

Dominant vs. Oppressed Group Dynamics Primer

DOMINANT GROUP	OPPRESSED GROUP
Defines parameters, judges what is appropriate, patronizes.	Feels inappropriate, awkward, doesn't trust own perception, looks to expert for definition.
Assumes responsibility for keeping system on course. Acts unilaterally.	Blames self for not having capacity to change situation.
Self-image of superiority, competence, in control, entitled, correct.	Self-image of inferiority, incompetent, being controlled, not entitled, low self esteem.
Views self as logical, rational. Sees others as too emotional, out of control.	Often thinks of own feelings as inappropriate and a sign of inadequacy.
Presumptuous, does not listen, interrupts, raises voice, bullies, threatens violence, becomes violent.	Finds it difficult to speak up, timid, tries to please. Holds back anger, resentment, rage.
Initiates, manages, plans, projects.	Lacks initiative, responds, deals, copes, survives.
Sees problems and situations in personal terms.	Sees problems in social context, results of system, "them."
Often needs to verbalize feelings.	Sees no point in talking about feelings.
Sees solutions to problems as promoting better feelings.	Sees solutions to problems in actions that change conditions.
Thinks own view of reality is the only one. Disagreements are result of lack of information, misunderstandings, personalities.	Always aware of at least two views of reality, their own and that of the dominant group.
Believes certain kinds of work below their dignity.	Believes certain kinds of work beyond their ability.
Does not acknowledge constraints in current situations.	Sees current situations in terms of past constraints.
Regards own culture as civilized, regards other's as underdeveloped, disadvantaged.	Feels own culture devalued, under assault.
Turns to others' culture to enrich humanity while invalidating it by calling it exotic.	Uses cultural forms to influence situation; uses humor, music, poetry, etc. to celebrate collective experience. Sees these forms as being stolen.

- Excerpted from *Erikson, Brad (Ed.) Call to Action: Handbook for Ecology, Peace and Justice, Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, 1990.*