



Complex Identities and Compassion in Equity Training

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Equity Training

Teaching about awareness of:

- The different sources of privilege and disadvantage that mainstream culture perpetuates
- People's own complex social locations
- How to engage in a constant self-reflective effort to work towards equity in our everyday interactions amid diversity

Sociological Perspective

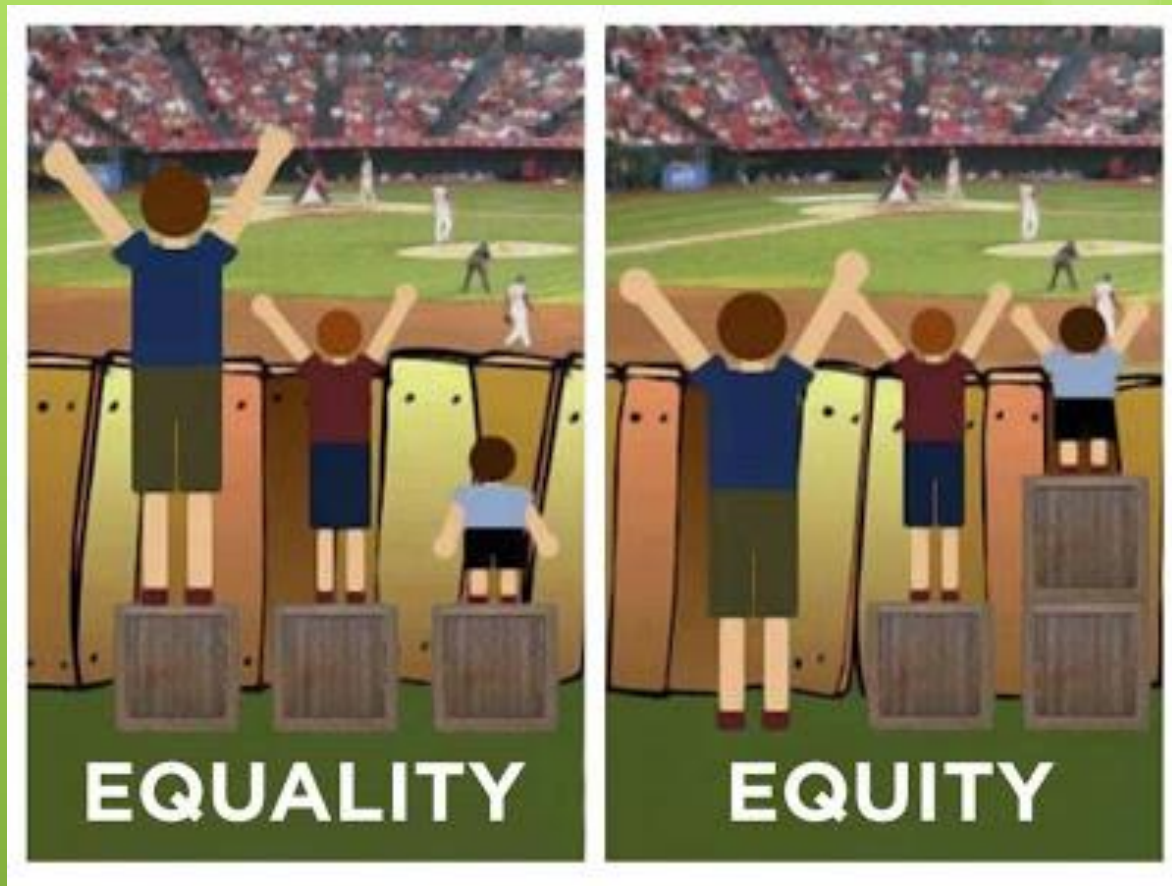
- Public issues vs. personal troubles
- Social structure vs. Individual agency

Complex Identities

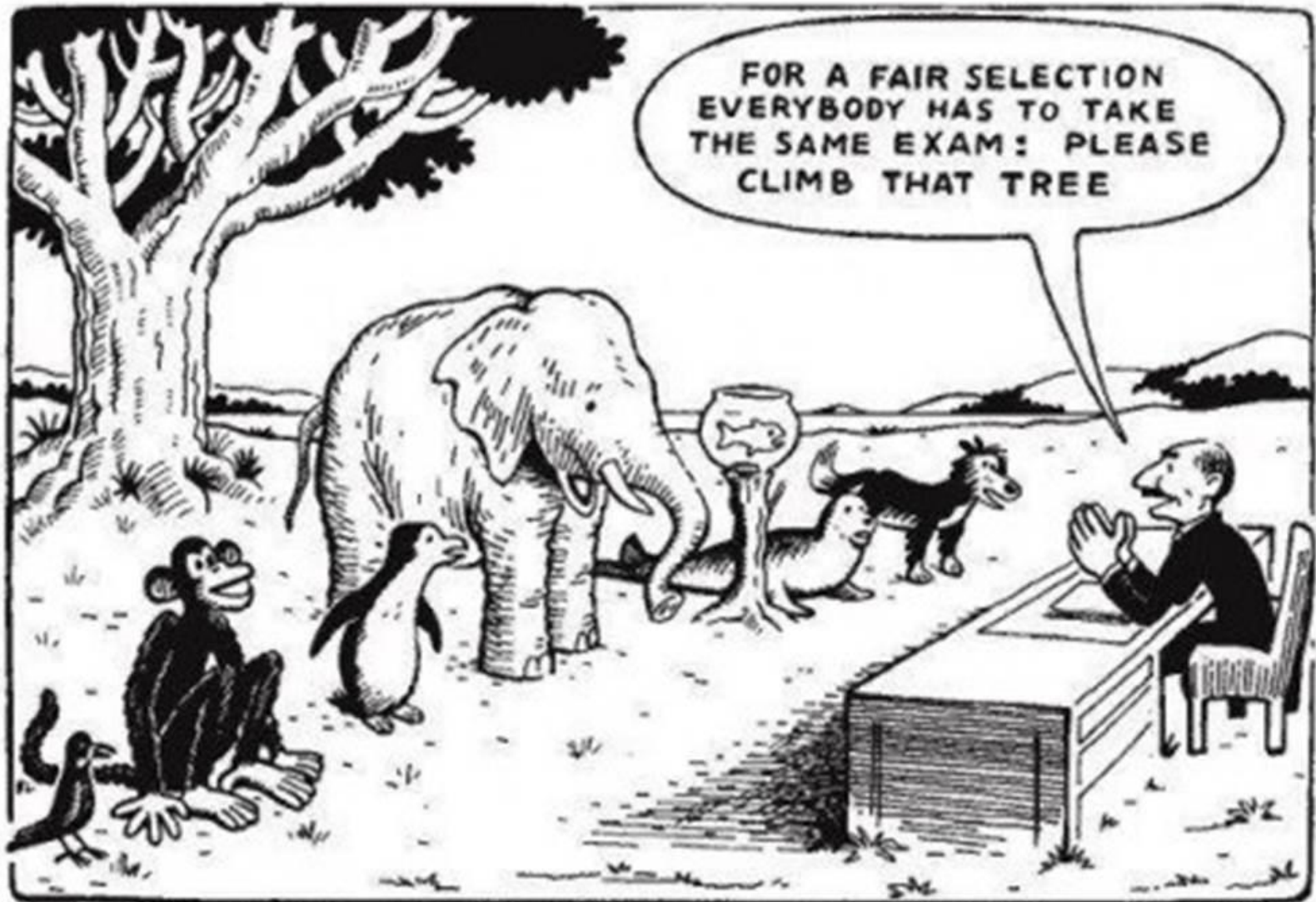
Various dimensions:

- Objective & Subjective
- **Privilege** & Disadvantage
- Intersectionality: Experience of various dimensions of disadvantage add up
 - Also, individuals may experience privilege and disadvantage at the same time

Equality vs. Equity



Equality vs. Equity



“Uneven playing field”

- The literature confirms that equity work must recognize that the field is not even:
 - Realizing that we can be part of the system that creates suffering.
 - Reflecting on our own privilege in an unequitable world is essential.

Guilt

- Awareness of privilege brings up feelings of guilt.
- For example: Hernández-Wolffe & McDowell found that **family therapists** who worked with people in marginalized positions had to deal with feelings of guilt:
 - “Increased awareness [of their privilege] involved personal struggles with guilt” (2012, p. 175).

Awareness of Privilege

- Requires challenging our own prejudice
 - Constantly confirmed by the dominant culture.
 - Wide-spread belief in individuality and meritocracy.
- **Guilt** may be a signal that may trigger awareness of privilege.
- But it is not sufficient on its own to elicit commitment to equity.

Guilt vs. Compassion

Principled morality

- What is morally right or wrong?
- Judgemental
 - Guilt due to undeserved privilege

Privilege

Compassionate morality

- Based on the ideal of Universal **love**
- Compassion both for oppressed and oppressor
 - Especially for the oppressor within oneself

SELF

Disadvantage

Compassion

- Controversial when theorizing about morality
 - Central focus of many spiritual traditions
 - Central moral philosophers have treated it critically; e.g. Kant: “this good natured passion is nevertheless weak and always blind” (cit. by Goetz et al., 2010)
- Has been described as a “moral barometer”: closely tracks suffering, responsibility, vulnerability harm-related concerns; an intuition that guides us in seeking to remedy undeserved suffering

Compassion

- Has been associated to: sympathy, pity, empathy, kindness, tenderness, warmth, caring.
- In psychology, it has been generally seen as a feeling directed to others (see Goetz et al., 2010).
- I have found it is useful to also pose it as a feeling directed to one-self in this context.



Compassion

- Based on the ideal of universal love.
- A “hermeneutics of the heart,” an understanding of our shared humanity:
 - Modern individual self is posed as rational, powerful, free.
 - Actual human beings are vulnerable, fragile, moody and needy—especially as infants (feminist literature).
- Empowering as a source of courage:

“...managing internalized voices of prejudice that are constantly reinforced in society... committing to this process takes both **courage** and compassion” (Hernandez-Wolfe & McDowell, 2012, p. 175)

Compassion for one-self involves:

- Being kind and understanding to oneself:
 - To our own suffering or perceived inadequacy.
- A sense of common humanity:
 - Suffering, failure and inadequacy as part of the human condition.
- A balanced awareness of one's emotions:
 - The ability to “face (rather than avoid) painful thoughts and feelings, but without exaggeration, drama or self-pity” (Neff, Rude, & Kirkpatrick, 2007, 908-909).

*And all the little monsters said in a chorus:
You must kiss us.*

What! You who are evil,
Ugly and uncivil.
You who are cruel,
Afraid and needy,
Uncouth and seedy.

*Yes, moody and greedy.
Yes, you must bless us.*

But the evil you do,
The endless ado.
Why bless you?

You are composed of such shameful stuff.
*Because, said the monsters beginning to laugh,
Because, they said cheering up.
You might as well. You are part of us.*

Suniti Namjoshi
(cited by Warner, 1994, xvii)

Why Self-Compassion in Equity Work?

- Perceived inadequacy in having internalized:
 - Prejudices in the dominant culture and assumptions that we deserve our privilege.
- Common humanity:
 - Equality in common human condition, forgiveness and less judgmental attitude towards one-self (Neff, 2003).
- Objective approach to our own emotions (mindfulness):
 - Without this approach there is a non-acceptance of our negative emotions (to ourselves, but also to others).

Also Compassion Directed at Others

- Judgment allows hierarchies and orders of desert.
- Compassion overcomes our meritocratic impulses.
 - An expansive individual self.
 - Compassion for the oppressor.
 - Freedom from hate and fear.

COSMOPOLITAN LIBERALISM

Expanding the Boundaries of the
Individual

Mónica Judith Sánchez-Flores



Equity Training—The Project

- An equity workshop designed under the principle of compassionate morality and complex identities (20 workshop participants and 20 non-workshop participants)
- This project will follow a qualitative research methodology (open-ended questionnaire responses and semi-structured interviews)
- Analysis of research data will include a mixture of *apriori* categories and grounded theory methods
- Can the principle of compassionate morality in an intersectional framework in equity training make participants more responsive to the ideas of equity and fairness than a guilt-based judgemental orientation?

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