b. What were the challenges of this activity? How might we understand these challenges from a critical social justice lens?

2. Working with a partner with whom you share a dominant group identity, identify a local organization that works from a critical social justice framework. Attend a meeting.

3. a. Watch CTV’s First Story documentary on Nora Bernard (see Figure 9.1) entitled The Legacy (2008) (http://tinyurl.com/2cgnx37) and then watch the documentary on Charlene Teeters called In Whose Honor (1997).

b. Using the example of Nora Bernard, Charlene Teeters, and at least two other Indigenous activists that you research, write talking notes to explain the position that we cannot ignore the past if we want to move forward in the present (in other words, it’s not as simple as “just getting over it”). Come up with at least three strong reasons for this position.

CHAPTER 10

Putting It All Together

“What now?”

Understanding social justice means that we must be able to recognize that relations of unequal social power are constantly being negotiated at both the micro (individual) and macro (structural) levels. We must understand our own positions within these relations of unequal power. We must be able to think critically about knowledge. And most importantly, we must be able to act from this understanding, in service of a more just society. This final chapter reviews key principles of critical social justice and offers some concrete suggestions for action.

What does it mean, then, to put critical social justice into action? In this chapter we return to the four key elements of understanding from the preface and offer practical suggestions to guide the next phase of the journey.

To review, understanding critical social justice means that an individual must be able to do the following:

- Recognize how relations of unequal social power are constantly being negotiated at both the micro (individual) and macro (structural) levels
- Understand our own positions within these relations of unequal power
- Think critically about knowledge
- Act on the above in service of a more just society

Below, we illustrate these elements through vignettes and organize them into two general areas: critical social justice perspectives (how we understand the issues) and critical social justice skills (how we act on that understanding). We offer some questions and suggestions (critical social justice considerations) to guide your next steps in developing your critical social justice literacy. Keep in mind that these are only examples intended to illustrate key elements; we are not suggesting that oppression is limited to these situations, nor are our suggestions meant to be foolproof formulas. Expect to make mistakes, and consider them learning opportunities.
Recognize How Relations of Unequal Social Power Are Constantly Being Negotiated

Imagine... a classroom of 20 teacher education students. In this class, there are 17 female students and 3 male. The female students are early childhood or elementary education majors and the male students are all secondary education majors. Seventeen of the students come from a middle-class suburban background, two from a working-class rural background, and one from a working-class urban background. The students’ ages range from 19 to 25. All of them are White. Two of the students have learning disabilities; none of them have visible disabilities. English is their first language. The professor, a White woman, points out that, much like the demographic of teachers and teacher educators, the class is not very diverse. Many of the students, feeling defensive, argue that there is a great deal of diversity among them.

Critical social justice considerations: What do you see? One of the dynamics at play in this scenario is the difference between how a person using a critical social justice lens sees diversity and how people who are using a mainstream lens see diversity. The students, looking through the lens of individualism, see diversity in terms of personality. From this lens, everyone is first and foremost a unique individual and social group memberships are unimportant. The instructor, who is looking through a critical social justice lens, sees the room in terms of key social groups. From this perspective, many major minoritized groups are absent, including: people of Color, people with visible disabilities, people from a range of socioeconomic classes, people in non-traditional gender career tracks, and people with different linguistic and cultural capital.

The absence of these key groups is not an accident nor is it irrelevant; it is the result of long-term structural oppression. The homogeneity of the class in these terms is never neutral or benign, and the forces that have led to it are always in play. Because we are socialized to think of ourselves as individuals, especially in our dominant groups, it is often difficult to understand why it is useful to think about people in terms of their social groups. However, when we think in terms of groups, we can begin to see patterns of structural injustice, recognize that key perspectives are missing, and know to pursue those missing perspectives.

When we don't see our social surroundings in terms of groups, we don't notice how segregated we often are from minoritized people; segregation becomes normal and unremarkable. Thus we are not compelled to change this segregation. This is another reason why colorblindness is so pernicious. If the students in this scenario insist that they "don't see color," they can deny seeing segregation and its impact on schools, neighborhoods, and children's educational opportunities. They can also deny their own racial socialization and how it shapes their worldview. But not seeing how structural power circulates through segregation does not mean that power is absent and no oppression is occurring. Indeed, power is reinforced in the very fact that we can look around and not see anything of value missing. Expanding your capacity to see at the group level—where groups are and where they aren't—is critical for seeing how power is reproduced in institutions.

From a critical social justice perspective, the more social group diversity there is in any social context, the more we increase our collective ability to consider multiple perspectives. Of course the presence of multiple perspectives (or social group diversity) is only the first step. The second is to foster an environment wherein people from minoritized groups (and their allies) can voice their perspectives and have them listened to and taken seriously; environments that are numerically diverse around key social group memberships are not necessarily prepared to support and engage with those perspectives.

Critical social justice considerations: Defensiveness. Another dynamic in this scenario is the defensiveness the students feel when the instructor points out the lack of diversity. This defensiveness signals that the ideology of individualism has been challenged. In our dominant groups, we are not socialized to see ourselves as group members and it is common to take umbrage at the suggestion that this aspect of our identity matters, for example, to feel defensive at the suggestion that our race, class, or gender is relevant to our life experiences. To point out the relevance of our group memberships is to challenge a privilege to which we often feel entitled: the privilege to see ourselves and be seen by others as individuals, outside of social groups.

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The students’ defensiveness also indicates that they are coming from a good/bad binary; the teacher has raised the issue of race, among other things, and implied that something is racially problematic about the demographics of the class. Unfortunately, their defensiveness indicates that they might not be as open to the discussion as they could be and this makes it harder for the instructor to broach it. Their defensiveness also sends an unwelcoming message to anyone else in the room who may want to engage constructively with the issue. Of course we do not mean to imply that the defensiveness is not normal or temporary, or that the students are not open to the discussion at all. But defensiveness in this context is an indication of a dominant worldview, and it functions to protect that worldview rather than expand it. From a critical social justice perspective, defensiveness should be an indicator to us that we are falling into the good/bad binary or that some aspect of our dominant group position is being threatened. In this way, we can use our defensiveness as an entry point into deeper self-awareness.

Critical social justice considerations: Additional layers of complexity. Now let’s imagine that the person who points out the lack of diversity is a person of Color (or a member of any other minoritized group who is not represented in any significant way in that setting). In this case, there are at least two key dynamics to consider. The first dynamic is the risk it takes to bring up an issue of critical social justice to dominant group members, and particularly dominant group members who are the numerical majority in the setting. Remember, key patterns of dominant group members include: they are usually not aware of injustice and/or deny its existence; they are defensive about the suggestion that it exists; they don’t like to be reminded of forms of injustice that benefit them; and they tend to lack the humility to listen to minoritized groups. These patterns make it very difficult for minoritized people to speak out. Based on well-grounded past experience, they are likely to be acutely aware of the risks and know that they are outnumbered and unable to count on anyone else in the room to support them. Even if there is a dominant group member in the room who understands the point being made and the importance of engaging with it, if they play it safe and don’t use their position to support the person who raised the issue, they are de facto supporting the unwelcoming climate in the setting.

A second key dynamic to consider is that dominant group members tend to dismiss the voices of minoritized group members as: representing “special” or biased interests; angry and disruptive; emotional and illogical; and therefore, as unworthy of consideration. When the minoritized person is the instructor of the class, the chair of a meeting, or the facilitator of a session, their status of temporary authority will be overridden by their rank as a minoritized group member, and any expertise they bring to the discussion may quickly be dismissed. In order to constructively interrupt the dynamics of oppression in this scenario the following perspectives and skills are necessary:

**Critical social justice perspectives**

- See at the group level and understand the saliency of your group memberships.
- Recognize that colorblindness hides, rather than addresses, social injustice.
- Recognize what is lost in homogeneity.
- Understand the ideologies that trigger defensiveness (e.g., individualism).
- Move beyond good/bad binaries.
- Work from the knowledge that the societal default is oppression; there are no spaces free of it. Thus, the question becomes, “How is it manifesting here?” rather than “Is it manifesting?”

**Critical social justice skills**

- Lower any defensiveness you may be feeling.
- Educate yourself about groups you have been separated from.
- Build authentic cross-group relationships (authentic means committed, ongoing, and mutual relationships, and does not mean seeking out a lone member of the minoritized group to educate you).

**Understand Our Own Positions Within Relations of Unequal Power**

Imagine . . . a workplace meeting with 14 people sitting around the table. Only 3 in the meeting are men, and all of these men are White. Of the rest of the group of women, 3 are women of Color. A White woman is chairing the meeting and opens the discussion by asking for suggestions for addressing a problem the group is working on. One of the men makes the first suggestion. Without waiting for other suggestions to be brought to the table, a second man rebuts the first man’s suggestion. They begin a back and forth exchange that goes on at length. Every now and then one of the women asks a question for clarification. One of the men occasionally rephrases his comments with, “I know I’ve been talking a lot, but . . .” and then continues to talk. Eventually, they wrap up their debate and a woman of Color makes the next suggestion. As soon as she begins speaking, one of the men checks his email and another gets up to refill his coffee.
Let's look at the dynamics of the meeting through a critical social justice lens. The first task is to identify the most salient group memberships at play in this part of the meeting. Once we've identified them, we can begin to notice what patterns these groups bring and how they might be manifesting in ways that reinforce, rather than interrupt, inequitable outcomes. Then we can decide what actions would be most constructive for each player to take.

Critical social justice considerations:
Salient group memberships. The most salient social group memberships at play in this scenario are gender and race.

Critical social justice considerations: What are the patterns at play? The first pattern manifesting in the meeting is that of male domination of the discussion. Men, and White men in particular, tend to take up an inordinate amount of talk time. They are apt to speak first, speak next, and afford very little if any "wait time" during a discussion (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004). They may believe that the space is open and free and that the solution is simply for other people to just speak up, that is, to act like them; the presumption is that anyone can speak if they want to. In reality, however, airtime is a limited resource; due to typical time constraints, not everyone can speak even if they want to, and certainly not for as long as they want to. Further, wait time is subjective—what seems to dominant group members as a very long pause may not feel long to others. And certainly, women overall have not been socialized to "just speak up" (Martin, 1998).

Another pattern in this scenario is that of the men shifting their attention away when a woman begins to speak. The men's behavior reinforces the dominant messages that men's voices are more important than women's, that men are entitled to speak first and most, and that what a woman has to say is not as valuable to men. These messages are reinforced for all of the women in the meeting, but are further problematic because the woman who begins to speak is a woman of Color. In addition to what this communicates to women overall, this also communicates to the women of Color that their voices are less valuable and reinforces not only male privilege, but White privilege. While this may seem to be an isolated incident in which the men "just happened" to get up or check their email at the moment a woman of Color began to speak, it is only one example of the kinds of micro-aggressions the women of Color endure every day; to the women of Color this is likely not an isolated exception. The enactment of White privilege is also reinforced for the White women; while the White women are disadvantaged by the male dominance, they still benefit from the White privilege manifesting in the room.

Critical social justice considerations: Why these patterns matter. Those who speak first set the agenda, guide the discussion, disproportionately influence decisions, are seen as leaders, and gain more social capital. Social patterns in groups are well documented; dominant groups lead overall. While an individual member of a dominant group might not be dominating (in this case, the third White man who was at the meeting but silent), in proportion to the ratio of men in the meeting, White men collectively are still dominating. In fact, the third man sitting silently and not interrupting the dominance of the other White men supports their ability to dominate (e.g., he could say, "I'm curious what other people think; could we hear from some others?"). These patterns are independent of individual members' intentions; they are not personal but they are always at play. To challenge social injustice we have to challenge our group's patterns (whether we personally see ourselves participating in them or not).

This scenario also demonstrates a point made earlier in the classroom scenario: Although there were members of minoritized groups present in the meeting (in this case women and people of Color), because of the lack of critical social justice skills and perspectives of the men and the White people, the environment did not support the inclusion of their perspectives.

Critical social justice considerations: Additional layers of complexity. Now let us add an additional layer of complexity: intersectionality. Imagine that the meeting is absent of the men and consists instead of 14 women: 11 White women and 3 women of Color. In this context, the dynamics of race will rise to salience and the White women will tend to dominate. Although the White women have been socialized to defer to the voices of the White men (internalized gender oppression), they have also been socialized to dominate over the people of Color (internalized racial dominance).

In order to constructively interrupt the dynamics of oppression in this scenario the following perspectives and skills are necessary:
Is Everyone Really Equal?

Critical social justice perspectives

- Recognize the range of social group memberships at play in the context.
- Think from the group rather than individual level.
- Remember that patterns are not personal.
- Understand that these patterns are deeply rooted and will not interrupt themselves.
- Understand that although you are in the same room, you are not having the same experience as others due to dynamics of inequitable power. When a member of the minoritized group speaks, be cognizant of your body language and when you decide to “take a break,” either mental or physical.

Critical social justice skills

For the dominant group:

- In general, don’t speak first (this guideline may be bypassed if the speaker is making a strategic move to use his or her voice in order to interrupt broader group dynamics, but this is an advanced strategy that is best taken up in consultation with minoritized group members and other allies).
- Self-monitor your participation.
- Build your tolerance for listening.
- Push your wait time beyond your comfort zone (try counting to 10 before speaking).
- Invite different voices into the discussion (“Could we go around the table and hear from each person?”).
- Stating awareness of your pattern (“I know I’m talking a lot, but . . .”) without stopping the pattern is disingenuous, allowing one to appear sensitive while still not letting go of control. If you are aware that you are dominating, stop dominating.

Intersectionality (in this case, the White women):

- Understand that because of racism and White privilege, you and the women of Color do not experience the White men’s sexism in the same way.
- While there are always other dynamics at play, use your White privilege when you can to support people of Color.
- A powerful step in challenging inequity is to recognize how your own internalized (gender) oppression may be silencing you and thus inadvertently contributing to the oppression of the women of Color. Work in solidarity with people of Color and other allies to name and challenge all forms of oppression.
- Your role is not to protect or save people of Color; if you choose to act as an ally, do so for your own growth and interest in fostering a just society, and not because you expect gratitude or believe yourself to be the most qualified.

Intersectionality (in this case the women of Color):

- Practice seeing how your group’s socialized racial patterns may contribute to upholding racism for people from minoritized racial groups other than your own. Challenge these patterns where they uphold internalized racial oppression for you and other people of Color.
- Work in solidarity with other people of Color and White allies to name and challenge all forms of oppression.
- Utilize the privilege you may have in other aspects of your life (e.g., language, religion, class, sexuality, status in the workplace). Use your positions to leverage power and be heard (“As the director of this program, I agree that we must address the fact that our students are not prepared to teach in urban schools” or “As a native-English-language speaker, I can see the value of actively recruiting more multilingual people into our department”).
Think Critically About Knowledge

Imagine ... You have been practicing your critical social justice literacy by working to identify ideology in a range of texts (books in school, news coverage, advertisements, and movies). Over coffee, a friend tells you about an "amazingly inspirational" movie she saw called Saving Migueł. The plot of the film revolves around a White family who saves a poor Puerto Rican child from the "drug-infested ghetto" of a large urban city. Midway in the story, Miguel returns to the barrio seeking a reunion with his drug-addicted birth mother. As he walks down the street of his old neighborhood, he is surrounded by a gang who tries to intimidate him into joining them. He is considering his limited options when the White mother arrives and confronts the gang leader, who backs down and retreats. The mother whims Miguel out of the ghetto and back to her safe suburban home. The story highlights the White family’s challenges as they adjust to having a Puerto Rican child in their lives. The movie has a happy ending when Miguel wins a spot at a prestigious arts school where he will specialize in dance.

You feel a little uncomfortable with the stereotypes the film reinforces. You raise this concern by cautioning your friend to remember that this film was written, produced, and directed by White people, and told from the White perspective. Therefore, you tell her, some of the characters and representations of life in the ghetto might be a bit stereotypical.

"But," your friend protests, "it’s a true story!" She seems genuinely confused by your suggestion that this story, which she found so inspirational, could be problematic. After all, she says, it isn’t just about the White family, it is about a Puerto Rican kid “making it.”

The following considerations can be useful for thinking about how to respond to your friend.

Critical social justice considerations: Key aspects of the exchange. A central element in this exchange is your friend’s belief that the story is true. The idea that stories told in media are true is common (be they historical accounts of a battle described in a textbook or a movie that was “based on a true story”). As we described in detail in Chapter 1, one of the key skills in adopting a critical social justice perspective is asking questions about the meaning given to any event. In this example we would ask: From whose perspective is the story true? Whose perspectives are missing? Are all of the elements true, or were some of those elements (such as the neighborhood being ruled by a gang or Miguel’s mother being an addict) added to make the story more “exciting” or “real” (appealing to a mainstream audience who has come to expect these tropes)? How much was rearranged, added, or subtracted in order to create the dramatic pacing a movie requires, and who made these decisions? Do these decisions reinforce stereotypes, or challenge them? Asking questions such as these is an important first step in unpacking the social construction of knowledge.

Frank Chin’s work (Figure 10.1) illustrates the struggle of people of Color to tell their own stories in ways that don’t reproduce racist stereotypes in mainstream culture.

If we consider other kinds of texts (e.g., school history textbooks) we can see the effects of omitted or obscured “truths” which give us an incomplete picture of our histories. In order to gain a more complex understanding, we must be able to tolerate alternative accounts that challenge the familiar stories that have shaped our national identities. This process unsettles what we think we know, and also the rituals that may have deep meaning and importance for us, such as how we celebrate Columbus Day or Thanksgiving.

Critical social justice considerations: Ideologies and discourses in the text. The plot of Saving Migueł may sound familiar to you because many of us have seen some variation of this story many times. The story is a classic narrative of White supremacy. The following are some of the key narratives of White supremacy repeated and reinforced in the story:

Figure 10.1. Frank Chin (b. 1940)

Author, playwright, and educator Frank Chin is the first Asian American to have had his plays performed on major New York stages, with 1972’s “The Chickencoop Chinaman” and 1974’s “The Year of the Dragon.” Chin is an important figure in American theater, helping establish the Asian American Theatre Company in 1973. His works of fiction often examine the theme of stereotypes about Chinese and Asian Americans in mainstream society. His work brings attention to the importance of thinking critically about any text; all stories are constructed and audiences must ask questions about what is being reproduced. Chin recognizes that there is a complicated relationship between being presented with the stories and experiences of “others” and actually “knowing” or understanding these experiences.

Source: http://cemaweb.library.ucsb.edu/images/chinfrank.jpg
The story is told from the perspective of White people.
White people act as saviors of people of Color.
Children of Color are innocent, but adults of Color are morally and criminally corrupt.
Whites who are willing to save/help people of Color, at seemingly great personal cost, are noble and courageous.
Individual people of Color can overcome their circumstances but usually only with the help of White people.
Urban spaces and the people of Color living in them are inherently threatening, dangerous, and criminal.
All people of Color are poor, belong to gangs, are addicted to drugs, and are bad parents.
The most dependable route for escaping the "inner city" is to assimilate into White society and become "civilized."
White people are willing to deal with individual "deserving" people of Color, but Whites do not become a part of their community in any meaningful way.
White people who are willing to "deal with" individual people of Color are morally superior to other White people.

Stories with characters of Color as protagonists who "make it" in White society and return to their former community in order to help civilize the others also reinforce White supremacy.

Critical social justice considerations: Economic and social interests in the production of the text. There are social and economic interests in the telling of any story, be it in popular film or school textbooks. In addition to understanding the concept of perspective, it is also important to ask whose interests are best served by a particular story.

• Who wrote and produced the text?
• Who is the primary audience for this text?
• Why will this story appeal to its intended audience? (In the case of a movie, in order to appeal to the masses, it must draw on plots and characters that are familiar. In the case of a textbook, a governing body that represents specific interests must approve it.)
• Who will profit from this text?

Critical social justice considerations: Additional layers of complexity. Now let us add an additional layer of complexity to this vignette by considering the element of the audiences' reading and interpretation of the text. From a critical social justice perspective, it is always important to question narratives that are "inspirational" to a mass audience. Generally, racial narratives will be inspirational to a mass audience only when they reinforce familiar ideologies of White supremacy. For example, while the movie Crash was widely loved by mainstream audiences and received the Academy Award for Best Picture, its ultimate racial message was "Everybody is racist." This of course reinforces the dominant understanding of racism (which conflates prejudice and racism) and hides structural racial inequality and White power (Howard & Del, 2008).

While a text's ideologies and the economics of its production may be fixed, the way that text is interpreted and valued by audiences is not. Herein lies the audience's agency: the more layers of complexity we can see in the knowledge constructed by a text, the more critically we can read that text and resist the ideologies embedded in it.

Critical social justice perspectives
• There is no neutral text; all texts represent a particular perspective.
• All texts are embedded with ideology; the ideology embedded in most mainstream texts functions to reproduce historical relations of unequal power.
• Texts that appeal to a wide audience usually do so because they reinforce dominant narratives and serve dominant interests.
• Expect there to be social consequences for challenging dominant ideology.

Critical social justice skills
• Identify the ideology and what or whom it serves.
• Build your tolerance for the social resistance you will likely get when you challenge dominant ideologies.
• Develop the skills to lower defensiveness and diplomatically provide an alternative perspective. For example, regarding your friend in the opening vignette, you might say, "I was talking to a friend who is Puerto Rican about this film and he gave me a perspective on it I hadn't considered before. May I share it with you?"
Act in Service of a More Just Society

Although all of the previous principles are necessary for critical social justice literacy, they are meaningless without action. From a critical social justice framework, the term ally refers to a member of the dominant group who acts to end oppression in all aspects of social life by consistently seeking to advocate for the group who is oppressed in relation to them. The following are examples of allies: men who work to identify and challenge their internalized superiority, work with other men to do the same, and speak out on behalf of women; White people who work to identify and challenge their internalized superiority, work with other White people to do the same, and challenge racism and White supremacy; heterosexuals who don't assume everyone else is heterosexual and who break silence and lobby for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered people to have the same rights that heterosexuals enjoy.

In general, being an ally means:

• Validating and supporting people who are socially or institutionally minoritized in relation to you, regardless of whether you completely agree or understand where they are coming from
• Engaging in continual self-reflection to uncover your socialized blind spots, privilege, and internalized superiority
• Working with other members of the dominant group and not positioning yourself as better or more advanced than they are
• Advocating when the oppressed group is absent by challenging misconceptions
• Letting go of control and sharing power when possible
• Taking risks to build relationships with minoritized group members
• Taking responsibility for mistakes
• Having humility and willingness to admit to "not knowing"
• Earning trust through action

In institutional spaces, such as meetings, allies can take these actions:

• Support members of minoritized groups in whatever ways you can.
• Recognize minoritized people in relation to you, both in terms of rank (race, class, gender) and in terms of status (the job title they have and its relative power).
• Generate a working definition of critical social justice and a way to assess it. There are many tools available from various critical social justice organizations, as well as many excellent examples of organizations that have implemented definitions and assessments (such as the United Steelworkers Union of Canada, described below).

• Pay attention to the dynamics in meetings and facilitate to interrupt inequitable patterns.
• Recognize that it matters who is in our environment and the roles they play (such as in the workplace, schools, and neighborhoods); work not only to increase representation along multiple fronts—gender, race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, ability, first language—but also to create a supportive climate.
• Recognize and affirm the importance of discussing critical social justice issues.
• Be honest about your lack of experience while demonstrating your willingness to try.
• Change the process, for example, move away from depending solely on voluntary participation in large-group discussions (sometimes called "popcorn style"), try calling for a go-around, or working in small groups, or working in pairs.
• Facilitate by inviting other voices in; for example, ask, "Does anyone have a different perspective?" "Who hasn't spoken yet?" and "Whose perspective is missing?" and then wait.
• Facilitate dialogue rather than debate, using a "both/and" rather than "either/or" framework.
• Work in solidarity with others and not in isolation; don't distance yourself from others in your dominant group.
• Be humble about your skills; members of the dominant group are the least qualified to judge their ally effectiveness.
• Be accountable to minoritized group members—check in and build relationships.
• The "isms" are always operating and thus feedback about something problematic you've done is not an accusation. Appreciate the courage it takes to give feedback on critical social justice issues, learn from it, and keep trying.

While the above are examples of actions an individual can take, the following is an example of action that an organization can take: The United Steelworkers of Canada's diversity statement on gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered issues incorporates critical social justice into its mission. In the opening, they state (much like many organizations do) that they value diversity:

Steelworkers are helping to raise understanding and respect for the diversity and differences that make us strong, proud and, indeed, Everybody's Union. . . . The Steelworkers union must continue to take steps to help create "positive space" for gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgendered workers. (United Steelworkers of Canada, n.d.)
But what distinguishes this diversity statement from most (and makes it exceptional) is that the authors do not stop there. They operationalize (i.e., make concrete) the critical social justice work that is necessary in order to create a "positive space." For example, they identify concrete objectives, where and how they will act, and explicitly name their goals in their following statements:

At the bargaining table:

- Negotiate anti-harassment workplace training, policies, and procedures. The United Steelworkers' Anti-Harassment Workplace Training Program has reached over 40,000 front line workers, supervisors, and managers.
- Bargain for anti-discrimination language to be included into [the] collective agreement.
- Make sure your definition of spouse includes same-sex partners. In Canada, it is illegal to deny same-sex spousal benefits.

In the union:

- Start a Steelworker Pride Committee... Pride Committees are opportunities for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered workers and their supporters to talk about issues, and plan how to raise awareness in our workplaces and in the union of gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered rights. Steelworker Pride Committees join with other labor and community groups to hold events and parades to both celebrate and educate.

Take action:

- Help fight HIV/AIDS. HIV/AIDS is a union issue. We work with people who have HIV/AIDS and care for people who have HIV/AIDS. We must make sure our workplaces are safe, healthy, and harassment free for all workers. That means preventing harassment and discrimination of people with HIV/AIDS.
- The Steelworkers Humanity Fund is helping to support the work of Stephen Lewis and the United Nations to build a global fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Canadian workers can demonstrate leadership in raising the resources, and pressuring other countries to do the same, to stop this epidemic. (United Steelworkers of Canada, n.d.)

The Steelworkers offer a powerful example of collective action and accountability, and the critical social justice vision that guides them. While these will not be easy goals to achieve given the embedded nature of oppression, their articulation is a fundamental step. Without a framework to keep the organization accountable, it is unlikely that there would be much institutional change.

At the beginning of this chapter we asked the question, "What does it mean, then, to put critical social justice into action?" We offered vignettes to illustrate different elements of critical social justice literacy and discussed them in some depth. Now we ask our readers to use the example of racism (or any other form of oppression), to reflect upon the following and jot down some examples for each:

- Active racism
- Passive racism
- Active antiracism
- Passive antiracism

Perhaps your list looks something like the following:

For **active racism**, your examples might include telling or encouraging racist jokes, excluding or discriminating against people of Color in the workplace, racial profiling, and accusing people of Color of "playing the race card" when they try to bring up racism.

For **passive racism**, your examples might include silence, ignoring incidents and dynamics that you notice, the inequitable funding of schools, lack of interest in learning more about racism, having few if any cross-racial relationships, and not getting involved in any antiracist efforts or in continuing education.

For **active antiracism**, examples might include working to identify internalized racial dominance if you are White, working to identify internalized racial oppression if you are a person of Color, making sure there are multiple racial perspectives on an issue in the workplace, joining organizations working for racial justice, and seeking out continuing education.

But now we come to **passive antiracism**. If you were able to come up with any examples, reconsider them from the lens of action and you will likely find that they don't hold up; antiracism requires action—by definition it cannot be passive. There really are no examples of passive antiracism. Antiracism, or any other endeavor to challenge injustice, is by definition not passive.

To illustrate the complexity of action, consider this analogy. Most of us know the basic rules of basketball. There are two teams, and each team is trying to get...
the ball into the opposing team's basket while simultaneously preventing the other team from doing the same. Each player has a position on the team, and novice players focus on their assigned role. However, skilled players are able to see beyond their own position and synthesize all of the dynamics in play. This enables them to think strategically about every move, consider the positions of every other player in relation to their own, and base their next moves on multiple, shifting, and contextual factors. Although these players must know how the game is played and have a familiar style of playing, they do not follow a set plan and likely do not make the exact same decision twice. Instead, they are always taking into account the bigger picture based on their knowledge of the other players, the rules of the game, and which other players are nearby to support them, as well as their own developing skill level. All of these factors inform the decision they will make about their next move.

Developing critical social justice literacy requires a lifelong commitment to an ongoing process. This process challenges our worldview and our relationships to others. It asks us to connect ourselves to uncomfortable concepts such as prejudice, privilege, and oppression. It challenges simplistic dos-and-don'ts approaches such as “do treat everyone equally” and “don't see Color.” Of course it’s so much easier when we believe that attaining social justice is as simple as a list of dos and don'ts. We wouldn't have to take account of the history of oppression in our nation states or trace that history into our present lives. We wouldn’t have to think deeply, engage in uncomfortable self-reflection, admit to our prejudices and investments in inequality, strive for humility in the face of the unknown, and build relationships with people that we haven’t been taught are valuable. We would have to acknowledge that our achievements are not simply or solely the result of merit and hard work, for within a society that is socially stratified, most of us benefit in some aspects of our lives from the disadvantages of others. And finally, we would have to take risks, make mistakes, and act.

Discussion Questions

1. Now what? What are your next steps (tomorrow, next week, next year) to continue the work of developing critical social justice literacy? What might be the easiest of these steps to accomplish? What will take longer? Identify what might be your key challenges. How will you meet these challenges?

2. The authors state that it is always the responsibility of the dominant group to interrupt oppression. Why? Discuss the dynamics involved in this statement.

3. Revisit the scenario of the meeting, when the two men who have been dominating the discussion choose to get up or open their laptop when a woman of Color begins to speak. Imagine now that these men claim that their timing had nothing to do with the woman speaking. Using the concept of "intention versus impact," explain why their behavior was problematic, regardless of their intentions. Discuss all of the various dynamics at play in the meeting. Imagine you are at the meeting and develop a response from your position.

Extension Activities

1. Identify two people, one with whom you share a dominant group identity and one with whom you share a minoritized group identity. Make a plan to check in with one another in a month. Decide what you will commit to doing in that month's time in working toward the goals of critical social justice.

2. Produce an essay examining your life through a critical social justice lens. This activity is meant to integrate your personal experiences with the theoretical framework of the book (the activity is not meant to be an unanalyzed narrative of your life story or your opinions about the various groups you do or do not belong to). Please draw upon the chapter themes (socialization, oppression, racism, privilege) to provide an analysis of what shapes your perspectives, values, expectations, and beliefs as a member of the various social groups you belong to.

In your essay, explain how your group memberships shape and affect your life. Describe how key influences (such as family, friends, schools, communities, ideas, values, your culture(s), and/or the wider society) have been formative in your thinking about your memberships in the different groups. It may be helpful to focus your analysis on one or two key group memberships (for example, race and gender), or to select one identity in which you experience privilege and one in which you experience oppression (for example, as a White woman).

Some guidelines for working on your essay and questions to stimulate your thinking:

- You must be a member of the groups you are writing about.
- Consider specific events or critical incidents in your life that have contributed to your awareness of either the minoritized or dominant group (individual level).
- Consider the historical, institutional, ideological, and cultural dimensions of your group's position in U.S. or Canadian society that also influence your understanding of each group (societal level).
Name a minoritized group that you are a member of. What is the dominant group in relation to your group? What kind of feelings do you experience as a member of this group? In what ways is your group made visible or invisible? In what circumstances? How has oppression manifested in your life as a member of this group? In what ways does this group membership affect your daily lifestyle? How does membership in this group affect your understanding of and attitudes toward the dominant group?

Name a dominant group that you are a member of. What groups are minoritized in relation to yours? What feelings do you experience as a member of this dominant group? Do you notice a difference in your ability to identify feelings when thinking about dominant group membership compared with minoritized group membership? In other words, is this question harder to answer than the questions relating to your minoritized group identity? If so, what are the implications of that difficulty? How is your group powerful? What forms of power does your group hold? Who are some agents of this power? What institutions are used to exert this power? In what ways? What privileges do you have as a member of the dominant group? How does membership in this group affect your daily lifestyle? How does membership in this group affect your understanding of and attitudes toward the minoritized group? (This is a widely used activity called Multicultural Mapping. This version is adapted from Dr. Biren (Ratnesh) Nagda at the School of Social Work, University of Washington, http://depts.washington.edu/ssweb/idea/)

3. Research the work of Frank Chin (see Figure 10.1). Watch the film The Slanted Screen: Asian Men in Film and Television (J. Adachi & A. Yeung, Producers; J. Adachi, Director: San Francisco, CA: Asian American Media Mafia Productions, 2006. Available at http://www.slantedscreen.com/). Choose one of the films featured in The Slanted Screen and write an analysis of the film and Chin’s work. What does Chin show us about the social construction of knowledge in film?