

## 7 **Creating the Being of Inclusion in Organizations**

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Earlier this week we met with the board of trustees and I was the only African American woman in the room. There was an Ethiopian African man in the room who was of color, but I was the only African American female. In the room was a White male here and another White male there. Basically, there were three little brown specks in a room of like 30. It is one of those things that I don't let bother me as much. Sometimes you feel like [audible sigh], but you just shake it off.

—Michelle, Black university administrator  
(Razzante & Tracy, 2019)

I feel like everything I say is thrown back at me! ... White people are being attacked and blamed, and we have to defend ourselves or just be used as punching bags. I give up! I am not saying anything else.

—A White woman's comment in a cross-racial dialogue (DiAngelo, 2018, p. 99)

I always like our annual board of trustees meeting. There's a real mix of people there—queer, straight, Brown, Black, White. You get the picture. At our last meeting, people greeted each other with smiles, handshakes, and questions about their summer breaks. There was a newbie I didn't recognize. He seemed to be of Middle Eastern descent and uncertain of where to sit. I caught his eye, waved him over to my table, and introduced myself. Sure enough, he was the visiting scholar from Iran. Although he seemed not so interested in my research, I shrugged that off and invited him to join a book club I'm leading later this month.

—Anonymous, hypothetical faculty member,  
hypothetical university

The snippets above show a slice of the being of exclusion and inclusion. Exclusion, as an experience, includes feelings of uncertainty, loneliness, dread, anger, and resentment. At an interactional level, exclusion might include being ignored, interrupted, bullied, blamed, attacked, or rebuffed. Inclusion, on the other hand, feels like connection, joy, and anticipation; it includes invitations, curious questions, and warm nonverbal communication in the form of eye contact, hand waves, and sharing physical space. Phenomenologically,

inclusion feels good. And, materially, it goes beyond mere diversity. So, how might our research and scholarship best inspire, motivate, and create inclusion?

As we will review in this chapter, engaged communication scholars typically address issues of inclusion in terms of activities such as (1) focusing on a problem or dilemma related to exclusion that needs to be solved, (2) conducting research on this problem, (3) creating analyses that then may be applied to help shed light on the issue, and (4) developing diversity programs (Dempsey & Barge, 2014; Mease, 2012; Tracy, 2016). Such approaches are certainly useful for helping explain how and why *exclusion* takes place. However, we would argue that these approaches are limited in their ability to create the being of *inclusion*.

In this chapter, we discuss how scholarship and teaching could be practiced so as to create what we call the “being of inclusion.” As will be fleshed out throughout this chapter, we put this phrase in quotation marks to indicate the specialized way we refer to “being” as the lived behavior and communication that results in people judging and feeling that a situation, person, or context is inclusive. This chapter outlines the limitations of merely “knowing about” inclusion at an epistemological level, as well as the restrictions of typical practical application activities for creating inclusion. As an alternative, we point to the promise of an ontological, phenomenological, phronetic, transformative (OPPT-in) “being” approach (Tracy & Donovan, 2018; Tracy, Franks, Brooks, & Hoffman, 2015). Such an approach highlights the value of several practices, including (1) the study of positive deviance (e.g., places where we see extraordinary connection, inclusion, or comradeship in action), (2) scholarly research that, through its thick description, inspires perspective taking and transformed behavior, and (3) pedagogy that asks students to practice and critically reflect on as-lived improvisation of talking and being that spark inclusion (e.g., practicing acknowledgement, micro affirmations, and authentic listening as well as communicating requests and demands in the face of injustice). We close this chapter by describing three programs that hold promise for creating the being of inclusion: *Free Listening*, *Civil Dialogue*® and *Storyscope*. Programs such as these and other activities associated with an OPPT-in approach may provide access for the doing and being of inclusion, social justice, and activism (Donovan & Tracy, 2017). First, we review some key issues regarding the being of exclusion and inclusion.

### **How Inclusion and Exclusion Manifest at Micro, Meso, and Macro Levels**

A glimpse at the current research shows that practices of inclusion and exclusion are manifest at macro, meso, and micro levels (Ferdman, 2017). That is, inclusion and exclusion unfold within the interplay of varying ideologies, organizational practices, and interactional behavior. In what follows, we use the macro-, meso-, and micro-level framework to review just a slice of existing literature related to exclusion and inclusion.

## **Exclusion at Macro, Meso, and Micro Levels**

Macro-level exclusion occurs through discursive formations that perpetuate larger ideologies of exclusion. Much research has recorded the macro-level discourses of whiteness (Nakayama & Martin, 2000) and color-blind ideology (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Within the field of communication studies, organizational researchers have also focused on how discursive formations of sexism manifest through male executives' language use (Tracy & Rivera, 2010). Research focusing on macro-level discourses shows how larger structures and sedimented scripts perpetuate exclusionary practices.

Meso-level exclusion occurs through various organizational practices such as trainings, committees, and job requirements. A primary way that organizations have attempted to address issues of exclusion has been through instituting diversity programs. However, diversity training is often undertaken for business reasons, rather than for reasons of human dignity and social justice (Mease, 2012), and racism is often obscured precisely through the institutionalization of diversity. With such programs in place, executives can turn a blind eye to exclusionary practices and point to their diversity programs as proof that they are "doing something." Indeed, many commitments to diversity are "non-performative," meaning that they do not bring into being what they claim to create (Ahmed, 2012).

Even when diversity programs are successful at including typically marginalized peoples, they may still result in "peripheral inclusion" (Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018), a term used to describe the experience of being neither included nor excluded, but rather somewhere in the middle or are relegated to provide the "marginalized perspective." When marginalized peoples are tokenized, they often face challenges in succeeding in typical workplace tasks—which is the case, for example, with faculty members of color who are asked to be on so many committees that there is less time to devote to research and academic publication (Fryberg & Martínez, 2014; Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018). What's more, seeking inclusion oftentimes requires that marginalized people must fit into and therefore perpetuate a biased organizational structure—which is the case, for instance, with blue-collar unemployed job seekers of color who learn White middle-class communication norms in order to get hired (Gist-Mackey, 2018).

Finally, micro-level exclusion occurs through small group and interpersonal communicative behavior. In the context of workplace bullying, exclusion manifests when an employee feels left out, whispered or gossiped about, or not invited to important meetings (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). Past research with transgender employees provide a vivid portrayal of what exclusion feels like. Among other things, transgender employees feel worried that revealing one's identity at work would be dangerous (Jones, under submission) and having "to pretend to be someone I'm not, or I'm not going to be able to find a job" (Eger, 2018, p. 278). In the context of whiteness studies, White fragility unfolds when White people feel unfairly attacked, and in response,

become unstable, defensive, and aggressive in their communicative behavior (DiAngelo, 2018). As such, micro-level responses are informed by macro-level ways of thinking (i.e., whiteness ideology, color-blind ideology, meritocracy, etc.). In the context of whiteness studies, Ahmed (2007) notes that the experience of exclusion manifests in the body when a person of color is one of the few, if any, people of color in the organization—a “little brown speck” (Razante & Tracy, 2019).

### **Inclusion at Macro, Meso, and Micro Levels**

Macro discursive formations such as meritocracy, supposed color-blindness, and the Protestant work ethic seep into organizational policy and practice (see Fryberg & Martínez, 2014). As a response, institutions of higher education have incorporated macro-level messages of inclusive excellence (Bauman, Bustillos, Bensimon, Brown, & Bartee, 2005) which serve as “institutional speech acts” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 54) to encourage change. Indeed, for inclusion to become a hallmark of organizational culture, “diversity needs to be embedded in the symbolic and cultural fabric of the institution” (Williams, 2007, p. 12). Increasing numbers of organizations are instituting macro-level inclusionary messages, in the forms of commitments to civility, policies against workplace bullying, and training guides for inclusive leadership (Bourke & Dillon, 2016). However, rules-based approaches do not necessarily show *how* organizational leaders should create inclusive workplaces and, therefore, can end up being non-performative in action.

At the meso level, organizational leaders have made efforts to create inclusive environments where employees can voice their opinion in relation to organizational change (Barge, 2014). Researchers have documented case studies of organizational inclusion as related to positive organizational ethics (Sekerka et al., 2014), compassion organizing (Dutton et al., 2006; Frost, 1999), and organizational virtuousness (Lutgen-Sandvik, Hood, & Jacobson, 2016). Such research is focused on creating flourishing in organizations. However, it’s often unclear how positive organizational ethics, compassion organizing, and organizational virtuousness might motivate material and embodied forms of difference in terms of social and cultural identity (Cooren, 2018).

Finally, we might consider micro-level interactions that promote inclusion. In the context of Black Lives Matter, Opie and Roberts (2017) suggest that members of organizations, especially Whites, adopt perspective taking when considering how racism influences people’s different ways of engaging the world. The workplace bullying research suggests that bystanders (especially those of privileged status) can engage in conversational pivoting and enhanced positive communication when they encounter bullying at work (Razante, Tracy, & Orbe, 2018). Co-cultural communication suggests that dominant group members can engage in conversational work that fosters inclusion by educating others, micro affirmations, and authentically articulating one’s

assumptions (see Orbe, 1998; Razzante & Orbe, 2018). And, research with girls of color and technology shows that, when organizational leaders open up discussions regarding the ways that people may be marginalized in some ways but privileged in others, that doing so helps form community (Ashcraft, Eger, & Scott, 2017). Collectively, these research findings illustrate a range of actionable paths toward inclusion, and as we explain next, we believe an OPPT-in approach can enhance and extend such work related to the being of inclusion.

### **OPPT-in into the Being of Inclusion**

An OPPT-in approach provides a promising framework (Tracy & Donovan, 2018) for the being of inclusion. First, an **ontological** approach is concerned with the existential being of human being (Heidegger, 1927/1962). Human beings are not just objects in the world, or a collection of bones, organs, and flesh. Rather, their humanness comes through interaction, experience, and consciousness. Indeed, “the basic practical-moral problem in life is not what *to do*, but what *to be*” (Shotter, 1993, p. 118, italics in original). Ontological scholarship and pedagogy inform and inspire ways of being; “if we know *who to be*, then *what to do* falls into place” (Cunliffe, 2009, p. 94, italics in original).

An ontological-phenomenological model contrasts with banking (Freire, 2000) and epistemological (Souba, 2014) models of education. Epistemological models focus on conceptual knowledge, and banking models suggest that students (or readers of research) are passive containers ready to be filled with information. Such approaches tend to focus on analysis of hypothetical, historical, or external situations rather than examining one’s own contextual experience. Third-person analyses of case studies, however, are not sufficient for creating virtuous action and being in the world (such as the being of inclusion). This becomes abundantly, if painfully clear when considering the question, “Do you *know* that exercise is good for you?” and realizing that all the knowledge in the world is not enough to motivate the being of exercise. This also becomes clear when considering the additional aspects of OPPT-in, including phenomenology, phronesis, and transformation.

In terms of the first P in OPPT-in, access to being is made possible through a **phenomenological** method in which first person, “on the court” learning is fostered rather than on third person, “from the stands” approaches (Erhard, Jensen, & Granger, 2012). As discussed in depth by Tracy and her colleagues (Tracy, 2016; Tracy & Donovan, 2018; Tracy et al. 2015), most organizational communication scholarship, even that which focuses on practical application, is focused on an epistemological third-person approach. Researchers begin with problems (e.g., workplace bullying, racism, and incivility), delineate how these problems manifest, and then provide recommendations that people, sometime in their future, might take up and apply. Although these approaches add to epistemological knowledge, they do not provide direct access to phenomenological, as-lived experience. The problems are “out-there” to be solved by someone else in some future hypothetical time.

A phenomenological approach provides direct access to specific ways of being in real time with tangible outcomes. Peoples' interpretations of the world and their actions are provided by the contexts, meanings, and assumptions that are embedded in our language (Hyde, 1994). Sometimes the words we have are not the words we need for transformation (Ashcraft, 2000); critical reflection on language and creating new linguistic alternatives provides access to new ways of being and interacting in the world. What's more, phenomenological access to a preferred way of being (such as the being of inclusion) lies not in acquiring knowledge or certain personal attributes. Instead, this being comes through discovering the frames of reference and contexts through which we engage with the world and, through language, recreating experiential contexts that will leave people exercising ways of being that serve themselves and others (Souba, 2014). Such access is crucial for practical wisdom, which leads to the next aspect of an OPPT-in approach.

The second P of OPPT-in refers to **phronesis**, variously translated as prudence or practical wisdom, a "true state, reasoned, and capable of action with regard to things that are good or bad for man" (Aristotle, trans. 1976, 1140a24-aa40b12). Phronesis is about appropriate and virtuous action in a particular situation, with choices deemed as useful (or not) in relation to specific values and interests of specific people in a specific scene; "phronesis goes beyond both analytical, scientific knowledge (episteme) and technical knowledge or know-how (techne) and involves judgements and decisions made in the manner of a virtuoso social and political actor" (Flyvbjerg, 2001, p. 2). Acontextual rules and theories lead to episteme, but enacting wise ways of being requires contextual apprenticeship, emulation, practice, and self-reflection.

The importance of intentional contextual practice, complete with its twists and turns, successes and failures, is also demonstrated in the skill acquisition research. As explained by Dreyfus & Dreyfus (2005), novices to any craft begin by learning rules and theories, and those who are at a level of competence *apply* these rules and theories to contextual cases. Applying theories to case studies is a very popular way in the field of communication of doing practical theory as "engaged reflection" (Barge, 2001). This type of practical theory unfolds by applying a theory to a case and using it iteratively with emergent data in the field to create new insight. Practical application requires learning the theories first (e.g., standpoint theory; critical theory; or muted group theory) and then laying these on top of real-world situations (such as exclusion or racism). Such an approach may be useful for creating *competence* in a preferred way of being (e.g., allowing a student or reader of a journal article to notice racism at work and make a decision to try conversational pivoting, for instance), but it does not create *expertise* or *phronesis* (e.g., the practical, intuitive wisdom of a workplace bullying bystander being skilled at when and how to intervene and conversationally pivot).

In short, for scholars (like ourselves) who are interested in creating expertise in being (and not just competence), the skill acquisition literature would

suggest that *application* of epistemological knowledge is simply not enough to inspire transformation. This is because expertise requires embodied action, practice, and decision-making in context. Experts operate holistically rather than applying rules, guidelines, or theories.

An expert does not calculate, or solve problems, or even think. He or she just does what normally works and, of course, it normally works. // If one asks an expert for the rules he or she is using, one will, in effect, force the expert to regress to the level of a beginner and state the rules learned in school.

(Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2005, p. 788)

To achieve expertise in being—whether that being is in sports, music, compassion, or the being of inclusion—requires intentional contextual practice. In terms of the being of inclusion, it means that people pay close attention to and honor silence, absence, suppression, and subtle nonverbal cues. Indeed, as Cruz's (2016) methodology of the traces so richly reveals, people are often reticent to openly talk about trauma. Identifying the residue of violence and upset—such as that which can accompany exclusion—requires close attention to context. It also means that organizational members (especially those who hold privileged status) benefit from immersion and interaction with those who are different, practicing invitations even if rejection is likely, crossing boundaries and entering unfamiliar ground, complicating oneself, and playing with the edges in life (Tracy & Trethewey, 2005). However, sole practice without reflection is not enough and is merely what Freire (2000) calls “activism.” The practical wisdom of *phronesis* (similar to Freire's “*praxis*”) requires action plus reflection of what is virtuous and appropriate, which leads to the final aspect of OPPT-in.

The T in OPPT-in stands for **transformative** learning. Based in large part on Freire's (2000) critical pedagogy, transformative learning is considered a liberatory pedagogical process in which readers or students can discover for themselves how to transform actions and frames of reference that have contributed to oppression, lack of freedom, or disempowerment. The critical-dialectical discourse aspect of transformative learning requires emotional intelligence, including “having an open mind, learning to listen empathetically, ‘bracketing’ premature judgment, and seeking common ground” (Mezirow, 2003, p. 60). To access the essence of experience, people need to be aware of their biases and habits, so that these lenses may be (if only temporarily) suspended—a process similar to phenomenological *epoché* (Orbe, 2009).

How is such reflexivity accomplished? People first must be able to talk freely about their own experiences, assumptions, and viewpoints. Then, through a process of critical self-reflexivity, people can examine the assumptions that guide their actions. As Cunliffe (2004) explains:

Instead of applying theory to practice, critical reflexivity emphasizes *praxis*—questioning our own assumptions and taken-for-granted actions,

thinking about where/who we are and where/who we would like to be, challenging our conceptions of reality, and exploring new possibilities. (p. 411)

Such questioning goes beyond self-reflexivity, in which people recognize the way they shape and are shaped by social experience, and instead involves a dialogue with ourselves in which we unsettle our assumptions, actions, and their impact on others, certain events, and in life as lived (Cunliffe, 2009). Critical self-reflexivity is virtually impossible to do by merely thinking on one's own, but rather benefits from collaborative relational interaction with others who listen, share, and ask questions. People often do not know what they think until they hear what they say (Weick, 2001).

Much of a transformative approach is accomplished via experiential learning in which students or readers of academic scholarship are inspired to focus on the "here and now" rather than the "there and then" of communication and behavior (Frey & White, 2012). Traditional epistemological and banking approaches to scholarship focus on observing, analyzing, and reflecting, whereas experiential learning surfaces and questions tacit knowledge in use right now; "learning is about 'moving with' rather than 'thinking about' ideas" (Tomkins & Ulus, 2016). In terms of the being of inclusion, then, transformative and experiential approaches would suggest that scholars need to go beyond analyzing problematic case studies to first recognizing and questioning the assumptions that guide peoples' ways of being in the world, and then motivating intentional contextual practice that might recreate the preferred future. So, what might this look like in terms of "being of inclusion" OPPT-in scholarship?

### **Creating the Being of Inclusion through OPPT-in**

Studying and practicing expertise in action is a primary aspect of OPPT-in. Phronesis and practical wisdom are developed when we can learn from rich and thick case studies that show intuition and improvisation in context. However, most research aimed at creating inclusion focuses on analyzing problems (Tracy & Donovan, 2018). What's more, typical organizational communication and leadership classes focus on reading case studies of problematic or ethically questionable behavior. Case in point, a review of five popular collections of organizational communication case studies (Bisel, Kavya, & Tracy, 2018) found that most of them focused on ethically problematic situations, with only 22% of them focusing on exemplary issues to emulate (for an exception, see Lyon's 2017 collection of case studies in courageous organizational communication).

To create expertise in being, scholarship must do more than illuminate problems (like exclusion) but must also describe, cultivate, and inspire immersive experience in the practice of positive deviance and virtuoso craft practice. This is because when learners watch or are brought through scholarly thick description (Geertz, 1973) into the being of situations where people are especially good at something (whether that something is cooking or



being inclusive), this can reduce the learner's random trials to the more valuable ones. One way to create an immersive phonetic experience is through writing richly and aesthetically about positively deviant situations in which people are especially compassionate or active in creating connection across difference, and then providing recommendations of what readers (especially those who are privileged) might practice themselves to imitate and create the preferred situation (Bisel et al., 2018). Indeed, "observation and imitation of the activity of an expert can replace a random search for better ways to act. In general, this is the advantage of being an apprentice" (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 2005, p. 788). Related pedagogical activities could usefully include analyzing lives of Nobel Peace Prize winners or "wisdom witnessing" in which students are constantly on the lookout for and discuss inclusion in action, and/or choosing "inclusive" role models and modeling ones values and actions likewise (Bruya & Ardelt, 2018, p. 242).

Students could also valuably reflect on how to employ aspects of their own privilege to *respond* to exclusion. As Brenda Allen (expert in issues of difference in organizational communication) pointed out at the 2017 Aspen Engaged Conference, there is a difference between being "response-able" and "responsible." An OPPT-in model might suggest that *responsible* privilege is a three-part process of *observing*, *listening*, and *responding*. First, in terms of ***observing***, responsible privilege requires that people are present to the suffering that makes up exclusion and, what's more, take responsibility for the existence of walls of exclusion that they have themselves built and maintained, intentionally or not. Second, ***listening*** is the process of actively tuning in to the concerns of those who experience marginalization and exclusion. Finally, ***responding*** is the process of working alongside marginalized members, making requests for change, crafting new and inclusive spaces, and delivering tangible repercussions when demands for justice are not fulfilled. Each of the steps requires relational empathy, critical self-reflexivity, and the continual unsettling of assumptions.

What do these issues look like as lived? This poignant example from Sara Ahmed (2012) illustrates her responsible action in the face of an exclusionary wall.

An open call comes out for an academic event on power and resistance. A number of speakers are named on the call: all male speakers but one, all white speakers but one. Some of us point out the restriction. A wall comes up in the very denial of a wall. We begin with a friendly openness. It's an open call, they say. Take our places, they even say. Note here how the gesture of inclusion, which is also a promise of inclusion, can be offered in a way that negates a point about exclusion. To suggest incorporation as potential (come along as you *can* come along) prevents any acknowledgement that the open call was restricted as a call. How to respond? We point out publicly that the publicity of the call suggests the event is not open.

(pp. 178–179)

This example illustrates several aspects regarding responsible privilege. As we see in this example, Ahmed addresses an instance of exclusion by pointing it out, making it visible, and refusing to simply ignore the wall or “get over it.” As a prominent female scholar of color, she responsibly (and courageously) takes action. This excerpt also illustrates that when people of privilege refuse to acknowledge the walls of exclusion they have created, or just expect that the disenfranchised will figure out a way to climb over them, it shuts down conversation and the potential for transformation. So, how might we cultivate alternative ways of being?

### **Toward Creating the Being of Inclusion: Free Listening, Story Circles, and Civil Dialogue**

The being of inclusion can be inspired through “dialogic spaces” (Rule, 2004) where people (employees, students, co-researchers) can talk through and reflect upon a range of macro-level societal issues (such as the “isms” that create exclusion) and practice being with those with whom they might typically exclude. We offer Free Listening, Storyscope, and Civil Dialogue® as three meso-level activities in which people can practice micro-interactions related to the being of inclusion.

#### **Free Listening**

As demonstrated by Bourke and Dillon (2016), inclusive leadership includes six signature traits: cognizance, curiosity, courage, commitment, collaboration, and cultural intelligence. More specifically, each trait aims to develop the following elements of inclusion: fairness and respect, value and belonging, and confidence and inspiration. Listening can serve to cultivate the being of fairness and respect, value and belonging, and confidence and inspiration emerge. Additionally, people can practice listening as a way to experience curiosity and courage toward developing cognizance and cultural intelligence. Finally, as demonstrated by recent research, listening is a good place to start when working toward creating inclusive organizational environments (Broome et al., 2019).

*Free Listening* is a grassroots movement in which listeners stand in public, hold homemade signs that read “free listening,” and then simply listen and ask questions to those people who approach the sign-holder and want to talk. Free listening is not about changing anyone’s mind, agreeing, or disagreeing. Rather, it is an activity that invites people to share what is on their mind, while the free listener asks questions, is verbally and nonverbally present in an embodied way, and refrains from judgment or resistance to what the other is saying. What’s more, this activity provides the “free listeners” with excellent practice related to relational empathy and the being of inclusion. A full description of the process and FAQs is available at <https://urbanconfessional.org>.

Communication instructors at Arizona State University have successfully incorporated Free Listening in a range of different classes and for different purposes including to cultivate authentic listening, connection, and compassion.

A related course assignment that uses Free Listening for creating the being of inclusion might spring from the tenets regarding responsible privilege described in the previous section: observe, listen, respond. Before engaging in this assignment, we encourage instructors to practice Free Listening multiple times themselves, practice it in the classroom (with half the students listening to the other half), and taking the students out together on campus to listen to at least somewhat familiar others. Many students will find Free Listening difficult even when talking to students who have a similar background, and practicing first in a collaborative and supportive atmosphere primes the wheels for listening to people that students do not typically include in their lives.

So how would a “being of inclusion” Free Listening event unfold? First, students could be asked to **observe** their life as lived and note situations in the community where they see problems regarding difference or exclusion. Or they may locate specific types of viewpoints, people, or ideas with whom they do not regularly interact (and therefore exclude) in their lives. This would help them determine physical locations where they could practice listening and being inclusive of ideas and people. Students would share what they have discovered and make connections with other students in their class who discovered similar places, ideas, and spaces.

Second, in small groups, students could go to this place (e.g., perhaps a rally for a political candidate with whom they disagree, or a parade for people who hold different values) and engage in 60–90 minutes of Free **Listening**. Third, before debriefing collectively, students could journal about their experience and critically reflect on the following: Who stopped by to talk? How did the conversations unfold? What did this experience feel like? How was this easy? How was this uncomfortable? What did you learn about your own ability to listen with or without resistance? What did you learn about the being of inclusion? After journaling, students could usefully debrief about the situation in class.

Fifth, students could be asked to **respond** by identifying three behaviors they would commit to practice that are related to listening and the being of inclusion (e.g., asking more questions rather than using blanket statements; using “I” language more than “you” language; spending more time listening than speaking; keeping their phone out of sight when sharing a meal with friends). Throughout the rest of the semester, students could practice their new behaviors, share their experiences (both the breakthroughs and breakdowns), and reflect on how these new behaviors impacted being of inclusion at micro, meso, and macro levels.

### **Storyscope Story Circles**

Storyscope, a type of story circle, is another structured activity that might inspire the being of inclusion. To show and not just tell, consider a vivid thick description of how story circle might unfold:

You are excited but nervous for your first Storyscope event. You know very few people and have no idea what story you will share. The host of

the event warmly greets you, offers a nametag, and provides a handout about the theme: *Change*. The evening's event begins with a short performance. A local artist reads her poetry, and you learn from others who have attended before that past performances include singing, dance, and interpretive readings.

As you reflect on the theme of change, you start jotting down some notes. The host encourages you to communicate in narrative form, with stories having a clear beginning, middle, and end. After another performance by a local artist, the group creates five or so small circles of chairs. A facilitator invites each in your group to take turns introducing yourself and shares some ground rules for your time together, such as keeping the story to three minutes, and finding a way to nonverbally acknowledge each other (so as not to noisily disrupt the other circles).

The story circle begins in silence. Most of your fellow six circle mates are staring at the floor while a couple of brave souls meet each other's eyes. The facilitator waits patiently with a warm, inviting smile. The woman to your right, sighs and clears her throat, "Alright, I'm happy to get this started." One by one, each member shares a story of change in their life. You are amazed to discover how different each story is even though they are bound by a common theme. You find yourself listening more intently to the person next to you share about the passing of her husband of 54 years. Inspired by her vulnerability, you suddenly feel more prepared to tell your story. After she finishes, the group acknowledges her with shimmering fingers and head bows. Clearing your throat and offering a tentative smile, you look up and begin narrating your story.

As shown in this description, Storyscope provides a space for bringing communities together through "personal and compelling stories around some of our more pressing issues" ("Storyscope," n.d.). By creating the space for people to come together and share their stories, story circles open discursive possibilities for connection and overcoming fear and ignorance about issues and people whom we typically exclude. This is because an individual story does not exist in isolation within a story circle. As each individual takes their turn, a "collective story emerges—larger, richer, and more complex. The things we have in common, as well as real differences, are brought to light" ("About story circles," 2018).

The creators of Storyscope thusly see how a story circle functions like a kaleidoscope—fluid and ever changing, yet vibrant as we individually twist and turn throughout life and then come into shared moments with others that add new dimensions. New dimensions require difference or disconnection. In this sense, disconnection is a learning tool; we learn from others when we see differences in their experiences. This disconnection then can lead to connection. Through such a practice, inclusion occurs during a story circle when someone is willing to exert effort to extend themselves to and towards another. This extension occurs through sharing, listening, and providing social support

in communicative and embodied ways. Participants experience connection in that they all have stories related to the same topic, yet simultaneously witness how their experiences are unique and distinct, a process that emphasizes how one's own experience cannot be unproblematically generalized to others.

## **Civil Dialogue**

In contrast to Storyscope, Civil Dialogue® begins from a place of difference: people come together to civilly talk through a divisive topic such as gun rights, political candidates, or health care. The expressed goal of Civil Dialogue® is to work within communities to

instruct citizens of all cultures, groups, political, parties, religions, generation, and belief systems that is it possible to sit down and cogently share ideas of disagreement, express themselves passionately, while really working to understand why those who hold differing, perhaps even opposite opinions may well be as deeply convicted as themselves.

(Genette, Olson, & Linde, 2018, p. 5)

Based on this goal, the creators have crafted a format that involves community members with the ongoing, sensemaking process of dialogue as a means for cultivating civility and critical communication practices.

A Civil Dialogue® event follows a consistent format (see Genette et al., 2018). Regardless of the place in which the dialogue takes place (e.g., a community space, a classroom, a place of worship), the room is always set up with five empty chairs placed in a tight semicircle facing the audience and potential dialogue participants. After providing background information and a rationale for the dialogue, a trained facilitator reveals a provocative statement around which the dialogue will revolve (e.g., “Trump will make America great again”). At this time, the audience is also informed of the format's ground rules: (1) be passionate, not hostile, (2) focus on how the statement makes you feel, (3) avoid framing the dialogue as an argument, (4) use “I” language (conviction) not “You” language (implies critique), (5) use your own words, avoid slogans, (6) disagree without demonizing, (7) listen to create genuine dialogue and communication, (8), listen patiently, do not interrupt, and (9) be present when listening, do not plan what you want to say next. Next, five participants are invited to take one of the empty chairs facing the audience—each of which is sign-marked with an opinion regarding the provocative statement: from left to right, “Agree Strongly,” “Agree Somewhat,” “Neutral/Undecided,” “Disagree Somewhat,” and “Disagree Strongly.”

After five participants take their seats, they are invited to talk through their opinion on the provocative statement and how they came to have that viewpoint. After each participant shares in turn, they have 10 minutes to freely dialogue with each other. After that, the facilitator turns to the larger

audience for further reflections and questions. The facilitator encourages diverse viewpoints to be shared, and for people to speak up when they disagree with others. As such, this is not necessarily a “feel-good” type of experience, but instead one in which clashes of viewpoints can be discussed in a civil framework (Figure 7.1).

Understanding Civil Dialogue® through the lens of inclusion means acknowledging that, instead of affirmation or comfort, inclusion also relates to bravely sharing our opinions with those who differ. What’s more, the framework encourages participants to speak up in resistance to issues and viewpoints in the world that they deem problematic (or exclusionary). Speaking openly about one’s opinions within the format of dialogue invites us to think critically about what inclusion looks like. More specifically, within this dialogic format, inclusion is something that requires practice, courage, and vulnerability to *be* with others who see the world differently.

As illustrated by the activities of Free Listening, Storyscope story circles, and Civil Dialogue®, the being of inclusion can manifest in a number of different ways. Free Listening asks us to set aside our own viewpoints and be with others so they feel heard. Story circles create connection across difference and the realization that even those from disparate walks of life may have something in common (e.g., stories of change). Civil Dialogue® provides participants with well-needed practice to civilly articulate their viewpoint on divisive issues among those who do not share their point of view. What each of these activities has in common are core communicative practices related to



Figure 7.1 Inclusion relates to bravely sharing opinions with those who differ, as opposed to affirming and comforting communication.

the being of inclusion, such as bracketing presuppositions (if only temporarily), authentically listening, vulnerably sharing space with unfamiliar others, and openness to change.

## **Conclusion**

Acts of inclusion and exclusion take place at macro, meso, and micro levels (Ferdman, 2017). What we propose in this chapter are several meso-level practices that can encourage the being of inclusion at the micro level. It is through micro-level interaction that we embrace the possibility for inclusivity to scale up to the macro level. Additionally, it is through such meso-level activities that people can begin to practice inclusivity through a phronetic, practically wise manner. Whether through Free Listening, Civil Dialogue®, or Storyscope story circles, such activities provide opportunities for people to practice and phenomenologically experience key communicative skills related to inclusion. What's more, they provide space for critical reflexivity in which participants might question their suppositions and ways of being. Finally, through such experiences, and through hearing and using new language, they may then see the world in new ways that allow for different possibilities rather than entrenched scripts of division and exclusion.

As discussed throughout this piece, to create the being of inclusion, scholars can usefully go beyond epistemological examination of problems to also practice scholarship that inspires authentic listening, generosity in spirit, and bravery. In addition to studying problematic situations, we can usefully examine positively deviant organizations and communicative interactions where inclusion is exemplified in living breathing color. For example, more research needs to be done on those organizations that practice radical inclusion (Johnson, 2019)—as opposed to periphery inclusion (Rennstam & Sullivan, 2018)—where marginalized groups are integral contributors to organizational decision making. Indeed, an OPPT-in approach suggests the importance of scholarship that goes beyond epistemological learning and third-person analysis of problematic exclusionary behavior in organizations. Such an approach inspires (1) research and analysis of positively deviant instances of inclusion, (2) intentional practice and critical reflection on as-lived behaviors that spark inclusion, and (3) structured programs that hold promise for creating the being of inclusion, such as Free Listening,<sup>1</sup> Civil Dialogue®,<sup>2</sup> and Storyscope<sup>3</sup> story circles.

## **Afterword From Sarah: A Moment of Critical Self-Reflexivity**

In the end stages of drafting this chapter (in Fall, 2018), I was struck with the irony and hypocrisy of three white people writing about the being of inclusion. That led to further reflection, and a sober assessment: All but four of my 50-some co-authored publications are the result of white hands and all but two of the 40-some graduate students I have formally advised are white.

In getting clear for the first time on the wall of white bricks surrounding myself as a scholar, I alternately felt ashamed, astonished, disgusted, and clueless. I have held myself out to be an inclusive, mindful, and critically reflexive person. I have not intentionally made choices about who to work with based upon gender, race, sexual identity or orientation, ability, or age. Meanwhile, if I took a photo with all my coauthors and advisees, we would together constitute a wall of relatively privileged people—most of us white, female, heterosexual, and normatively attractive.

To have a blind spot of one's own bullshit revealed is a gloriously excruciating experience. It is one level of pain to discover we have been fooling others, and "far more unsettling to discover that we have fooled ourselves" (Hochschild, 1983, p. 47). Indeed, when I originally drafted this afterword in 2018, I could feel my face grimacing and my fingers fluttering up to my lips in uncertainty and shame. When I considered whether to include it in this chapter, I fretted about whether and when I should explicitly share the whiteness of my scholarship and teaching, and the ramifications of doing so.

In writing this chapter, listening and contributing to the 2019 #CommunicationSoWhite discussion, writing an article for a special issue on whiteness and merit (Tracy, 2019), and identifying and assigning more inclusive readings in my courses, I have spent at least 150 hours in the last year thinking, writing, and teaching about the importance of critical self-reflexivity, vulnerability, and taking responsibility for our own walls of exclusion. So, I am standing in the muck of such a revelation with these words from Tibetan Buddhist Pema Chödrön (2000):

Rather than letting our negativity get the better of us, we could acknowledge that right now we feel like a piece of shit and not be squeamish about taking a good look. That's the compassionate thing to do. That's the brave thing to do. We could smell that piece of shit. We could feel it; what is its texture, color, and shape? We can explore the nature of that piece of shit. We can know the nature of dislike, shame, and embarrassment and not believe there's something wrong with that.

(p. 50)

And we can also make our way through the shit and come out on the other side with some important change.

Alas, as I write now in 2020, I can stare with less fear and shame at the walls of exclusion in my own life—walls laid brick-by-well-intentioned brick – and do the rigorous work to recraft that wall. It can be a disorienting and cognitively dissonant space to stand. It is also one, though, that prompts action—both in destruction of privilege and recrafting the way I can know and teach. It is precisely a space of being that proponents of critical self-reflexivity and an OPPT-in approach would say is imperative for transformation, inclusion, and social justice.



## Notes

- 1 See The Urban Confessional for more information on Free Listening at <https://urbanconfessional.org/>.
- 2 See the Institute for Civil Dialogue for more information at [civil-dialogue.com](http://civil-dialogue.com).
- 3 Storyscope is an affiliate of the U.S. Department of Arts and Culture (usdac.us), a grassroots action network inciting creativity and social imagination to shape a culture of empathy, equity, and belonging.

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