DEALING WITH PREJUDICE AND CONFLICT IN THE CLASSROOM: THE PINK TRIANGLE EXERCISE

A classroom exercise designed to explore students' attitudes and encounters with homophobia and discrimination against gay males and lesbians asked students to wear a pink triangle for one day. Students reported their internal conflicts - fears and anxieties - about identifying with gay and lesbian people, their external conflicts - encounters with peer pressure and prejudice - and their own efforts to assert a progressive and anti-discriminatory stance in the midst of these situations. In classroom discussion a heated encounter between a straight male and a gay male brought these issues into direct, personal focus and mandated the use of creative conflict management techniques to preserve open dialogue and positive learning. The exercise, and the classroom encounter, have great utility for examining other forms of oppression and discrimination and for experiential learning about important social psychological principles.

The activity described here was undertaken as part of an undergraduate seminar entitled "Intergroup Conflict and Social Change." This seminar is part of a growing curricular emphasis on intergroup conflict, prejudice, and discrimination. Although such curricula have a long history (Kriesberg 1973, Wehr 1979), they have been spurred recently by numerous incidents of campus racism, sexism, and homophobia, and they have become the focus for substantial faculty debate and innovation in curriculum and pedagogy (Collins and Anderson 1987; Takaki 1989).

Twenty-five undergraduate students enrolled in this seminar-practicum. Through a deliberate recruitment and screening process, approximately one-half of the class were students of color and one-half were Caucasian; one-half were males and one-half were females; one-half were upper-class students and one-half were first-year students and sophomores. The class was "team taught" by a male Caucasian faculty member and a female Latina advanced doctoral candidate.

The purpose of the classroom activity described here was to provide students with an experiential opportunity to explore the social psychology of social conflicts, prejudice, and oppression. We wished to complement classroom intellectual work (oral and written) with an experience exposing students to their own and others' patterns of prejudice and discrimination. We also wished to bring to the surface covert or latent intrapersonal and intergroup conflicts, so we could examine their effects and potential resolutions. We chose to focus on homophobia and prejudice against gay men and lesbians because this form of oppression is much less overt than racism and sexism; thus, many students have not yet examined their feelings and values on this issue, nor have they discovered how to deny or hide their individual presentations with socially acceptable discussions and actions. The range of social-psychological principles embedded in this activity are illustrated throughout in students' own reactions taken from their oral exchanges and written reports. Their reactions are both the product and the process of our classroom work.

Insofar as we deal in class with real oppression and discrimination and create real encounters
with these issues, we often work with deeply held psychological and political concerns - those of students and our own. Under these circumstances, conflict (whether overt or covert) should be expected (McKinney 1985; Troiden 1987). Some of the issues that surfaced in this exercise reflect students' fears of being labeled as deviant, they will become vulnerable to potential discrimination. Others refer to students' internalized homophobia. Students' accounts describe rejection of homosexuality and a desire to have nothing to do with the issue (and therefore resistance to the exercise), efforts to portray themselves as liberal and "respecting everyone's rights" while objecting to homosexuality, and serious attempts to challenge internal and external contradictory or homophobic signals. Still others describe the learning power of the exercise itself and raise questions concerning pedagogy: active versus "banking" learning, dialogue about "hot" or vulnerable issues, and dealing with conflict in volatile classroom situations. In this exercise, as in others of this type, both we and the students entered into an unknown where there is great potential for real and immediate teaching and learning; there also is potential risk. We must learn to manage such risk better, as well as its attendant substantive learning opportunities (Berheide and Segal 1985; Gondolf 1985).

THE EXERCISE OF THE PINK TRIANGLE

In this particular exercise students were provided with small buttons bearing a pink triangle symbol. A pink triangle is the emblem that lesbians and gay men were required to wear in concentration camps in Europe during the Holocaust (Heger 1980; Lautmann 1980-81; Plant 1986). Today this symbol has become part of the personal and political identification process of the gay and lesbian movements. With this understanding, students (and the instructors) voluntarily wore these buttons prominently for one full day in the week between two class sessions. Students also were required to write a two- to three-page paper describing the nature of their decision making about wearing the button, their own feelings as they progressed through the day, the reactions of others around them, and the ways in which they respond to others. In the next class session, small-group exchanges and full class discussions were used to process students' experiences.

STUDENTS' DECISION TO WEAR OR NOT TO WEAR THE BUTTON

The decision as to whether to wear the button at all and how to display it was a focus of much serious reflection, and students approached this question with a variety of attitudes. The tension elicited between students' private self-concept (identity) and their public presentation of self influenced the way they managed this decision. Values and beliefs, fears of stigmatization, pressures to conform, and issues of identity and sexual orientation were weighed and challenged as students confronted their decision to pursue the exercise.

The majority of students undertook the exercise eagerly and seriously as a means to explore their own feelings and the reactions of others. Some even saw their participation as a welcome opportunity to express solidarity with a victimized population. Students' commitment to the exercise, however, was not devoid of inner debates or contradictory feelings:
"While I had accepted this notion intellectually, I had never personally experienced what it was like to take a stand and take that risk of being a "suspect." I made a pledge that if I was asked why I was wearing a pin and what the pin signified that I would say only that I was wearing it to show my solidarity with the Gay Rights Movement. I felt that if I stated I was wearing the pin as part of a class assignment, I would really be copping out."

"I decided to wear a shirt that would really make the triangle noticeable. This was a hard decision for me. I've always been self-conscious, and to wear a symbol that marked me as different from the norm made me nervous. I set out for class that day with a great deal of apprehension."

Some students were not particularly eager to engage in the exercise but decided to wear the button anyway. They clarified their decision in the face of internal conflict about homosexuality by endorsing core beliefs in individual liberty and civil rights. In other words, these students were able to wear the button by creating distance between themselves and the issue of homosexuality:

"I personally have nothing against gays or lesbians except for the fact that it goes against my religious beliefs and the way I was raised. It goes against my interpretation of what the Bible says. I'm not saying that my religion is the right and only way, but I'm very strong in my belief. As far as the social aspects go, I think that every person is entitled to live their own life and believe in what they want. My particular philosophy is 'each to their own.'"

"I felt that I was secure enough with my identity that wearing the triangle would not be a threat to me. I'm not a homosexual but I do sympathize with the gay community. In a way I understand how many homosexuals feel because of the fact that I am Black. I know what it's like to be condemned or stereotyped. Blacks and homosexuals are often persecuted by the 'white dominant male.'"

Some students decided not to wear the button at all. Some felt firmly opposed to homosexuality on principle; others declined out of confusion or anxiety:

"It significantly distracted me to the point where I was unable to perform what I was doing at the time. In my opinion, this distraction was due to both self-consciousness and my position on the homosexual issue. I neither support nor sympathize with the homosexual cause. Actually, as a Christian, I oppose homosexuality."

"I feel that the sexuality of a person, whether heterosexual or homosexual, is one's own personal business. In areas where thoughts count, we are all human beings and have valuable points to make. But in public places, SEX should not be an issue. I did not wear the Pink Triangle Button for these simple reasons: the daily interactions with people, who in my case are Engineering professionals and students, have no place for explicit sexual statements."

The range of concerns about full participation in the exercise reflects a variety of intellectual and emotional reactions, some of which mirror the prejudice and homophobia we were interested in
exploring with this activity. The social psychological phenomena and principles that were or could have been explored with this juncture included the following:

- Exploration of personal identity;
- Concern about personal identity;
- Managing a consistent public identity;
- Concern about social conformity;
- Tension between personal identity and political values;
- Homophobia;
- Anticipation of rejection;
- Impression management.

Our strategy in discussing the exercise was to use the experiential encounter to illuminate or generate these sociological and social psychological principles or "lessons," and then to tie these lessons to relevant literature and theory. We took care not to focus on any one student's comments, but to conceptualize on the basis of a pattern of reported experiences (internal psychological or external social encounters). In making conceptual or sociological observations and in noting studies or scholarly findings, we asked students to "test" these scientific reports against their own experience. We wanted to respect and draw lessons from student's own experiences, rather than imposing academic language and conclusions on them. Finally, we asked students to consider and discuss the extent to which they had encounters (or could imagine encountering) similar phenomena in other circumstances, thus paving the way for more generalized knowledge.

**RESPONDING TO OTHER'S REACTIONS**

Almost all students anticipated conflict when they wore the button in public, and many planned strategies for managing it. For many, the fear of being publicly labeled or "suspect" as gay or lesbian largely determined their plans and their reaction to others. Some students examined this personal fear in terms of their internalization of the oppression and stigma that our society imposes on homosexuals (although no student expressed this concept explicitly). These students struggled overtly to determine how they thought it might feel to be forced to explain or defend one's sexuality and sexual orientation. Their comments reflect a discovery of their own biases or intolerance and reveal their discomfort in this recognition. Others reflected on their vigorous assertion of their heterosexual orientation. Many of these students found that fear impeded their ability to address their own or others' homophobic reactions. Some students distanced themselves from the problem and rationalized their avoidance, by taking a libertarian or "to each his own" position; often they denied their own or others' intolerance. Finally, some students addressed these conflicts by challenging (or promising to challenge) their own fears and the negative reactions of others. In summary, students' accounts vividly reflect the ways in which they discovered new layers of meaning about themselves in relation to others as they managed the conflicts elicited by wearing the button in public.
Ignorance or lack of clarity about the symbol: Several students reported that their friends or peers did not know the meaning of the button; some were relieved and others were disappointed at such "non-attention":

"Throughout the entire day I wore this pin, no one understood the symbolism associated with the pink triangle. In all instances I found myself in the role of initiator. Everyone I talked to stated that they were unfamiliar with the association of the pink triangle to homosexuals."

"Nothing, absolutely nothing happened....I was both relieved and disappointed."

Because of the invisibility of lesbians and gays in society, many students had to initiate conversation or identify themselves and enact a version of "coming out" in order to elicit responses from others. Crumpacker and Vander Haegen (1987) note that making homophobia visible is a key step in exploring or confronting-in oneself or in others-this or any other form of prejudice or discrimination. This coming-out process did elicit other responses, ranging from hostility to silence to support, and in turn exposed students to some of the forms of discrimination experienced by gay men and lesbians:

"My roommate asked me what the pin meant' after I explained it to him, he told me to "take the thing off, I don't want people to think I live with a faggot." One of my other roommates, whose stepbrother is gay thought the assignment was great and wanted me to let him know how things went."

"At that moment [when I explained the symbol's meaning], I noticed that all of the seven people at the table suddenly became silent and not one was making eye contact with anyone else...I decided to ask a few of the people at the table what their reactions were to my explanation for the button. One woman said that she was embarrassed because she laughed at my explanation, thinking I was joking about what it really meant. Another woman just felt that I might be gay but that it was none of her business to ask. The people tat the dinner table had very different reactions, and I assumed everyone to be homophobic because they were silent and did not pursue the topic further."

Dealing with fear of being judged. The fear of being labeled and judged negatively required some students to confront the potential contradiction between being liberal and supporting "civil rights for gay men and lesbians" and being frightened that others might think of them as homosexual. The comfort of being a distant advocate of tolerance and acceptance was challenged when the issue became personalized:

"I was horrified: because I wore this button, my teachers, friends, and even strangers might assume that I am a lesbian. It hit me! I was worried, I did not want my image to be shattered because I wore the "silly pink button." I surprised myself; although I support gay and lesbian rights, the thought of being recognized as a lesbian was horrifying. I realized that I am not willing to put my reputation and image on the line. Whereas I support the needs and rights of gays and lesbian, when it came down to it, I would not want to be thought of as one."
Publicly denying homosexuality. Some students responded to the conflict between private and public identities, and to their confusion and fears, by making it quite clear to others that wearing the button was simply a class exercise and that they themselves were not homosexual. Most students who adopted this behavior did so almost unconsciously; many later regretted its political implications:

"I had decided that I would not mention that I was wearing it for a class, partly because I felt that this would give false justification to others, and partly because I was really wearing it because I am a support of gay and lesbian rights, and others should know that. My answer to my friend thus began with an explanation of the symbol's origins and my support of gay and lesbian groups of people. Then I did something very strange and troubling. I told him that I was still looking for a female companion; a girlfriend. I guess I did this just to confirm that he knew that I was not gay; that the pin had nothing to do about my own sexual orientation. This was childish and hypocritical, and I was ashamed of myself after I ended the short conversation."

"I found myself in a situation where I had to explain what the pink triangle symbolized and why I was wearing it. I not only over-emphasized that it was a classroom assignment, but found that I was zestfully and vehemently trying to prove that I was not homosexual or of the gay community. I was almost paranoid...I am in no way judgmental or discriminatory. In fact through my "out of the classroom" education and my Sociology class I have a newly acquired appreciation for individual differences and intergroup relations. However, an uncomfortable feeling stayed with me that whole day. How can I be accepting of a subculture but at the same time be uncomfortable with it?"

"I constantly felt an overwhelming need to explain why I was wearing the button. The symbolism behind it was secondary. Primary in my mind was the need to remove any shadow of doubt in the mind of the person I was talking to as to whether or not I am gay. Wearing the button not only sensitized me to the level of prejudice that exists, but also forced me to directly question my own views."

Fear of being stigmatized pervades these students’ accounts. Unlike race and gender, one's sexual orientation is not identified by external physical markers. Thus nobody knows who is gay or lesbian unless they are told. In the context of this exercise, no one knows, unless they are told, that the wearer of a pink triangle button might not be homosexual. This ambiguity, and thus the ability to "pass" and be labeled as lesbian or gay, makes this exercise particularly powerful for explorations of one's own personal feelings and prejudices, public identity, experience with stigma, and fear of discrimination.

Distancing and promoting individual freedom. Some students dealt with these conflicts by distancing themselves from the issues at hand. Several students suggested that homosexuality is a personal choice, not a socially constructed category like race and gender. In these instances, feelings of discomfort or moral judgements about lesbians and gays are considered a matter of personal opinion rather than of prejudice. This it becomes easier to dismiss or deny oppression,
to blame the victim, or to think that people who chose or "asked for" this lifestyle must accept it consequences:

"Homosexuality is a personal affair, perhaps immoral, but it exists. Just due to their own (homosexual) interpersonal insecurities, they wish to make it public. In this case, I would definitely defend these individuals as human beings, and not because of their sex."

"Looking at the issues objectively, the only thing that is different about them (homosexuals) is something that is basically shared in private and is not the general public's business anyway."

The adoption of individualistic postures in explaining prejudice and discrimination is common. Kramer and Martin (1988) state, "Many students take the position that sexual behavior in particular and gender behavior in general results from personal choice, and are unaffected by structural forces. ...this is the greatest single obstacle to communicating a sociological analysis" (p.134). Turkel (1986) also notes this problem in her discussion of male students' inability to understand structural discrimination against women.

Responses such as fear of being judged, publicly denying homosexuality, and distancing and promoting individual freedom illustrate how the private/public dialectic unfolded as students confronted themselves and others. In many instances, liberal views did not free students from not wanting to be perceived as "one of them." The fear of being judged led some students to claim that they were "certainly not homosexuals" (saving face, managing stigma) but led others to confront the depth of their internalized homophobia and pressures to conform.

Making proactive commitments. Some students announced that the exercise had renewed their commitment to some sort of social action, at least on a personal level. They expressed a desire to go beyond the particular assignment and to adopt an active, personal relationship to the issue. One student, who initially had "saved face" by telling a peer he was "looking for a girlfriend," decided to wear the button on his backpack throughout the term, perhaps to prove that despite internalized pressure to conform, it is possible to change. Attention to the internal dissonance between views of homosexuality and fears of stigma, or to the external dissonance between personal views and others' reactions, often stimulated students to consider new courses of action.

"This gave me a much better (though very simplistic) appreciation for what it must be like for gay men and lesbians who have come out. They face this kind of anxiety and trepidation every day of their lives. I've always made a point of making sure people know that I was straight. I'm not going to continue to play along with the system in this manner. I'm going to wear the pink triangle pin on my backpack from now on....if people are going to judge me and from misconceptions about me, that's their business and their problem. If they want to know my sexual orientation, they're going to have to have the courage to ask."

"For the first time in my life I was identified as a member of a persecuted minority group. I felt self-conscious at times. I never knew something of what it felt like to be perceived as something other than a white, upper middle class, heterosexual male."
These students have begun to generalize the experience of the exercise. For them, the activity opened up new layers of meaning. They have gone beyond the activity itself to ask larger questions about majority/minority relations and internalized oppression.

The social psychological phenomena and principles that were or could have been explored with student in classroom discussions at this juncture included the following:

- Reflection of personal identity in others' judgement and reactions (looking-glass self);
- Discovery of prejudice and internalized oppression;
- Difficulty of public non-conformity;
- "Passing";
- Invisibility of "deviant" lifestyles;
- Structural influences on individual views;
- Cognitive dissonance and behavior change.

EXTENDED IN-CLASS DISCUSSION

Class discussion mirrored the comments presented in this report. Students discussed their fears and anxieties and their behavioral encounters quite honestly, including their concerns about what "others might think of me." We used the discussion to draw students' attention to the social psychological principles and phenomena presented at the end of the previous sections. Sometimes we commented briefly on these principles and referred students to research studies or literature relevant to the issues being experienced or discussed.

After students reported their experiences in wearing or not wearing the button in public and spoke about some of the powerful learning this activity had created, open discussion ensued. People asked questions and engaged in comparative discussion throughout the room. At one point a young man, identifying himself as straight (heterosexual) and as not prejudiced toward gay people, asked a gay man directly: "But why do you gay people want to identify yourself so publicly as gay? This is a matter of private sexual preference. Why make an issue of it? Is the purpose to announce yourself so you can pick up other people?" They gay student responded that his self-identification and public expression of sexual orientation were a personal political act. "In doing this," he said, "you overcome isolation and silence that leads to being ignored and to death. In addition, you can set a model of openness for other gay men." The first student (X) indicated that he was only asking why and repeated his statement regarding his lack of prejudice and his view of the private nature of sexual preference and activity. The gay male (Y) repeated that the issues were far more complex. "For instance," he said, "I could ask you, 'why do Jews (X was known to be Jewish) always identify yourself and draw attention to the Holocaust?'" "That's clearly different," responded X quickly. "That was a terrible even that was not a matter of choice." A vigorous free-form discussion ensued. Homophobia and a covert in-class conflict suddenly had become overt; the "there and then" of others' reaction became the "here and now" of our class.
The discussion quickly intensified in emotional tone and moved into attack-defend comments. Everyone began to get excited and nervous, and the situation appeared to be explosive and out of control. As the instructors, we were temporarily shocked and paralyzed. We feared for students' sensibilities and were not sure what strategy to follow. We did not want to witness further anger and explosiveness; nor did we want to cover up important issues and drive the exploration of homophobia and conflict further underground. Some intervention was necessary.

With only a vague idea of an instructional (or even a social control strategy, we said loudly: "We have here an example of a substantial conflict, a fight. Let us try to use some of the conflict-management, dialogue-creation techniques we have learned this semester. We could ask X and Y, if they are willing, to sit face to face in the center of this room and to talk with one another about these issues. We can help them, and the rest of us, to actively listen and hear one another."

As instructors, we both wondered whether it was possible to reestablish a learning scenario in the class. If possible and advisable, could it be controlled? Should it? Would this fishbowl dialogue work? What was meant by "work"? What would a suitable and instructive outcome look like? We were at the edge in either case; if positive learning was to be salvaged, this strategy seemed to be a good gamble. Perhaps we would learn and teach about processes of conflict management and dialoguing as we dealt with the issues before us.

The class, and X and Y, agreed to this process. X and Y sat in the middle of the room, stated their positions to one another, restated or mirrored each other's position in their own words, and checked for accuracy. Then they responded to each other, still mirroring. The dialogue that ensued was fragile and difficult. X remained stubborn and defensive; Y remained hurt and angry. Slowly some of these feelings and postures dissolved as real questions were asked and answered and as the class was assured that each party wished to hear the other and that these issues could be explored together. Comments began to be supportive of each person's individuality, although not necessarily of their ideas.

When it appeared that X and Y, and the rest of the students, were beginning to repeat themselves, we decided to end the dialogue, at least for the time being. We did so by making the following comments: "We have gone about as far as we can go right now. We have tried a new procedure to deal more openly with intense conflict, and it has permitted us to hear and appreciate each other's view more effectively. But it is easy in the liberal environment of the class, and in this moment of crisis, to support Y's sexual orientation and to empathize with his personal hurt and challenge. Will we still express concern for him tomorrow? And knowing that X is not a mean person, an outright bigot, are we prepared to support his political diversity as well? Will we scapegoat X as the lone bigot amongst us, not care for X, or deny that piece of him that is within all of us? Think about these limits on our diversity and tolerance."

In the following weeks several class members went out of their way to express support for Y’s feelings and position and for X's well being. Both young men became more open and obviously felt supported rather than punished for the risk they took in direct exchange and in the "experimental dialogue."
The social psychological phenomena or principles which were or could have been explored in classroom discussion with students at this juncture included the following:

- Escalation of conflict;
- Stereotypes;
- Attribution of motives;
- Side taking and scapegoating;
- Styles in conflict (avoidance and escalation);
- Communication distortion in conflict;
- Fear of loss of control;
- Prejudice and assumptions about homosexuality;
- Stigma and labeling;
- Problems in generalizing across forms of oppression;
- Personal identity and sexual orientation;
- Self-presentation and management of public identity;
- Covert versus overt conflict;
- Interpersonal versus structural conflict;
- Conflict levels and degrees of intensity;
- Techniques of listening and engaging in dialogue.

We did not explore all these options directly, nor did we explore all of those listed at the end of the previous sections, but in the following section we discuss some of the choices we made and how we pursued them.

**REFLECTIONS AND CONCLUSIONS**

The students commented that both the pink triangle exercise and the subsequent in-class discussions were highly positive learning experiences. We returned to them in later weeks when we discussed racism and sexism as other forms of prejudice and stigmatization. This exercise also produced extraordinary learning about several social psychological principles and phenomena. Although we have summarized these specific principles as they arose in different phases of this exercise, the overarching themes or more general "sociological lesions" can be summarized as follows:

- The breadth of societal prejudice against gay men and lesbians;
- The degree to which many of us have internalized these principles and hold covert homophobic attitudes;
- The strength of societal pressure to conform;
- The degree to which we fear or avoid a deviant or stigmatized status;
- The difficulties of continuing to listen in the face of conflict and controversy;
- The positive role of overt conflict in bringing hidden feelings to the surface and resolving alienation and distance.
How were these sociological lessons codified and conceptualized? They were "learned first hand," at least by many students, in the midst of encounters and discussions with themselves and with others. Yet one of our primary instructional tasks was to provide a broader intellectual context and interpretation for these experiential lessons. For example, we drew special attention to the implicit or explicit pressures for conformity that many students reported experiencing. We first listed on a chalkboard some of the specific comments and examples that were provided in discussion and in papers. We took care not to focus on individuals or to castigate students for their reactions but to highlight the normalcy and power of pressures to students' internalized prejudices and confusions about homosexuality. With this background, and with examples rooted in the concrete and publicly acknowledged experiences of class members, we lectured briefly on the generic process of social conformity as it applies in many arenas of daily social life.

Of course, not all pressures to conform work in the same way. In this area of emotionally and politically sensitive behavior the stakes are particularly high; as a result, the pressures are particularly strong and overt and provide a good set of examples. Therefore, we were careful to draw attention to some of the more subtle ways and arenas in which pressures to conform also operate. It became very clear to students how these pressures work as an instrument of social control, especially control of "deviant" ideas and behaviors, and how their own ignorance or confusion made them even more vulnerable to these pressures. This discussion permitted us to link individual and experiential learning to the more general sociological concepts listed above and to remind students of the material they had read which illustrated these concepts (in some cases we provided students with new readings). A final step in this instructional process was to recheck with students to learn whether they now could assert the links between the general social psychological concepts being discussed and the raw feelings of anxiety and pressure they had experienced earlier.

Another example of the process of codification and conceptualization focused on some of the principles of conflict management that had come alive during the class discussion. During that discussion we commented about the nature of the class interaction, raised questions about what was said, and made connections between what was said by different people. As the emotional tone of the discussion between X and Y and other members escalated, we pointed to the degree of intensity ("fights" versus "games" versus "debates"), to the social level of conflict ("interpersonal" versus "intragroup" versus "intergroup"), and to some of the behavioral options for managing the discussion. We suggested that as a class we could escalate the conflict even further (by yelling or fighting physically), could engage in an experimental dialogue (by trying to listen actively and to hear one another). During the "dialogue" between X and Y we made comments to facilitate their exchange and to improve the quality of interaction between them and the rest of the class. At that time no specific connections were made with the principles listed
earlier, except for those aimed at enabling "active listening." Once the dialogue was finished, we pointed to some of the principles involved in "sidetaking" and "scapegoating," not only as they limited classroom or group tolerance but also as they often mask our own homophobia and prejudices. Subsequently, we were able to inform students about how their individual and group experiences mirrored (or in some cases diverged from) traditional social psychological treatments of group conflict, and we could direct them to specific readings.

Our pedagogical approach, here as elsewhere, was to begin with concrete and strongly felt experience, to help generalize this experience among class members (as well as to be attentive to different experiences with the same phenomenon), and then to seek higher-order conceptualizations. With these experiences named and labeled as social psychological concepts or principles, we could make the connection with sociological literature. Finally, we could complete the cycle with a review of other direct experiences associated with this phenomenon, in other times and places. Thus, we could move from homophobia and discrimination against homosexuals to a discussion of prejudice and discrimination in general, as well as the ways in which these social forces work differently in matters of race and ethnicity than in matters of sexual orientation.

In no case did we begin this process of conceptualizing and linking students' experiences in the midst of heated encounters or discussions; to do so would have drawn the energy out of direct experience and would have distracted the students from the experiential learning encounter (as well as avoiding the conflict). As soon as these events were concluded or deescalated, however, the students' and our own behaviors (including our design of the exercise and our intervention tactics) became grist for intellectual and sociological work.

We proceeded in a similar manner with several other of students' general experiences, including 1) some concepts rooted in the nature of prejudice, homophobia, stigma, and discrimination and 2) some concepts rooted in processes of conflict creation, conflict management, and the role of listening and negotiating words and deeds in the midst of heated engagement.

Several contextual or procedural factors helped to create maximum learning advantage from this design and its unexpected power. First were the particular norms and context of this class and the commitment to honest exploration as well as dialogic skills that students had developed in the earlier part of the semester. The use of a conflict-management or dialogue-creating process did not arise ahistorically and mysteriously in the class; it mirrored other processes that had been used in class and built on previously established norms. Second, the active recruitment of students from different races, genders, ethnic groups, and sexual orientations helped to create a heterogeneous learning environment that elicited a wide range of experiences and insights and confronted students with new layers of meaning. Third, the spiraling effect of the design, from personal reflection to public behavior to more personal reflection to small- and large-group
discussions, helped students to examine and integrate some of their feelings and reactions several times in the course of several days (Anderson 1988; Berheide and Segal 1985). Fourth, although the dynamics of the "teachable moment" could not have been predicted, many of us who work with these issues of intergroup conflict hope that just such serendipitous events will occur. Failing to intervene would have constituted a failure to live up to the norms and agenda of the class; it also would have taught a negative lesson regarding honest confrontation and exploration of overt conflict. Thus, as instructors, we had to take the risk of escalating issues even further in an effort to draw from the event maximum learning about the process and substance of discrimination (Berheide and Segal 1985). Fifth, the use of a team of instructors of different gender and race or ethnicity permitted us to use our own differences in checking signals several times during the entire activity and in supporting each other and students. Different students could relate more or less effectively to either of us (and vice versa); this situation provided additional safety and support for everyone (Kramer and Martin 1988). Finally, the students had a vital commitment to continue to learn, to write about their learning, and to reach out and support one another over time.

Without the presence of at least some of these conditions, we doubt that the exercise would have been so successful. Even so, not all these conditions need be present in order to make this exercise effective and to generate useful learning. Even without such a heterogeneous class, important issues will arise and can be confronted and discussed, at both an experiential and a conceptual level. Even without the special "teachable moment," important and useful social psychological phenomena will arise, and principles can be inferred and articulated. Certainly, different designs for preparing and debriefing students may work as well as those described here, or better. Probably the essential elements are commitment to norms of honest exploration, dialogue among students and between students and instructors, and the willingness to explore issues with real life meaning and consequences, as well as intellectual and sociological import, for students and for our collegiate communities.