

# Addressing Power and Privilege

To enact an ethical stance for Justice-Doing & moving towards Decolonizing work we need to first reflect, as Sontag (2003) says, on how the suffering of others is systemically mapped onto the privileges we hold as helping professionals. These privileges are often made invisible by the obscurification of power. Kvale (1996) warns that an investigation into our practice, and our ability to enact the ethics we espouse, might reveal transgressions we neither intended nor accepted responsibility for.

Addressing our privilege foments discomfort which is both predictable and necessary (Kumashiro, 2004) in terms of unsettling our relationships to power and opening us up to accountability. These reflexive questions, that can never be fully answered, provide a frame for beginning to address our access to power and responding accountably in relationships of power:

- What are the intersections (Crenshaw, 1995; Truth, 1851) of my own power and privilege with disadvantage? How am I accountable for unearned privileges?
- How do I resist positioning myself in my locations of disadvantage when serving suffering others? Meaning when we are in the power position of therapist how do we resist positioning ourselves as the oppressed person in the relationship? How do we get our own sites of disadvantage out of the way if they are not useful?
- How am I responding to power both moment to moment and contextually in this interaction?
- How am I resisting righteousness, posturing, and the double-comfort (Heron, 2005) of naming privilege righteously, but doing nothing to mitigate it? Such as naming white privilege, and then dominating the space.
- How can I invite, embrace, and hold the discomfort required to accountably address positions and access of power?
- Who is in solidarity to shoulder me/us/our organizations up in making space for discomfort, accountability and repair of power relations? What ideas, practices, and lived experience helps me/us?
- How are we holding ourselves as professionals, our teams, organizations and our professions to account for transgressions of power? How are clients invited in safe-enough and trustworthy-enough ways to name transgressions? What structures and practices are in place to make this naming possible and useful consistently and predictably across time?

(This exercise is taken from :

Reynolds, V. & Hammoud-Beckett, S. (2018). **Social Justice Activism and Therapy: Tensions, Points of Connection, and Hopeful Scepticism**. In Audet, C. & Pare, D. (Eds.) *Social Justice and Counselling*. NY: Routledge.)