Chapter 7: Classism

Quadrant 3

***Name of Activity:*** Follow Up, Option B:Identifying Opportunities for Coalition

***Instructional Purpose of Activity:*** To highlight overlaps and intersections between classism and other systems of oppression, and to begin to transition to thinking about steps for effective action

***Learning Outcomes:***

* Participants will further solidify their understanding of overlaps and intersections between classism and other manifestations of oppression
* Participants will delve deeply into one or a few examples of classism, with a focus on identifying key stakeholders and opportunities for coalition

***Time Needed:*** 30-60 minutes

***Materials Needed:*** Paper, writing utensils, and questions outlined below

***Degree of Risk:*** low

***Procedure:***

This activity focuses on preparing to step into action, and specifically on forming coalitions based on what the Five Faces demonstrates about intersections. Depending on the context and timeframe of the course/workshop, this activity could take the form of an action project spanning weeks or months, a thought experiment spanning an hour or so, or something in between. The description below is for the shortest version. In general, this activity is most effective for groups that already have some familiarity with strategies for advocacy and social change, whether through the current coursework or previously.

* Divide participants into small groups, and have each group choose a specific contemporary manifestation of classism that they would like to address through activism (hypothetical or actual). The manifestation should be specific and localized, e.g. not “classist microaggressions” but rather “students at our school ostracizing others for being poor and teachers not addressing it,” or not “lack of healthcare access,” but rather “lack of healthcare access for seasonal workers in the tourist economy in our town.”
* After choosing a manifestation, each group will discuss and generate responses to the following questions (in a longer timeframe, research could be conducted to flesh out answers):
  + Who are the stakeholders in this issue (those who are harmed directly and indirectly, those who benefit directly and indirectly, those whose actions support/perpetuate the manifestation, bystanders, etc.)?
  + Who else experiences a similar or parallel manifestation of oppression?
  + Based on the above, what organizations, individuals, and/or unorganized communities would seem to be “natural allies” in addressing these issues? (And further: Which members of those communities are more likely to be allies to this cause, and which less so? Why?)
  + Who is already working on this issue? Is there work already happening that we might join or support, rather than (or in addition to) starting a new action plan?
  + Who has worked on this issue in the past? Are there previous campaigns we can learn from?
  + What is OUR role (acknowledging the specific identities and roles of the individuals in the group) in this manifestation of oppression? (Are we harmed, or do we benefit? Directly or indirectly? Do we share relevant identities with those who are harmed and/or who benefit? What is our relationship to the individuals and communities who are most directly impacted and implicated?)
  + To whom are we accountable? How can we be in relationships of accountability to double check ourselves and to support the leadership of those most impacted? (Note that engaging in real relationships of accountability will sometimes lead a group “back to the drawing table” – rethinking whether the issue they choose to address is appropriately prioritized and framed.)
* Report out and discussion: Each small group reports on their discussion to the whole group, including what if anything they would have to research further before really starting an action project on the issue they have explored. Participants have a chance to ask follow-up questions of each small group about the product and process of their discussion. For example, participants (or facilitators) might ask questions like:
  + Was there any moment in your discussion when you had to rethink an initial assumption?
  + What don’t you know, yet, about this issue or the people or groups who may already be working on it?
  + What led you to choose this issue in the first place?
  + What aspects of your identities and experiences might have impacted your discussion so far? How so? What does that imply for your work moving forward (if you were to move forward with this as an action project)?
  + How is this similar to or different from other experiences you may have had of launching an advocacy project?

***Facilitation Notes:*** This activity leads participants through some beginning stages of choosing an issue they might address through advocacy, and identifying key stakeholders who might be appropriate coalition partners. If it is used to launch a more in-depth action project, further content will be needed including addressing skills for working in coalitions, principles of accountability, strategy and tactics for social change campaigns, etc. As a stand-alone thought experiment, it will not be in-depth enough to prepare participants to actually launch a campaign, but will help participants begin to understand the complexity and ethics of taking action around a social problem.

***Recommended Readings/materials for Students:***

Readings for Diversity and Social Justice 3rd Edition, Classism Chapter

Young, Iris Marion. “Five Faces of Oppression.” Selection 5 in RDSJ3.

***Recommended Supplementary Materials/Readings for the Instructor or Facilitator:***

Leondar-Wright, Betsy. (2005). *Class matters: Cross-class alliance building for middle class activists.* Gabriola Island, British Columbia, Canada: New Society Publishers.

Rose, Fred. (2000). *Coalitions across the class divide: Lessons from the labor, peace and environmental movements*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

***Name(s) to credit for this activity*:** Davey Shlasko