Tools for Change

Common Behavioral Patterns that Perpetuate Power Relations of Domination

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Power is the ability to act—the more access to resources one has, the more options one has. Power differences are expressed in institutional and cultural contexts. These power differences continually inform our interpersonal relationships.

The following chart shows some patterns people learn in order to survive in a hierarchical society. Not to conform to expected behavior risks social ostracism, privilege and /or one's survival. These patterns take place in correspondence to each other; they are tendencies in relationships not personality characteristics. They are to be read horizontally. When we ignore these patterns or fail to act to transform them, we reinforce the dominant culture's injustice, even if we aspire to egalitarian relationships. It takes courage to step outside of the norms and feels as though one is going against the grain. *Because they are relational a shift on one side brings about a change on both sides and the pattern is broken*.

 NOTE: As you read, think of a circumstance you find yourself in where some of these patterns may be occurring. *You may find it painful to consider these issues. Though the temptation is to close down, the challenge is to open and cultivate compassion both for others and ourselves. Doing so, we will find it easier to step out of the patterns and develop relations of mutual care, creativity and support.*

Tendencies of people in **Privileged** positions	Tendencies of people in **Oppressed** positions
Defines parameters, judges what is appropriate; often patronizes.	Feels inappropriate, awkward, does not trust own perception, looks to expert for definition.
Is seen as, and feels, capable of making constructive changes.	Is seen as, and feels, disruptive.
Assumes responsibility for keeping system on course. Acts unilaterally.	Blames self for not having capacity to change situation.
Self-image of superiority, competence, in control, entitled, correct.	Self-image of inferiority, incompetent, being controlled, not entitled, low self-esteem.
Presumptuous, does not listen, interrupts; may raise voice. Includes bullying, threats of violence, and violence.	Finds it difficult to speak up, timid, tries to please. Holds back anger, resentment, and rage.
Seeks to stand out as special.	Feels secure in background, feels vulnerable when singled out.
Assumes anything is possible, can do whatever one wants; assumes everyone else can too. Doesn't acknowledge constraints in current situations.	Feels confined by circumstances, limits aspirations. Sees current situations in terms of past constraints.
Initiates, manages, plans, projects.	Lacks initiative, responds, deals, copes, survives.
Sees problems and situations in personal terms.	Sees problems in social context, results of system, "them."
Sees experiences and feelings as unique, feels disconnected, and often needs to verbalize feelings.	Sees experiences and feelings as collectively understood and shared. No point in talking about them.
Sees solutions to problems as promoting better feelings.	Sees solutions to problems in actions that change conditions.
Thinks own view of reality is only one, obvious to all, assumes everyone agrees with their view. Disagreements are result of lack of information, misunderstandings, and/or personalities.	Always aware of at least two views of reality, their own and that of the dominant group.
Views self as logical, rational. Sees others as too emotional, out of control.	Often thinks own feelings are inappropriate, a sign of inadequacy.
Believes certain kinds of work below their dignity.	Believes certain kinds of work beyond their ability.
Does not believe or trust ability of others to provide leadership.	Does not believe has capacity for leading.
Unaware of hypocrisy, contradictions.	Sees contradictions, irony, hypocrisy.
Fears losing control, public embarrassment.	Laughs at self and others. Sees humor as way to deal with hypocrisy.
Regards own culture as civilized, regards other's as underdeveloped, disadvantaged. Turns to other's culture to enrich humanity while invalidating it by considering it exotic.	Feels own culture devalued. Uses cultural forms to influence situation. Humor, music, poetry, etc. to celebrate collective experience and community. Sees these forms as being stolen
Sees oppression as a problem in the past and wants others to "just get over it"	Reminded in countless ways daily of the pervasive presence of oppression.
Feels uncomfortable reading about these patterns.	Feels validated reading about these patterns.