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CHAPTER 8

SOCIAL INJUSTICE

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SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Social injustice challenges us to recognize the ordinarily invisible harms that are inflicted but not seen, and the rationalizations and justifications that support them. This chapter shows how both direct and structural violence depend on distorted perceptions, thoughts, and moral decisions, and suggests a framework for fostering inclusion, social justice, and peace in the twenty-first century.

DIRECT AND STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

Violence is the exertion of physical force so as to injure or abuse. Johan Galtung (1969) directs our attention to overt vs. more subtle forms of violence. *Direct violence* is immediate, concrete, physical violence committed by and on particular, identifiable people. Even when it is committed from afar, as in missile launches, particular people decide what to do, particular people activate

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weaponry at a particular moment, and particular people are victims.

Structural violence, in contrast, is less obvious than direct violence. It is gradual, imperceptible, and normalized as the way things are done; it determines whose voice is systemically heard or ignored, who gets particular resources, and who goes without. In structural violence, agency is blurred and responsibility is unclear; there may not be any one person who directly harms another. Structural violence normalizes unequal access to such social and economic resources as education, wealth, quality housing, civic services, and political power.

Direct and structural violence have different manifestations, but they are clearly related and interdependent. *Ethnic cleansing*, a euphemism for mass murder motivated by ethnic conflict, is direct violence that results from many kinds of structural violence, forces which have intertwined in “a long-forgotten history coming back to haunt us, a history full of thousands of economic, social, ethical, territorial, cultural and political problems that remained latent and unnoticed under the surface of totalitarian boredom” (Vaclav Havel, quoted by Burns, 1992, p. 3).

On the other hand, direct violence can give rise to long-term structural violence. Rape as a weapon of war has long-lived effects on victims and their society. Raped individuals are often reluctant to come forward because they fear exacerbating the debasement they and their families have already experienced. In some societies, mass rape has produced social, economic, and political inequalities; for example, in 1998, rape directed at Chinese women in Indonesia was tactically employed to wrest control of Indonesia’s commerce away from Chinese citizens (Mydans, 1998).

MORAL EXCLUSION

Both structural and direct violence result from moral justifications and rationalizations. *Morals* are the norms, rights, entitlements, obligations, responsibilities, and duties that shape our sense of justice and guide our behavior with others (Deutsch, 1985). Morals operationalize our sense of justice by identifying what we owe to whom, whose needs, views, and well-being count, and whose do not. Our morals apply to people we value, which define who is inside our *scope of justice* (or “moral community”), such as family members, friends, compatriots, and coreligionists (Deutsch, 1974, 1985; Opatow, 1990; Staub, 1989). We extend considerations of fairness to them, share community resources with them, and make sacrifices for them that foster their well-being (Opatow, 1987, 1993).

We see other kinds of people such as enemies or strangers outside our scope of justice; they are *morally excluded*. Gender, ethnicity, religious identity, age, mental capacity, sexual orientation, and political affiliation are some criteria used to define moral exclusion. Excluded people can be hated and viewed as “vermin” or “plague” or they can be seen as expendable non-entities. In either case, disadvantage, hardship, and exploitation inflicted on them seems normal, acceptable, and just—as “the way things are” or the way they “ought to be.” Fairness and deserving seem irrelevant when applied to them and harm befalling them elicits neither remorse, outrage, nor demands for restitution; instead, harm inflicted on them can inspire celebration.

Many social issues and controversies, such as aid to school drop-outs, illegal immigrants, “welfare moms,” people who are homeless, substance abusers, and those infected with HIV are essentially moral debates about who deserves public resources, and thus, ultimately, about moral inclusion. When we see other people’s circumstances to be a result of their moral failings, moral exclusion seems warranted. But when we see others’ circumstances as a result of structural vio-

lence, moral exclusion seems unwarranted and unjust.

Psychological Bases for Moral Exclusion

While it is psychologically more comfortable to perceive harm-doers to be evil or demented, we each have boundaries for justice. Our moral obligations are stronger toward those close to us and weaker toward those who are distant. When the media reports suffering and death in Cambodia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, the former Yugoslavia, and Rwanda, we often fail—as a nation, as communities, and as individuals—to protest or to provide aid. Rationalizations include insufficient knowledge of the political dynamics, the futility of doing much of use, and not knowing where to begin. Our tendency to exclude people is fostered by a number of normal perceptual tendencies:

1. *Social categorization*. Our tendency to group and classify objects, including social categories, is ordinarily innocuous, facilitating acquisition of information and memory (Tajfel & Wilkes, 1963). Social categorizations can become invidious, however, when they serve as a basis for rationalizing structural inequality and social injustice. For example, race is a neutral physical characteristic, but it often becomes a value-loaded label, which generates unequal treatment and outcomes (Archer, 1985; Tajfel, 1978).

2. *Evaluative judgments*. Our tendency to make simple, evaluative, dichotomous judgments (e.g., good and bad, like and dislike) is a fundamental feature of human perception. Evaluative judgments have cognitive, affective, and moral components. From a behavioral, evolutionary, and social learning perspective, evaluative judgments have positive adaptive value because they provide feedback that protects our well-being (Edwards & von Hippel, 1995; Osgood, Suci, & Tannenbaum, 1957). Evaluative judgments can support structural violence and exclusionary

thinking, however, when they lend a negative slant to perceived difference. Ingroup-outgroup and we-them thinking can result from social comparisons made on dimensions that maximize a positive social identity for oneself or one's group at the expense of others (Tajfel, 1982).

3. *Fundamental attribution error*. We tend to attribute our own behavior to situational factors but attribute others' behavior to their personalities or dispositions (Jones & Nisbett, 1971). This attribution bias occurs because situational factors influencing others are less obvious to us than the nuances of our own social situation. As a result, our characterological attributions about others can be harsh or unflattering because we do not see the complex contextual factors that influence their behavior. In interpersonal feuds and in intergroup wars, an adversary's position and interests are depicted as more simple than the complex contingencies and extenuating circumstances influencing our own behavior.

4. *Self-serving biases*. Social comparisons often result in moral judgments with egocentric biases (Messick & Sentis, 1979). Self-serving perceptions and judgments magnify others' imperfections and lead us to cast others as less deserving than ourselves (Miller & Ross, 1975). Research on enemy images (cf., Holt & Silverstein, 1989; Volkan, 1988; White, 1984) and ethnocentric conflict (cf., Brewer, 1979; LeVine & Campbell, 1972) document our tendency to see adversaries as frightening, untrustworthy, or immoral.

5. *Zero-sum thinking*. Although many conflicts can be resolved with some mutual gains for disputants, we tend to view conflicts as zero-sum so that gains for one mean losses for the other (Deutsch, 1973). This perceived—but often exaggerated and inaccurate—incompatibility of interests can generate negative attitudes, prejudice, bias, and hostility (Campbell, 1965).

6. *Attributive projection*. Our tendency to perceive our own views as correct and universal

can make it difficult to prevent them from intruding on and interfering with our inferences about others (Higgins, 1981; Ross & Fletcher, 1985). Imagining others' views as indistinguishable from our own supports the belief that our own social reality is correct and helps us avoid intrapsychic tensions that could result from realizing that others' beliefs may be in opposition to ours (Markus & Zajonc, 1985; Ross & Fletcher, 1985). Although we assume that age increases our ability for perspective taking and understanding others' thoughts and concerns, research on social perception, attributive projection, and false consensus indicate that adults continue to perceive others' beliefs and perceptions as more similar to their own than they actually are (Holmes, 1968; Ross & Fletcher, 1985; Ross, Greene, & House, 1977). Consequently, when others hold views that are different from our own, attributive projection leads us to view people who hold them as wrong and outside our moral community.

7. *Just world thinking.* Our need to perceive the world as fair and to believe that people get what they deserve results in *just world thinking* (Lerner, 1970, 1980). In just world thinking, either evidence that victims are suffering is denied or their fate is perceived as just (Lerner & Simmons, 1966; Rubin & Peplau, 1975; Ryan, 1971). The view that the world is just because those who suffer deserve their suffering assuages our guilt (Austin & Hatfield, 1980; Utne & Kidd, 1980; Walster & Walster, 1975). Just world thinking masks structural inequality by reducing distress resulting from perceived social injustice. Bystanders to structural and direct violence are more psychologically comfortable when they perceive that exploiters deserve their good outcomes and victims deserve their suffering. During World War II, surveys conducted in the United States indicated a rise in anti-Semitism, rather than increased sympathy or concern for victims of the Holocaust (Selznick & Steinberg, 1969). Bystanders were able to maintain their belief in a

just world by seeing victims as blameworthy people who deserved their fate.

Each of these tendencies toward perceptual distortion has adaptive, innocuous, and self-protective aspects, but each also fosters moral exclusion, structural and direct violence, and, ultimately, social injustice.

Dimensions of Moral Exclusion

Like violence, moral exclusion takes a variety of forms. The forms of moral exclusion can be described on three dimensions: 1) *intensity*, from subtle to blatant; 2) degree of *engagement*, from active to passive; and 3) *extent*, from narrow to wide in scope.

Intensity. The intensity of moral exclusion ranges from subtle to blatant. At the mildest end of the intensity dimension, we have rude or degrading behavior, then mild injury, severe injury, torture, irreversible injuries, mutilation, and murder. More subtle forms of moral exclusion relegate some people to social roles that undermine human dignity and allocate resources so that they receive less. Subtle forms of exclusion include such forms of structural violence as inadequate health care, sanitation, enforcement of housing codes, and police protection; substandard civic services can cause injury and death, even when direct violence is not intended. Blatant forms of moral exclusion include intentionally injurious, destructive behavior such as inflicting disfigurement, pain, injury, and death on people and destroying homes, communities, crops, and businesses.

Engagement. Participation in moral exclusion ranges from unawareness to ignoring, allowing, facilitating, executing, and devising. At the more passive end of the engagement dimension, crimes of ignoring and allowing occur when people have the social, intellectual, or financial re-

sources to hinder moral exclusion, or aid those who are harmed, but remain aloof, uninterested, or uninformed. At the more active end of this dimension, are crimes of devising and executing violent acts. Architects of genocide, despots such as Pol Pot of Cambodia, are at the extreme end of the engagement scale, even when they themselves do not carry out the policies they devise and set into motion.

Extent. Moral exclusion ranges in extent from narrowly focused, to widespread and prevalent within a society. Narrowly focused moral exclusion affects small segments of a society, targeting those viewed as marginal, deviant, or nonentities, such as people having minority religious views or minority sexual orientations. Widespread moral exclusion affects most of a society; for example, during dictatorships or inquisitions, human rights violations and persecutions become the norm (cf., Moore, 1987).

Table 14.1 Dimensions of moral exclusion

	Subtle manifestations		Blatant manifestations	
	Narrow in extent	Wide in extent	Narrow in extent	Wide in extent
Passive engagement	1 Ignoring or allowing rudeness, intimidation, and derogation, such as slavery, racism, bullying and sexual harassment	2 Ignoring or allowing domination and structural violence, such as violence directed at and rampant violations of human rights, such as ethnic cleansing, mass murder, inquisitions	3 Ignoring or allowing persecution and direct violence directed at particular subcultures, such as hate crimes, witch hunts	4 Ignoring or allowing direct violence and rampant violations of human rights, such as ethnic cleansing, mass murder, inquisitions
Active engagement	5 Participating in, facilitating, executing, or devising such forms of rudeness, intimidation, and derogation as bullying, sexual harassment	6 Participating in, facilitating, or devising domination and structural violence, such as slavery, racism, sweatshops, poverty, domestic violence	7 Participating in, facilitating, executing, or devising persecution and violence directed at particular subcultures, such as hate crimes, witch hunts	8 Participating in, facilitating, executing, or devising direct violence and rampant violations of human rights, such as ethnic cleansing, mass murder, inquisitions

Perceptions of Invisible, nonenti- Expendable, less than Reprehensible, vermin, a contaminat-
those excluded ties human ing danger, a plague

Table 14.1 describes eight forms of moral exclusion that emerge from interactions among these dimensions. While each form is quite distinct, on a deeper level, all forms have much in common. Whether moral exclusion is blatant or subtle, active or passive, and wide or narrow, it is characterized by a psychological orientation that:

- views those excluded as psychologically distant.
- lacks constructive moral obligations or responsibility toward those excluded.
- views those excluded as nonentities, expendable, and undeserving of fairness, community resources, or sacrifices that would foster their well-being.
- approves of procedures and outcomes for those excluded that would be unacceptable for those inside the scope of justice.

Like direct and structural violence, multiple forms of moral exclusion simultaneously exist within a society and, like direct and structural violence, one form of moral exclusion can give rise to others. For example, moral exclusion which is characterized by passive engagement, subtle manifestation, and wide extent (Cell 2) creates a social climate that nurtures more virulent forms of exclusion, such as homophobic hate crimes and lynching (Cell 7) or “ethnic cleansing” (Cell 8).

DETECTING SOCIAL INJUSTICE

Moral exclusion fosters structural and direct violence. Even when moral exclusion and structural violence are widespread and severe, they can be invisible when they are institutionalized. Before they can be addressed and deterred, they require detection. Detection, however, can be difficult for several reasons:

1. *Social injustice does not surface as a moral issue.* Harm and suffering that others experience is less obvious and painful than harm we ourselves experience. How we understand others' situations determines what we believe can or should be done. Different kinds of obligations ensue from construing others' experiences as morally relevant or not (Berkowitz, Guerra, & Nucci, 1991). Structural violence such as dangerous, brutal, degrading, and ill-paid work can be perceived as a matter of personal discretion (e.g., "It's her choice to work here") or social convention (e.g., "This is how these factories operate or they will close and people will be out of work") rather than a moral issue (e.g., "Poverty-level wages and insufficient safety mechanisms are exploitative and should be illegal").

2. *Social injustice is hard to see up close.* It is easier to detect injustice and moral exclusion in the past or in distant cultures than it is in our own. Self-deception occurs when people encounter evidence that contradicts their worldview. Psychologically, it is easier to question the credibility of evidence, dismiss its relevance, or distort it to fit one's views (Bandura, 1991). To avoid discovering evidence that disconfirms important beliefs, people keep themselves intentionally uninformed, failing to ask questions that would reveal unwanted information (Fingarette, 1969; Haight, 1980), "leav[ing] the foreseeable unforeseen and the knowable unknown" (Bandura, 1991, p. 95). For example, information on the widespread use of child labor in the production of rugs, clothing, and footwear was available many years before public opinion was mobilized to combat it.

3. *Indecision and inaction abets social injustice.* Eldridge Cleaver's aphorism from the 1960s, "you are either part of the problem or part of the solution," emphasizes non-neutrality of inaction. In malevolent social contexts, failing to perceive violence or act against injustice has

important individual and collective social consequences. Failing to perceive or oppose moral exclusion in contexts of widespread, severe, active violence, such as slavery or political repression, may be expedient and self-serving, but is a non-neutral decision with political implications for victims, perpetrators, and bystanders. Since moral exclusion narrowly directed at one group is more likely to spill over and spread than it is to abate, large portions of a society can become collaborators in persecution, as happened during the Spanish Inquisition, the witch trials in Europe, and McCarthyism in the United States (Moore, 1987).

4. *Combating social injustice consumes resources.* Constricting the scope of justice can lead to harmful outcomes. Enlarging the scope of justice, however, is not always possible or desirable. Although we like to think of ourselves as fair, moral, and upstanding, our capacity for justice is finite. Considering, attempting, and achieving fairness incurs real costs in time, energy, and resources. These costs increase during conflict, as resource availability diminishes and claims on scarce resources expand (Lerner, 1981; Leventhal, 1979; Staub, 1989). Under adverse conditions, excluding others from one's scope of justice is adaptive and simplifies difficult choices. Thus, moral exclusion is not a simple problem, but raises profound, complex questions about justice (Crosby & Lubin, 1990).

FOSTERING SOCIAL JUSTICE

Structural violence and moral exclusion can be narrow in scope, relatively subtle in outcome, and result from passive complicity. They can be perceived as acceptable, normal, and the way things are done. Structural violence may offer some members of society protection against competing claims on our scarce social or physical resources. Yet structural violence is not inevitable. While our society is characterized by many forms of direct and structural violence, inclusionary think-

ing also flourishes. As previously unrecognized injustices gain attention, now more than ever we support the civil and human rights of such disadvantaged people as children, the aged, and people with HIV, and increasingly, the effects of destructive environmental behavior on the natural world (Opotow & Clayton, 1994). Fostering inclusionary thinking can be accomplished by:

1. *Welcoming open dialogue and critique.* Change and resource scarcity are a fact of social life, but they increase the sense of threat and danger and consequently narrow the scope of justice (Opotow, 1990). Therefore, tolerance for and encouragement of discussion and critique is a first step in recognizing structural violence and identifying its causes and cures. Supporting open dialogue and valuing pluralistic perspectives not only can help us identify unfair and divisive procedures for distributing social resources, but can also help social groups (e.g., political entities, citizen organizations) develop sufficient flexibility to withstand the stresses of social change and conflict (Coser, 1956).

2. *Establishing procedures that keep communication channels open during increased conflict.* Dialogue and critique are especially difficult and particularly important in those difficult times characterized by conflict and resource scarcity. Therefore, establishing communication channels and keeping them open is important if open dialogue and critique are to be encouraged. Foresight in establishing and maintaining these channels before they are needed is essential if they are to function when conflicts escalate (DeRidder, Schruijer, & Tripathi, 1992).

3. *Valuing pluralism and tolerance.* The need to view situations from perspectives other than one's own is axiomatic in conflict resolution, but the ability to do so is not innate (Opotow, 1992). Understanding others' needs and positions means quieting one's own views so that they do not interfere with our ability to perceive the perspectives of others. Benefits that result from

pluralism and tolerance include an increased ability to take others' perspectives; an increase in fresh, novel, and creative approaches; personal growth; and constructive societal change. Perspective taking and tolerance can be learned, and are more likely to become normative when they are modeled throughout the society by leaders, teachers, and parents in their relationships with each other (Opatow & Deutsch, 1999).

4. *Being alert to symptoms of moral exclusion.* Although it is more comfortable to see others as the ones perpetrating structural and direct violence, we are all skilled at moral exclusion. Exclusionary thinking is promoted by prevailing myths that allow us to take a righteous stance, deny negative outcomes that accrue to others, deny the validity of their perspective, and deny our own contributions to the problems of social living. Awareness of the symptoms of moral exclusion can help individuals, groups, institutions, and nations take actions consistent with the moral principles they cherish.

CONCLUSIONS: PEACE PSYCHOLOGY FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY

The direct violence of hate crimes, ethnic tension, and war are the visible effects of unseen, pervasive, and long-lived structural violence, such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination. Structural violence is sustained by social, psychological, economic, and political conditions that privilege some but exclude others. Differential access to effective schools, health care, safe and affordable housing, employment, sanitation services, and transportation are social, economic, and political issues, but they are fundamentally moral issues as well. What is traditional, affordable, and expedient cloaks implicit moral choices that privilege some with access to social and physical resources while rationalizing others' lack. Moral exclusion makes structural violence prob-

able, “logical,” and invisible.

Although moral exclusion, direct and structural violence, and social injustice are ubiquitous, they are not inevitable. Inclusionary thinking is fostered by valuing one’s connections to and interdependence with others, while seeing the mutually constructive possibilities of those connections as beneficial. Maintaining relationships depends on being committed to extending considerations of fairness, being willing to make sacrifices, and being willing to allocate and share resources to preserve those relationships with distant as well as close people. While we tend to envision peace as an outcome, peace is an inclusionary process. In the long run, cultures of peace, characterized by human rights, tolerance, democracy, free flow of information, non-violence, sustainable development, peace education, and equality of men and women will depend upon moral inclusion.

Social conflicts can foster injustice, but they also motivate social change that advances social justice. Constructive conflict processes can maximize social outcomes, but they are not intuitive and need to be learned (Coleman & Deutsch, this volume; Deutsch, 1973; Opatow & Deutsch, 1999). Appreciation of diversity, trust, and respect are difficult to achieve, taking considerable skill, effort, maturity, and patience to accomplish. To achieve these constructive outcomes, communication needs to unflinchingly address rather than suppress real structural inequalities that take some people’s needs into account while disregarding, disrespecting, and excluding others. By so doing, we can enlarge the scope of justice, foster equality, and promote peace in the twenty-first century.