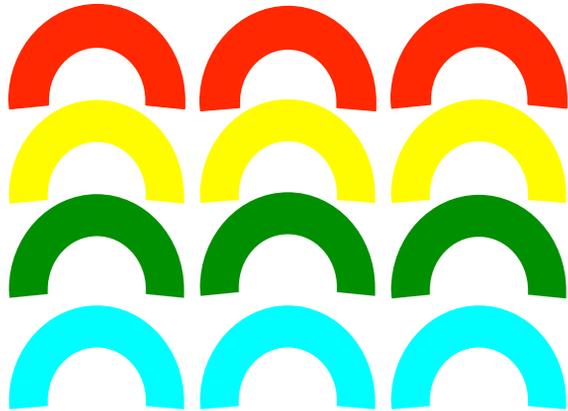


# **Training for Change: An Integrated Anti-Oppression Framework**

**A Tool for Trainers and Community  
Service Organizations**



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# Acknowledgments

The information contained in this document is a summation of various discussions taking place within the community of social justice trainers, activists and community educators. It highlights the barriers, challenges and questions we have of ourselves and of each other, as well as sharing our ideas and insights about the work we are doing. The information presented here is not meant to be the end of the discussion about integrated anti-oppression, but is offered as part of the continuing dialogue.

*“Change does not roll in on the wheels of inevitability, but comes through continuous struggle. And so we must straighten our backs and work for our freedom.”  
Martin Luther King Jr.*

The Rainbow Health Network (RHN) facilitated three community forums and four key informant interviews, administered an email questionnaire and co-hosted a workshop on the issues of a marginalized community. One community forum was hosted prior to the funding of the project; however, the information gleaned from it pertains directly to this project.

The RHN Education Committee and the authors would like to thank all the participants for sharing their wisdom with us. You are too numerous to name here, but you know who you are. The authors are Margaret Alexander and Fran Odette, of Springtide Resources.

April 10, 2008 - Trainer's Forum - by invitation  
September, 2008 - meeting with key informant  
October 15, 2008 - Among Friends Conference - Forum - open  
November 12, 2008 - Sherbourne Health Centre - Forum - by invitation  
November 2008 - collection of questionnaire responses - key informants  
November 2008 - George Brown College, Positive Space Team Members - meeting with key informants  
Feb. 12, 2009 - Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf - key informants interview  
April 8, 2009 - Ontario Rainbow Alliance of the Deaf - key informant interview  
April 16, 2009 - Ontario Rainbow Alliance for the Deaf –“Deaf Access to Healthcare: Exploring how Audism, Oralism, Ableism and Heterosexism intersect to create an environment of inaccessibility and inequity for Deaf LGBTTT1SQQI individuals in Health Care”



Funded by:



## **About the Rainbow Health Network**

Rainbow Health Network (RHN) was founded in 2001 by the Coalition for Lesbian and Gay Rights in Ontario (CLGRO), which works towards feminism and bisexual, lesbian, and gay liberation. RHN was created to pursue the recommendations of CLGRO's 1997 research report "Systems Failure: A Report on the Experiences of Sexual Minorities in Ontario's Health-Care and Social-Services Systems." You can get a copy of the report at: [www/clgro.org/](http://www/clgro.org/).

RHN is well situated to make a significant contribution to our community. As a volunteer run forum since 2001, RHN has managed to develop a vibrant listserv, a website and a number of educational and advocacy projects that leveraged the relationships and partnerships our members brought to RHN. In 2008 our work was recognized with a Pride Toronto Gala Award.

The objectives of RHN and the work undertaken through different initiatives are intended to ensure that these objectives remain central to how we do our work.

Networking - through the exchange of information, resources and opportunities for collaboration, RHN strives to create and sustain an accessible, inclusive network of volunteers committed to promoting health and wellness for people of diverse sexual orientations and gender identities.

Education - RHN acts as a resource to health and social service providers, community groups, researchers and academics. Through a variety of initiatives, public education resources are produced and made available, along with providing education and training to health professionals.

Advocacy - RHN advocates with government, agencies and the public on initiatives regarding health and wellness needs, strengths and priorities of LGBTQ2 communities.

Equity - RHN works collaboratively through partnerships to address health disparities experienced by LGBTQ2 communities which are further marginalized by oppression such as racism, sexism, ableism and classism. RHN works toward increasing access, equity and inclusion in healthcare, supports and social services.

## About the Project – Training for Change

### The Need

The findings from the “Systems Failure” report include:

- Almost 100% of participants (1,233 respondents) felt healthcare must be improved to meet LGBTQ2 needs.
- “...those reached by the survey tended to be ‘out’ (openly lesbian, gay or bisexual). It is by no means clear that those who were out were the majority of the lesbian, gay and bisexual population. Given what the out members had to say, the need to be silent felt by the rest should give us pause.”
- “The treatment of transgendered people by hospitals was characterized as ‘absolute contempt’...”
- Existing services and training resources often did not adequately reflect the diversity and multiple identities of “LGBTQ2 communities,” or address the complexities of discrimination and oppression, which intersect across sexual orientation and gender identity.

Within the current climate of shrinking resources, we are faced with a severe lack of research and public policy initiatives around all LGBTQ2 health issues. Therefore, an integrated anti-oppression framework is important in order to avoid further marginalization of diverse cultural communities, trans and queer communities, communities representing people with disabilities, communities representing people living on fixed incomes, Aboriginal communities, and others.

'Who benefits from acts of oppression and social exclusion' and 'who is at risk if we do not act to address these issues' are questions that are important to any social change work.

There is no question that there has been a great deal of extraordinary work done in the area of justice and inclusion for the LGBTTIQQ2MSMWSM<sup>1</sup> communities that has led to expanded rights for many people who resist social constructions of sexual and gender identities. However, as trainers and activists, it is imperative that we continue to build on our knowledge of the ways people self identify and live their lives and to deepen our understanding of the inequities and barriers we continue to face. Also, as trainers and activists, we must continually

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of convenience and space in this document the acronym LGBTTIQQ2MSMWSM was used to mean: lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, transgender, intersex, queer, questioning, 2-Spirit, men who have sex with men and women who have sex with women. This was one of the latest versions of the range of sexual identity classifications that the authors could find. This acronym was not used throughout the whole document as it is not familiar or confirmed by most of the trainers this document is targeting. The acronym LGBTQ2 is used throughout most of the document as this is the acronym that seems to be used most often in conversation and materials.

take opportunities for self-reflection as it pertains to the work we undertake and reflect upon the progress we strive to achieve.

In 2008 the RHN Education Committee developed a proposal for the City of Toronto's Access, Equity and Human Rights – Community Partnership and Investment Program. It had two main goals: to develop a facilitator's guide to an integrated anti-oppression framework for sexual and gender diversity training, and to build and develop ongoing relationships with LGBTQ2 organizations representing diverse communities.

In spite of the reduction in funding requested, the Education Committee decided to re-organize the initiative into two stages. Phase 1 took place from September 2008 through June 2009. Phase 2 is scheduled for July 2009 through June 2010. The goal of Phase 1 was to begin to build relationships with organizations representing the diversity of LGBTQ2 communities, to gather and analyze information about educational needs and existing resources, and to produce preliminary educational material based on this process.

## **About the authors of this document**

At this point it feels important to share some information about ourselves in order to provide the reader an understanding of the perspectives we bring and how we relate to this work. We acknowledge that our lived experiences (both personal and professional) are the entry point and lens from which we understand and relate to anti-oppression concepts. From that vantage point, we recognize that there will be gaps in our information and places where it will be obvious to some that we still need to expand and deepen our knowledge.

### **Margaret Alexander – My perspective on anti-oppression training**

When I do a basic anti-oppression training and ask people to locate themselves in the socially constructed group categories, I often start off locating myself as an example. I generally do this in order to encourage participation and perhaps lessen some discomfort from the participants, but mostly I do it to create entry points into the discussion of anti-oppression and the ideas of "group identity". After 15 years of anti-violence and anti-oppression training, I still believe it is a good place to start the dialogue because it leaves you with various directions you can take the conversation.

I say to participants: "I socially locate myself as a queer, racialized woman of mixed ancestry (European, African and First Nations). I do not live with a disability but I do live with some chronic pain issues. I am born and raised in Ontario and my first language is English. I come from a socio-economic background of poverty, but now in my 40's have achieved some access to middle class privilege. These labels (or classifications) come loaded with stereotypes and assumptions and don't really tell you much about me personally, but they will

give you some ideas about the ways I experience social and systemic discrimination and privilege and therefore expose how inequity is maintained.”

I approach social justice work with the idea that we are all part of the system of oppression and division, so we will all be part of the system of change. Therefore I tend to focus on how oppression is maintained and supported and on assisting people to understand social norms, dominant culture and other ways society constructs difference and hierarchies of difference. I guess I think that if people understand how they have been duped into believing one person is better than another solely because of classifications that are not permanently fixed and don't actually make sense, even in relation to themselves; that they will better understand how challenging oppression isn't just about “those other” people.

I approach the training with the objective that participants will leave knowing that there is a concrete system of oppression and that the system oppresses everyone. The details of how individuals will experience oppression will be different based on who they are and in what time and place, as will the impacts of their experience of oppression, but tools and tactics that maintain oppression are the same. I think teaching this frame of reference allows people to become allies across lines of privilege and marginalization. Once they understand that barriers are created to maintain oppression, they can begin to dismantle the barriers.

In this document I include myself in the community of trainers, activists and community educators.

### **Fran Odette – Perspectives on ensuring meaningful inclusion**

Much of the work that I have been doing is looking at framing the experience of disability and difference along a continuum of experience. There is a recognition that oftentimes disability and difference is not well integrated in the ‘typical’ kinds of work we do related to anti-oppression. As a queer disabled activist, I start from the assumption that working to ensure inclusion in its broadest of ways is an acknowledgment that all of us, those living with and without disability, are exposed to messages that speak to the marginalisation of disabled persons as common place. I have been doing work in the area of gender and disability for over 16 years.

One might look at me and be confronted by assumptions made about who I am by the way I look. In my conversations with people, I will share that there are entry points in my own lived experience where I hold power and live with privilege. In the same conversation, however, I recognize that there will be assumptions made that there are other entry points, depending upon where I find myself where I hold less power than others.

Challenging our understanding of systemic discrimination and how thinking within the dominant culture maintains the classifications and separation of people based on ‘difference’ leaves us with no room to see our lived experience other

## Training for Change: An Integrated Anti-Oppression Framework

than what we perceive as what is presented to us. It continues to perpetuate binaries that are socially constructed and are intended to keep people separate. Where might I as a queer woman find my place in the LGBTQ2 community, when I am unable to get in the door? Where might I find myself within a community that acknowledges disability and difference as a lived reality, while believing that my queer identity does not need to be seen?

I too include myself alongside the community of trainers, activists and community educators.

## **What is integrated anti-oppression?**

The term 'anti-oppression' reflects a number of different approaches to the work of addressing the social and institutional inequalities that are constructed in our society. In North America, the theories and concepts of anti-oppression grew out of the social justice movements of the 1960's. Disenfranchised groups who were opposing the status quo also began to challenge each other to recognize that different people within these groups experience different levels of oppression.

Integrated anti-oppression looks at all the ways people can experience oppression and marginalization, and how those social locations intersect. This approach recognizes that individual contexts are different, and that people's lived realities are complex. It is integrated because it asks us to combine information and values from a range of people and sources in order to get a fuller, more inclusive result.

Integrated anti-oppression requires that people examine their own experiences and actions, and critically analyze social structures of power and privilege. It insists that the dominant group recognize the power of its own social location(s) and how that power results in societal privilege and benefit to the exclusion of marginalized people.

This approach encourages us not to make assumptions about group identity. It emphasizes that people who share a group identity may or may not have similar characteristics and lived experiences. Integrated anti-oppression reminds us to unlearn what we thought we knew and to think of and work with people as individuals.

## **Principles of integrated anti-oppression**

The following are principles that guide the integrated anti-oppression model:

Society operates within a socially constructed hierarchy of difference where some people are valued and privileged and others are marginalized and exploited. For example people living with a disability are devalued by society and their contribution to society is not recognized, solely because of their disability.

- People do not belong to just one category or social location. Our identities are complex and multiple; fluid rather than fixed. As a result we can be both victims and perpetrators of oppression. We often re-create the relations of social power and control that also oppress us. For example, one may experience oppression because of female gender but at the same time experience white skin privilege.
- The ideas, thoughts and beliefs of people who "belong" to groups that are highest on the social hierarchy create "dominant culture". Dominant culture becomes the standard or norm by which everyone is compared. For example in

Canada the dominant cultural norm related to women's clothing does not include wearing the hijab; as a result wearing the hijab is considered unusual and abnormal.

- People who are members of privileged groups have the power to control access to resources and information. This perpetuates the cycle of power and oppression for people who are not members of these groups. People who are marginalized and exploited experience limited access to the power to shape their own past, present and future. For example, Canadian history has been written from the perspective of white skinned, European-descended colonialists. This historical perspective is perpetuated through dominant educational institutions as the only true view of history.
- Not everyone from the same social group has the same experiences because people have many different lived experiences, and often live with more than one identity of marginalization. People who live with multiply marginalized identities do not merely face extra barriers; their lived experience is entirely different. For example, consider the issue of abortion. It has been framed as "a woman's right to choose," as a way to empower women. But all women do not have the same choices. Abortion was a "right" already imposed on racialized women for the purposes of eugenics.
- Integrated anti-oppression work requires that individuals accept responsibility for their role in perpetrating oppression both interpersonally and systemically. To bring about change, individuals and systems must be changed.

## **How is it different from other approaches to equity?**

A formal 'equality' approach generally means that the rules are the same for everyone, and nobody gets special considerations or favours. This approach assumes that if the same rule is applied to everyone, it will produce equal results. This approach is flawed however, because it does not recognize differential impacts and circumstances. It renders people's experience of social discrimination and oppression invisible by insisting it either does not exist or does not matter.

Cultural competence is an anti-oppression practice that encourages people to work across cultural variations. It asks individuals and organizations to focus on understanding the characteristics and needs of "diverse groups". Cultural competence encourages people to include diverse groups in existing frameworks.

This approach is limited because the dominant group's culture is accepted as the norm and diversity is identified as anything outside of those norms. Often, with

cultural competence, the dominant group does not critically examine its power and privilege. This approach also reinforces identity politics and divisions between groups that are based on superficial characteristics and social markers.

Another approach is substantive equality or equity, which recognizes that the same rules applied to everyone will not produce equal results because of different circumstances and social discriminations, at present and in the past.

Sometimes, substantive equality tries to remedy the effects of past discrimination by providing additional supports to those who have historically been marginalized. Integrated anti-oppression is comparable to the substantive equality approach. There are the legal remedies through substantive equality or equity law but how do we see this as comparable through anti-oppression practices? How it begins to address issues around substantive equality or equity is multi-layered. There is an acknowledgement that there are marginalized communities that do not experience discrimination in the same ways; whether that be in the organizations that we work within, and/or the organizations that provide supports to those who want to do this work. The intersectional approach acknowledges that there is no “single” way of removing and addressing systemic barriers and how that will be experienced is different within the context of one's lived experience.

## Issues identified by participants

### **Anti-oppression work can lack an intersectional analysis.**

Our informants have noted that anti-oppression often gets fragmented into one singular issue. There can be a failure to recognize that oppression manifests differently and is experienced differently by individuals who occupy a group category. When we talk about intersection, that does not mean just recognizing the multiply marginalized in passing or by layering oppressions one on top of the other as if each way of being marginalized is separate and distinct.

*An example: Anti-homophobia workshops that are examining and challenging discrimination based on sexual identity.*

*These sessions will often identify (or encourage participants to think about), ways that LGBTQ2 people are oppressed. However, that list will rarely include things like: not installing ramps into the building or charging huge membership fees to social or recreational clubs, which conveys the message that access to money ensures access to services and a different kind of engagement with community.*

*Oppressive acts are fragmented into categories, as are people. When we don't talk about or think that ramps are an issue for LGBTQ2 people - we could be saying that there are no LGBTQ2 people currently living with disabilities or who*

*have mobility issues or who are older adults. Or when we say LGBTQ2 people we are actually referring to non-disabled LGBTQ2, fully mobile or young people. The consequence of operating from this premise makes people living with disabilities or older adults who identify as LGBTQ2 either invisible or separate from the rest. This view also perpetuates the idea that LGBTQ2 people only experience oppression from heterosexual people.*

Our "group identities" are not layered one on top of the other; rather they are intertwined within the individual. As individuals we take up space as both marginalized and privileged by dominant culture at the same time. It is in our places of privilege that we have the power to create and disseminate knowledge. As anti-oppression trainers we are obligated to challenge ourselves in those places of privilege so as to ensure that our entry point is not the only perspective that is heard and accepted as the truth of everyone. It is inaccurate to suggest that heterosexism and homophobia will manifest the same way for everyone, or that everyone will experience this oppression the same way.

**Language and concepts can be interpreted differently and create additional barriers.**

The classifications of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, transsexual, intersex, 2-Spirit, and queer were created with the intent of greater inclusivity. However, they have been felt to be limiting for some, and confusing for others. The origins (with the exception of the concept of 2-Spirit) are Eurocentric, North American concepts of sexual identity that for some people don't make sense either linguistically and conceptually. Some of the words that are used in a North American context do not translate literally into all languages.

Being Two-Spirited is also viewed by some as going beyond sexual orientation or activity because in most Aboriginal societies, sexual activity and orientation issues were not openly discussed. Some feel the term Two-Spirit is more of a societal role and/or spiritual identity that people who are now more commonly known as gay/lesbian/bisexual/Trans might have played within Traditional societies.<sup>2</sup>

The issues raised by the LGBTQ2 categories are complex and challenging. In addition to questions that were raised in the discussion groups, we offer some further thoughts. The definitions of the classifications are generalized because people interpret them based on their personal experience, which in turn, results in much time being spent on defining what they each mean, which varies and is different depending on who the person is both in explaining and in listening.

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<sup>2</sup> 2-Spirited People of the 1<sup>st</sup> Nations, Our Relatives Said: A Wise Practices Guide, Voices of Aboriginal Trans People. Toronto. 2008

As an example, think of how you would define the term lesbian. Who would you include in this classification? Do you think everyone you know would define the term lesbian the same way? Who has the authority to determine the definition of lesbian?

It is important to acknowledge that labelling sexual and gender identity has been and is important to the social and political fight for the rights of non-heterosexual people. Further that for many people the words lesbian, gay, bisexual, 2-Spirit and transgender represent understanding, inclusion, power and community. However, these classifications reinforce the norms and privilege of the dominant culture by creating binaries or fixed locations within the marginalized group.

The dominant culture within the marginalized group has defined the framework for the discussion of sexual identity. For example: to be gay you must conform to certain criteria. As a result more and more classifications of sexual identity are created as is demonstrated with the additions of: men who have sex with men (MSM) and women who have sex with women (WSW). This framework also recreates hierarchies of value for groupings of people, with some sexual identities being better than others. For example: the issue of bisexuality is marginalized within the LGBTQ2 community often because people believe among other things, that being bisexual is not a real sexual identity – just someone who can't make up their mind.

*The phrase "alphabet soup" has been used to describe the acronym that is used to refer to sexual identities because of the addition of letters. This phrase used by people from all sexual identities indicates a general fatigue and tension in the effort to be inclusive and also represents some resistance to give up hierarchical power within the marginalized group.*

*For some people the adoption of the word "queer" as identity is an attempt to use a term that represents the concept of being outside the dominant culture construction of norm without creating a fixed definition of what that represents.*

The additional concepts of gender identity add to the level of confusion and perpetuate the belief that transgender, transsexual and intersex identities are about sexual identity, rather than intertwined with issues of sexual identity. The grouping of all these identities together is problematic. It is assumed that all the people within this grouping have the same issues; that the experience of discrimination is based on whom they have intimate or sexual relationships with. This minimizes the complexities of the issues particularly for people who identify "trans" as part of their identity. Trainers have said that they make this distinction when delivering training, which is a start. However, it usually happens at the beginning of training during the "definitions of the terms" stage and often no where else.

The idea of languaging the various ways we live and who we are is very important to some people. When talking about and framing our lived experience,

we might feel the need to say, "I am a woman" or "I am a lesbian". In these ways we recognize each other, but in these ways we also don't see or know each other. The words are loaded with assumptions, stereotypes and misinformation, which in turn, can result in not seeing and knowing the person, but believing you do because of the vision the word or label represents in our minds.

As trainers and activists we must engage in much more discussion about the language of identity without defensiveness and challenge ourselves to suspend the idea that we will personally lose our identity and who we are if we talk about this issue. In this way we are much like the people who hold tightly to the heterosexual identity because in addition to power and privilege they believe heterosexual identity defines who they are in terms of their gender. For example many heterosexual women believe that what makes a woman a woman is her ability to birth children and therefore women are obliged to be in heterosexual relationships.

### **Lived experience of the trainer is a factor**

The majority of the participants in the forums and interviews spoke of the importance of the trainers' lived experience and that the trainer must identify as sharing the lived experience of the group which the training is focused on. There is a recognition that knowledge of marginalized groups has historically been and continues to be constructed through a dominant culture lens or what is sometimes known as the "colonizer's lens". Groups of people remain marginalized because their identity is constructed by the very people who have a vested interest in maintaining their power and privilege through the devaluing of others.

Anti-oppression activists and trainers are aware of the dominant culture privilege and ability to silence marginalized people in this way and many of the informants identified feeling uncomfortable about speaking to issues of groups that they did not identify as a part of. Many of the trainers said that they did not speak to certain issues except to mention that other issues exist as they felt they "should not" or "could not".

In many ways, opportunities are potentially lost by narrowly focusing on being able to only talk about those issues that we know of from our lived experience. This issue should be framed in ally work and looking at what the responsibility of an ally requires. It speaks to the issue of the anti-oppression work that we all must take on individually in challenging our own values, beliefs and actions. It isn't possible for anyone to be an expert on everyone. And it is oppressive thinking to believe that one person who identifies as part of a marginalized group can speak on behalf of the whole group. What is possible and necessary is to understand oppression as a system that impacts everyone.

Trainers hold a position of power, whatever their social location and that power should be shared amongst marginalized voices. As allies, trainers whose social location has incorporated a great deal of dominant culture privilege have a responsibility to cultivate relationships with marginalized people and support their ability to become trainers. They have a responsibility to address the issues of systemic and social oppression of other groups that they do not personally represent, which makes it extremely important to examine the materials used and the way in which different lived experiences are represented in the training.

It also makes it very important to examine the way in which the material is delivered and to dismantle the notion that the trainer is 'all knowing'. When training about barriers for queer groups, trainers cannot decide that they can't speak to issues of queers who are Deaf, for example because they themselves are not Deaf. To do so would perpetuate the oppressive belief that Deaf people are not part of the queer community or further, that Deaf people are not sexual beings. When we as trainers are not prepared to challenge the assumptions about who can and cannot speak to the issues affecting the community, we risk engaging in perpetuation in making members of the queer community invisible. As trainers we need to question the paradigm that says "it is only those of us who 'live' the experience of a particular identity, that can do the training". Rather there are opportunities fostered to build into the training places where individuals who are marginalized can develop leadership and training skills.

Training from an integrated anti-oppression framework with the focus on systems of oppression and the ways oppression occurs allows the trainers and the participants to understand that anyone marginalized by dominant culture will experience the same tactics and that discrimination will occur across difference.

### **Training Challenges**

Many of the informants for this project identified the ways in which we are asked or required to train as an additional barrier to our ability to affect real change. Trainers and activists struggle with issues of time constraints, finding willing and open participants, financial limitations and institutional resistance. They also face questions about their limitations as trainers in speaking accurately of the issues of identities that they do not feel they belong to, having content that reflects diversity, being up to date on new language and classifications, etc.

Overwhelmingly the informants identified that it was very important to have voices and narrative from marginalized communities participate in leadership roles in training and activism, but many people were unsure whether what they were doing to practice this was inclusive enough. It is very important that various and diverse perspectives are represented in this struggle for social and systemic change.

In working from an integrated anti-oppression approach, it is the learning of individual experiences that assist us in deepening our understanding of what is actually happening in the places where we are not located that helps us figure out what needs to change in the whole. However, it is impossible to represent knowledge from every perspective and location in one discussion or from one or two people; whether the discussion takes place in a 3-hour presentation, a 2-day workshop or a 14-week course. It is more important to identify how social and systemic oppression takes place and to identify the ways to create change; one of these ways being searching for new and diverse sources of knowledge and promoting leadership from within marginalized communities.

It was commonly identified that trainers are required or requested to provide training to staff, volunteers or community members in 2- or 3-hour workshops or presentations, and experience a great amount of pressure to cover 'everything about everybody' in that time period. A good portion of trainers identified their own internal tension in trying to figure out how meaningful the training would be if trainers could raise the issues and build awareness in general of sexual and gender diversity or whether these forums defeat the purpose because participants leave not really doing or changing anything, but at the end, they just feel better.

The question boils down to "what is the best way to do anti-oppression work" and the answer is all of these ways. There is no "one way" of doing training or activism. However, trainers must be clear about what is reasonable to accomplish within the time, budget and other constraints. Asking questions when the training is requested can help the trainer and those seeking the training gain greater clarity as to what exactly will be realistic given financial and resource constraints.

How useful is it for participants to receive a 3-hour workshop on defining sexual diversity classifications? What would the objective be of providing this kind of training? There are times when it is useful and times when it is not. Consider as trainers that we engage in dialogue with the people requesting the training to find out what it is they hope to accomplish and learn by having this workshop. You are the trainer/activist; you have a part in the determination of what the training looks like. A three-hour discussion about what they (participants) think about sexual and intimate relationships can be just as effective as three hours on general terminology.

Trainers and activists should think about saying "no" to some requests that seem unreasonable and resist feeling accountable to requests that seem impossible. The idea is to have effective learning and teaching opportunities. For example, if trainers are asked to provide a day long workshop for 50 people with the objective that the participants will leave knowing how to provide service to anyone who identifies as LGBTQ2 this would be unreasonable. What would be considered a reasonable objective for the day might be the provision of

information about systemic and social oppression of sexual identity and creating a starting point for people to talk about becoming allies.

### **Looking at training objectives**

A way to change how we enter into discussion about sexual and gender identity may be to focus training and presentations about gender and sexual identity not as binary categories but as fluid ways of being. This would allow trainers to encourage both trainers and participants to place themselves within a circle that represents a continuum of ways of being and encourage the discussion and learning to begin in a place where everyone is living within the same circle.

This conversation would not allow the discussion to result in a comparative between heterosexuality as "normative" and superior and everything else as "other" requiring people to identify themselves as belonging to one group or another. From there, the learning can be about where people are given social and systemic power in their ways of being. This may allow people to step into a discussion about hierarchies and privilege that helps them to see the places where disparity is perpetuated.

This represents a shift in the framework of sexual diversity training from a model focused on cultural competency. Within the cultural competency model, the objective is for those with social power and privilege to recognize marginalized identities and learn to understand "the issues of those people" and learn how to be more accepting and tolerant of "them" or to provide service to "them" from their place of dominance. Cultural competency does little to challenge the idea of privilege and dominance; instead it confirms the belief that all of "those people" have the same issues and therefore the same needs. It allows for the discussion to begin from "this is what those people are" and "this is how they need me to behave when they are around".

Training using an integrated anti-oppression framework requires that participants, trainers and activists engage in a discussion of systemic and social change. The service is important but providing better service actually requires systemic change, as well as personal or individual change. In addition to helping the individual understand the impacts of oppression and marginalization, there has to be a focus on the systemic and social behaviours that maintain oppression and exclusion and how individuals are responsible for changing the whole.

## **Applying an integrated anti-oppression framework to training**

### **Checklist**

In developing training curriculum or preparing to train on queer issues, there are a number of things to think about. Each of us may have developed our own list of things to consider when talking to agencies seeking training. We have offered some more to consider among this list. They include:

1. How will the activities in the training meet the different learning needs of the participants?
2. How will activities be modified and reflect inclusion of all participants attending the training?
3. How will the training requested explore and identify the differential impacts of systemic discrimination and marginalisation for different people?
4. How will the training address different people's lived experience?
5. How will the training address issues of who benefits from maintaining the dominant culture, power and privilege and multiple identities and marginalisation?
6. In what ways can I facilitate learning and skill development to potential trainers on queer issues through this training?

## Example of adapting existing material

Many trainers use variations of a tool called the "heterosexual privilege" questionnaire.<sup>3</sup>

Usually the questionnaire lists a variety of life experiences that someone who identifies from a privileged classification (or social location) can expect to enjoy or receive without reprisal or consequences.

Some of these include:

1. When I am told about our heritage and culture, I am shown that my people made it what it is.
2. I am never asked to speak for everyone who is heterosexual.
3. I can watch TV and see emotional relationships that I might have now, or will have one day.
4. I grew up thinking that my crushes and friendships were perfectly normal and healthy.
5. I do not have to fear revealing my sexual orientation to friends or family. It's assumed, and it has never been associated with a closet.
6. My partner and I can find appropriate anniversary cards for each other in any store.
7. The books that my children read in school contain stories and pictures of families much like ours.
8. My partner and I can parent our children without threat of intervention by child protection agencies based on our sexual orientation.
9. My partner and I can comfortably purchase a "couples membership" at a gym or fitness centre.
10. I can be pretty sure that the neighbours where I live will be friends, or at least neutral.
11. I do not have to fear that by revealing my sexual orientation, that my children's well being will be questioned.

This is an example of a classic tool about unearned and often unrecognized privilege that is used to:

- \* Define privilege in the context of social identities and oppression,
- \* Raise awareness and make plain how privilege manifests,
- \* Encourage those who experience privilege based on social location to recognize and resist inequity,
- \* Unpack "norms" and social expectations that exist "invisibly",
- \* Demonstrate the oppression that people from marginalized communities experience,

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<sup>3</sup> Heterosexual Privilege is based on "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack" by Peggy McIntosh, in 1989. The questions listed in this example are adapted from various adaptations. One of which is from the GBC Positive Space Training used at George Brown College in Toronto. 2008.

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- \* Compare and contrast different lived experiences,
- \* Identify areas where ally work can take place.

Examining this tool with an integrated anti-oppression framework highlights some areas for change.

This checklist is often used and adapted to fit a single-issue perspective. In this example it is used to highlight heterosexual privilege and in the original article by Peggy McIntosh it was used to highlight race privilege. This tool is easily adaptable because it is easy to show the oppression of any marginalized group, because the tactics or tools of oppression are the same – you just change the ‘reason’ for the oppression. In fact it became necessary to change and adapt this checklist because most people who filled it out realized that they experience the same oppressive tactic but for a different reason.

However, upon even closer examination of the statements in the checklist, many of us who fill it out will find that they may experience privilege in one way for one reason or in one context and experience the same incident as oppression for a different reason or in a different context. For example: one may be able to purchase a club membership as a couple without consequences because of a heterosexual relationship but may not even be able to purchase membership in that same club because of racial or class issues. Issues of oppression are multi-layered. The heterosexual racialized or poor couple will experience oppression in this case – not privilege.

This tool can be adapted to fit an integrated anti-oppression framework in much the same way it is adapted to fit singular issues.

Instead of a list of questions that ask people to answer yes or no, perhaps the questions can ask when or how. For example:

- How do you see your privilege reflected on television shows?
- Who do you see reflected on television shows and what message does that give you?
- Do you see yourself reflected on television shows?
- Who does that leave out and why?

The list then becomes a list of questions that start the discussion rather than a list that ends the discussion.

Or if the training is specific to queer issues you might frame the question as:

- How are queer people presented on television shows?
- How do you know you are seeing queer people on television shows?
- What is the underlying message to the public about queer people that television shows are sending?

Any of these questions will open discussions and get participants thinking about hierarchies of value in groups, and within society at large, intersections of

oppression and about how systems of oppression are perpetuated and maintained.

## **In Conclusion**

Working from an anti-oppression framework is not easy. Lack of time and lack of money for training create barriers to change, and issues of oppression are often relegated to the back burner in organizations. Looking at our own social locations and where we have power can be uncomfortable and cause resistance. Being in a social location of power can make it difficult to see the power that we have in relation to others. However, those who are affected most by being left out of the conversation are also those who usually have the least power to make change. (Springtide Resources, 2008). We have a collective responsibility to name the experience, and that responsibility does not end when the training is complete.

The discussions with social justice trainers, activists and community educators that have informed this educational tool have emphasized that finding ways to become allies is key to being agents of change. By understanding the ways in which each of us both has power and lacks power, we can learn how to work together. Everyone is at a different level of understanding. As we challenge ourselves to deepen our own understanding, we will be more effective as trainers and educators.

## **References**

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