

## Resistance Ethics

Social, cultural, and institutional dynamics of oppression result in what can be experienced as 'micro-aggressions'.

Micro-aggressions are individually 'small', usually unconscious and unintentional, enactments of privilege, bias, or cultural ignorance that the other person experiences as insulting, inconsiderate, alienating, or rude.

Examples of micro-aggressions include:

- a white sales clerk looks past a black customer and asks a white customer if she can be of service
- a woman enters an office conference room with a male colleague and the male chair of the meeting welcomes her male colleague by name and fails to mention her
- an Asian woman at a nightclub is approached by a white man who tells her that her exotic beauty is a real turn-on
- a group of co-workers is planning the annual office holiday party and discuss bringing spouses, girlfriends, and boyfriends, and someone turns to the only openly gay man in the room, whom everyone knows has married another man in a formal ceremony, and says he should bring his friend
- the annual holiday party is referred to as the Christmas party

The accumulation of micro-aggressions over time can become overwhelming and impact the individual by contributing to their experience of feeling disempowered in the context of the dominant cultural group.

The experience of disempowerment can lead to very uncomfortable and dysfunctional feeling states and become generalized as a persistent state of being and relating to the world.

---

<b>Empowerment</b>		<b>Disempowerment</b>		<b>Feeling States of Disempowerment</b>
Personal power	<b>vs.</b>	Overpowered by others	→	Anger
Self-control	<b>vs.</b>	Lack of control	→	Fear
Internal sense of self	<b>vs.</b>	Externally defined sense of self	→	Low self-esteem
Community or group belonging	<b>vs.</b>	Isolation	→	Depression
Self-sufficiency	<b>vs.</b>	Dependency	→	Insecurity

---

Healthy Resistance Ethics oppose the experience of disempowerment and reinforce the individual's personal integrity and experience of personal empowerment.

Without Healthy Resistance Ethics,

- an individual can get caught up in a cycle of fighting the internalization of disempowerment and reacting from the disempowered feeling states – which in turn reinforces the experience of disempowerment
- reacting from the disempowered feeling state can result in behavior that becomes dysfunctional or disruptive to relationships

# Resistance Ethics

## *Resistance Ethics:*

- ❖ A refusal to accept or internalize negative self-images from another person or from the broader society (an internal, personal experience)

## *Healthy Resistance Behaviors:*

- ❖ Normal and healthy responses to experiences of disempowerment, especially when the forces preventing empowerment are located externally (actions that can be seen and experienced by others)

Healthy resistance ethics acknowledge the dynamics of oppression and disempowerment and locate them externally – the problem is not with me, but with them/it.

Healthy resistance ethics encourage healthy resistance behaviors and contribute to an experience of personal and community empowerment.

---

<b>Resistance Ethics</b>	<b>Healthy Resistance Behaviors</b>
◆ Not believing negative things other people have said about me or about people who are like me	◆ Getting angry and expressing that anger without hurting myself or others
◆ Knowing that it is ok to be safe, and to define my own meaning of 'safety'	◆ Crying, laughing, singing, and talking back
◆ Feeling vulnerable and afraid and soothing myself through the experience	◆ Thinking – taking the time to think things through before acting
◆ Trusting that I have done my best every step of the way, even when others thought I could do better	◆ Loving and letting others love me
◆ Sustaining hope and knowing that healing is a priority	◆ Telling the truth and listening to others
◆ Holding on to my humanity	◆ Questioning assumptions and questioning authority
◆ Looking at others in my situation and finding them beautiful	◆ Being defiant, but with flexibility and willingness to negotiate when appropriate
◆ Believing that I am loveable	◆ Asking questions and saying 'no'
◆ Trusting God, my Higher Power, the Great Spirit, or connecting with my Spiritual Self	◆ Dancing, moving, feeling my body and enjoying the experience
◆ Affirming life	◆ Breathing deeply and slowly, feeling my body as I breathe

---

Adapted from: West, T. (1999). *Wounds of the spirit: Black women, violence, and resistance ethics*. New York: New York University Press.

# Accountability

All members of society are challenged to resist the internalization of the dynamics of oppression and privilege

People who are members of historically oppressed groups

- must resist internalization of oppression or disempowerment
- often form a community that reinforces healthy resistance ethics and accountability

People who are members of 'privileged' groups or dominant group cultures

- must resist the internalization of privilege or superiority
- often need to work at developing a stable network that can support accountability
- may face ridicule or suspicion from other dominant group members

Accountability requires recognizing

- which 'privileged' or dominant groups function in society
- which of these groups you belong to
  - if you are a member of a non-dominant group, examine ways in which you identify with dominant group norms
- the culture and norms of the dominant group
- the factors of 'privilege' embedded into the dominant culture
- what you have been taught (or what the dominant culture believes) about historically oppressed or marginalized groups
- how your unconscious, unintentional everyday actions could be perceived by others outside the dominant group
- how your actions contribute to the continued dominance of the 'privileged' group

Accountability means having a commitment to

- engaging in a personal process of self-awareness and growth to resist the internalization of the dynamics of privilege/oppression
- developing a personal and/or professional network of people who share this commitment and who talk about it openly
- inviting others, including those of historically oppressed or marginalized groups, to give you blunt feedback on your actions that convey an unconscious, unintentional internalization of privilege or oppression
- taking action on a regular basis to oppose oppression in the social, professional, cultural, and political realms