

*Oppression and Trauma
on Personal Identity*

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Psychological Oppression

- ☞ “to be weighed down in your mind; it is to have a harsh dominion exercised over your self-esteem” (Bartky 22)
- ☞ Modes of psychic alienation
 - ☞ stereotyping
 - ☞ cultural domination
 - ☞ sexual objectification

Psychological Oppression

- ∞ Fragmentation: splitting whole person into parts (true vs. false selves), coerced into identifying with some aspects over others (e.g., the body)
 - ∞ Not necessarily *metaphysical* splitting; can be in degrees
- ∞ Mystification: “systematic obscuring” of reality and active factors of oppression, so the oppressed state appears natural, given, pathological (Bartky 23)
 - ∞ Can be in degrees

Stereotypes

- ❧ Pervasive moral harms
 - ❧ Disrespecting interests, rights
 - ❧ Obstacles to finding and actualizing one's "true self" and acting free of coercive constraints
- ❧ "The truncated self I am to be is not something manufactured out there by an anonymous Other which I encounter only in the pages of *Playboy* or the *Ladies' Home Journal*; it is inside of me, a part of myself" (Bartky 25)

Cultural Domination

- ❧ Long-standing and entrenched practices and institutions that perpetuate denigrating myths about a particular group's identity
- ❧ Exclusion, marginalization as deep, difficult to overthrow
 - ❧ Attempts to overthrow will still need to operate within oppressors' norms, systems

Sexual Objectification

- ❧ “when her sexual parts or sexual functions are separated out from the rest of her personality and reduced to the status of mere instruments or else regarded as if they were capable of representing her” (Bartky 26)
- ❧ Oppressive when this identification “becomes habitually extended into every area of her experience” (ibid.)
 - ❧ Outside control, no escape

Responses to Oppression

- ❧ Contradictory beliefs: detect oppressive forces, but try to believe that those forces are imagined (since this is what oppressors want the oppressed to believe)
- ❧ False consciousness: systematically deceived by others and by self → alienation → double-bind
 - ❧ “our struggles are directed inward toward the self, or toward other similar selves in whom we may see our deficiencies mirrored, not outward upon those social forces responsible” (Bartky 31)

Trauma

- ❧ Ruptures ability to be oneself with others
 - ❧ “Without this belief, [...] one can no longer *be oneself* even to oneself, since the self exists fundamentally in relation to others” (Brison 40)
- ❧ Sexual trauma changes the victim’s relationship to others, herself, her body → social death
 - ❧ “during a rape, the victim is defined out of existence by the attitudes and actions of the rapist, which incapacitate the victim’s self” (45)

Embodied Memories

- ☞ Traumatic memories “stay in the skin” – cause intense, regular, and unexpected rage, guilt, crying, other behavior
- ☞ “If memories are lodged in the body, the Lockean distinction between the memory criterion and that of bodily identity no longer applies” (Brison 45)
- ☞ Memory criterion and bodily continuity views of PID will not capture the traumatized self

Fracturing of the Self

- ☞ During the trauma, consciousness splits from the body
- ☞ After the trauma, current self splits from past self
- ☞ Breaks in narrative identity
 - ☞ No longer feels “at home” in the world, diminished emotional/cognitive capacities, intrusive and uncontrollable memories, hampered ability to envision the future

Fracturing of the Self

- ☞ Emotional numbness causes loss of motivation
re: narrative construction
 - ☞ Separates the person from the trauma, past self, future self – “living in an endless present” (Brison 53)
 - ☞ “the ability to form a plan of life is lost when one loses a sense of one’s temporal being” (52)
- ☞ One aim of recovery: Regain control over aspects of narrative
 - ☞ Integrate trauma memories, unify disparate parts

Importance of Community

☞ Need trustworthy community to give uptake to healing narrative, bear witness, provide safe venue for narrative construction

☞ Obstacles

☞ Fear of empathizing with trauma

☞ Difficulty of making meaning out of violent trauma

☞ Worries about being further silenced, oppressed, excluded, disbelieved, identified with the traumatized memories or body

Narrative Reconstruction

- ❧ “By finding (some aspects of) one’s lost self in another person, one can manage (to a greater or lesser degree) to reconnect with it and to reintegrate one’s various selves into a coherent personality” (Brison 63)
- ❧ Become sufficiently autonomous, in control, and empowered to overcome trauma
 - ❧ Will remain risky as long as oppressive factors remain

Questions? Comments?