

Privilege, Power, and Oppression

DEFINITIONS

CONFLICT: The tension created through an active disagreement, struggle for needs, opposing efforts, and/or divergent ideas.

POWER: Power can be defined as the ability to cause or influence an outcome. It is not the ability to control a situation, control is always limited.

PREJUDICE: A judgment or opinion that is formed on insufficient grounds before facts are known or in disregard of facts that contradict it. Prejudices are learned and can be unlearned.

STEREOTYPE: An exaggerated or distorted belief that attributes characteristics to members of a particular group.

OPPRESSION: The combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates systems that perpetuate discrimination against some groups (often called “**target groups**”) and benefits other groups (often called “**dominant groups**”). Some examples of oppressive systems are **racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism**. These systems privilege dominant groups and exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources.

Four Levels of Oppression/”isms” and Change:

Internalized: Values, Beliefs, Feelings

Interpersonal: Actions, Behaviors, Language

Institutional: Rules, Policies, Procedures

Ideological: Beauty, Truth, Right

PRIVILEGE: Privilege operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. In the United States, privilege is granted to people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups:

White people (also, white-skinned* people); Able-bodied people; Heterosexuals; Males; Christians; Middle- or owning class people; Middle-aged people; English-speaking people.

INSTITUTIONAL POWER: The ability or official authority to decide what is best for others. The ability to decide who will have access to resources.

We can define privilege as: **a set of unearned benefits given to people who fit into a specific social group.** Society grants privilege to people because of certain aspects of their identity. Aspects of a person's identity can include race, class, gender, sexual orientation, language, geographical location, ability, and religion, to name a few.

“Privilege is the other side of oppression. It's often easier to notice oppression than privilege. It's definitely easier to notice the oppression you personally experience than the privileges you experience, since being mistreated is likely to leave a bigger impression on you than being treated fairly.”

EverydayFeminism, Sian Ferguson

Understanding Systems of Oppression

*Chart adapted from USC Suzanne Dworak-Peck School of Social Work

There are MANY more interlocking forms of oppression and systems of power which reinforce them. We recognize we have not listed examples of every form of privilege, system of power, and/or types of oppression

<u>Type of Oppression**</u>	<u>Target Group</u>	<u>Non-Target Group/Dominant Group</u>
Racial	People of color	White people
Class	Poor; working class	Middle and Owner Class
Gender	Cisgender & Transgender/Gender Non-Conforming (GNC) Women	Cisgender Men
Gender Identity	Transgender; GNC; Gender Non-Binary; Two-spirit	Cisgender people
Sexual orientation	Lesbian, gay, bisexual, Two-spirit	Heterosexual people
Ability	People with disabilities	People without disabilities
Religion	Non-Christian	Christian
Age	Children, Youth, and Elderly people	Adults
Educational Privilege	People without college degree	People with college degree
Immigrant status	Immigrant	U.S.-born
Language	Non-English	English