger, 2008; Scholl & Dunlap, 2010):

- Creating a mission statement
- Writing publications in multiple languages
- Including examples of a diverse clientele in program brochures
- Examining admissions policies
- Avoiding assumptions about someone's cultural background that are based on skin color
- Employing diverse people who speak more than one language
- Expanding service offerings
- Evaluating these offerings and staff with a view toward inclusion and social justice competency

Staff training is also key and should focus on orienting new hires to social justice competencies and the practices of the agency, providing staff with ongoing support regarding new information and techniques, and maintaining a commitment to inclusion at the forefront of business practices (Scholl & Dunlap, 2010). Companies should revisit this commitment periodically on both an individual and an organizational level. Going outside the profession and exploring and engaging in other best practices will further inform internal practices.

Social Justice Competency and Risk

Imagine the risk potential for students if outdoor leaders neglect to engage in socially just leadership. A marginalized or bullied student may act out in ways that physically put themselves or

others at risk. The wilderness is an indeterminate environment that holds inherent potential for risk. Camping tools (e.g., Swiss army knives), the backcountry environment and issues of access, unpredictable individuals, certain outdoor activities (e.g., rock climbing and partner belays), and attitudes and behaviors all pose potential risks. Students who feel at risk often simultaneously feel vulnerable and act out in a variety of ways, including practicing self-mutilation, displaying lax behaviors regarding technical activities (e.g., river crossings), and exhibiting attitudes and actions that are counterproductive to group goals.

Parallel risk management concerns exist in the realm of emotional safety. Imagine that a student from a low socioeconomic background receives a scholarship to go on an extended trip with a group of kids from a high socioeconomic class. Most nights, the fireside conversation focuses on the extravagant trips that the kids have been taking. One girl responds to another boy, "Yeah, Disney World in Florida is okay, but have you been to Aulani?" The student on scholarship asks, "What's Aulani?" and everyone around the fire snickers. One kid says, "Duh! It's the Disney resort in Hawaii and it's the best! I can't believe you haven't been. You should ask your parents to take you next year instead of doing another lame trip like this."

This scenario is common. In thinking back to the opening story, Grace ended up regretting her hesitation to speak out about the dreamcatcher activity. She learned partway into camp that a student there was of Native American heritage and no one knew. That student spoke to the camp director, voicing her concerns about the camp co-opting this tradition without acknowledging its heritage.

Summary

Issues related to cultural and social justice often are imbued with emotion. Developing social justice competency provides an opportunity to develop awareness of ourselves and others, leading to a more informed outdoor leadership practice. The journey toward socially just leadership is both challenging and rewarding because we are compelled to confront our own privilege and biases and to examine how those affect our leadership and the members of our group. Applying socially just leadership in everyday engagements and leadership practice holds great potential in contributing to a more socially just world. The journey is long, but as the opening quote suggests, there is hope.

Professional Development Exercise

The goal of this activity is to further explore issues of privilege and oppression in a manner that helps us identify our own privilege and consider our role as allies rather than one that induces guilt or ill feelings. Draw the power flower (see figure 4.4) on a piece of paper. Consider who you are—and who you are not—in relation to those who hold hegemonic power in society. Fill in each of the petal exteriors relevant to your particular context (e.g., race: Caucasian; ability: able bodied). Next, consider what the dominant social identity—the one with privilege—might be. Make a check in the middle of the flower when your self-identification matches with the socially dominant identity. Count up the checks, or at least consider each one and reflect on how that privilege might or might not inform you as a leader. Write a short reflection or creative prose articulating some of what you learn and feel when doing this exercise. Finally, make a list of ways you wish to act as a leader as you assimilate the chapter's content and this activity.

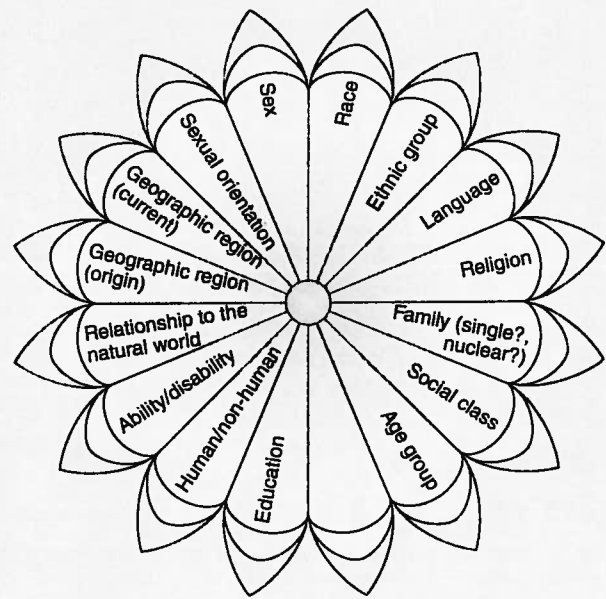


Figure 4.4 Power flower.

Adapted from Barb Thomas, Doris Marshall Institute; Adapted from Lee, Letters to Marcia, as cited in Arnold et.al. 1991.

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