

Definitions of Concepts Related to Privilege and Oppression

Oppression: A system that maintains advantage and disadvantage, based on stereotyped social group memberships, and operates on individual, institutional and social/cultural levels.

- **Individual:** attitudes and actions that reflect prejudice against a social group (intentional and unintentional).
- **Institutional:** policies, laws, rules, norms, and customs enacted by organizations and social institutions that disadvantage some social groups and advantage other social groups. These institutions include religion, government, education, law, the media and the health care system (intentional and unintentional).
- **Societal/cultural:** social norms, roles, rituals, language, music and art that reflect and reinforce the belief that one social group is superior to another (intentional and unintentional).

Oppression depends on socialization into systems of belief that mask injustice and promote “common sense” rationales for accepting social injustice as part of the natural order, the result of meritocracy, hard work, or individual talent.

Oppression Results In: Disadvantage for Targeted Groups + Privilege for Advantaged Groups
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Privilege: Unearned, unasked for, often invisible benefits and advantages not available to members of targeted groups

Oppression is maintained by different dynamics among and within social groups:

Vertical Oppression: occurs in interactions between advantaged groups and targeted groups that maintain and reinforce oppression. Both members of advantaged and targeted groups are capable of prejudice, abuse, violence, and hatred, but only advantaged groups have the institutional and cultural power to back up their prejudices and turn them into widely held institutional and social policy. Claims of “reverse racism” or “reverse sexism” fail to take this dynamic into account.

Horizontal Oppression: interactions within groups that maintain and reinforce oppression. Can be advantaged-to-advantaged group dynamics or targeted to targeted group dynamics.

Internalized Oppression: Internalized oppression occurs when members of advantaged and targeted groups adopt the dominant ideology about their own groups that maintains and reinforces oppression. *Internalized domination:* members of advantaged groups accept their group’s superior social status as normal and deserved. *Internalized subordination:* targeted group members internalize messages of inferiority about their group.

From: Hardiman, R., Jackson, B., & Griffin, P. (2007). Conceptual foundations for social justice education. In Adams, M., Bell, L.A., & Griffin, P. (Eds.), *Teaching for diversity and social justice*, 2nd edition (pp. 35-66). New York: Routledge.