

Oppression

Table of Contents

Understanding Oppression	1
Oppression Definitions	2-4
Institutional Power Chart	5
Pyramid of Oppression	6
Internalized Oppression	7
What is Privilege?	8-12
Qualities of Being an Ally	13-14
Interrupting Oppressive Remarks	15
Interruption Skills	16-17
“Oppression” – an article by Marilyn Frye	18-20
Institutional Power and Domestic Violence	21
“No Public Safety” – a poem by Chrystos	22

Synopsis

We begin our volunteer training with a unit on basic oppression theory because understanding oppression is essential to understanding the dynamics of domestic and sexual violence and to working effectively with our agency’s diverse participants.

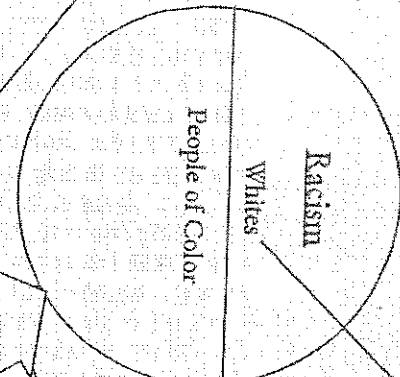
Power and control is central to oppression theory, where we sometimes refer to **agents** (the people who are privileged by oppression and maintain power and control in society) and **targets** (the people who are hurt by oppression). However, it is also important to begin to understand the complexity of intersecting oppressions and the ways in which these multiple forces effect the dynamics of abuse and barriers to leaving or accessing services for individual survivors. We will explore these concepts during this training.

As a volunteer, you will be working with people from all different backgrounds, experiences and identities. It is important that you not only work to understand potential barriers and experiences of those you will be working with, but also that you are working on you own issues of power and privilege. These two things are critical to being an effective advocate and support person. Someone who is working on ending oppression within themselves and their communities is called an **ally**. Volunteers will begin the process of becoming good allies in this training.

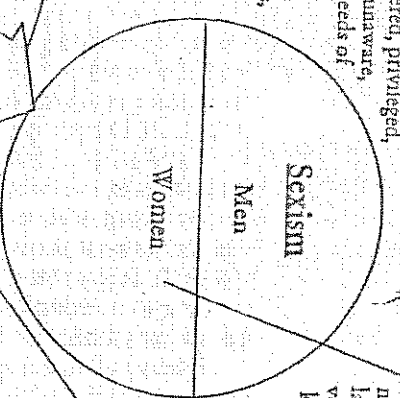
Understanding Oppression

quick guide

Institutional Types:
 housing
 accessibility
 employment
 education
 media
 health services
 government
 legal system
 law enforcement
 religious system
 family system
 taxation system
 welfare system

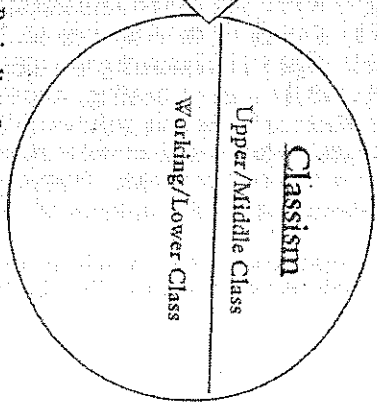
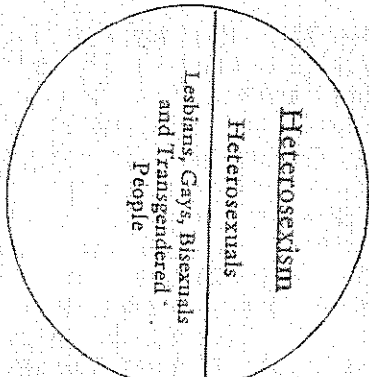


Agents: powered, privileged, named, normal, unaware, unconscious of needs of targets, often unconscious of inequality, visible, accepted.

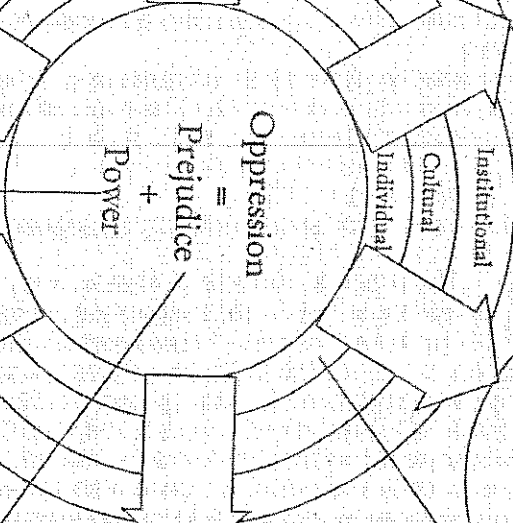


Targets: Disempowered, disrespected, named, devalued, different/other, stereotyped/labeled, excluded, invisible, suspect, very aware of self, conscious of inequalities, knowledgeable about agents

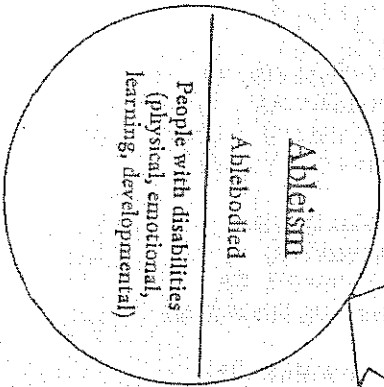
Individual Types:
 prejudices
 stereotypes
 attitudes
 behaviors
 beliefs
 jokes
 slurs
 harassment
 rape
 murder
 assault
 threats of violence



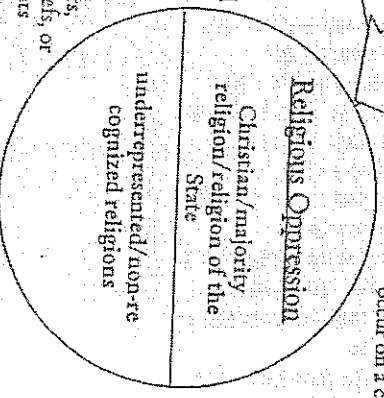
Prejudice: Inaccurate and/or negative beliefs about another social group and its members without basis in fact. Prejudice is often based on stereotypes and can occur on a conscious and unconscious level



Cultural Types:
 values
 standards of beauty
 language
 TV/movies
 arts/music
 publications
 religion
 concept of family
 societal values/norms
 dress
 orientation to time
 relationship to work
 historical events
 traditions/celebrations
 communication style
 epistemology



Social Power:
 The access to and availability of social goods, services, and the other social sanctions needed to influence others; enforce one's beliefs, or get what one wants



*Note: this diagram could not possibly take into account every form of oppression (for example, age and national origin are not discussed). Rather, it is intended to show the system of oppression and some of its manifestations.

Sources:

Katz, J.H. *White Awareness: Diversity Works*, Amherst, MA
 Culture Wheel, Dr. Bailey Jackson
 J.J. Scott

Compiled and adapted by Sara Hinkel, LGBT Issues Coordinator, Dean of Students Office, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Oppression Definitions

Prejudice:

An unjustifiable negative attitude towards individuals who belong to a specific social group. This can be an attitude towards specific races, ethnicities, religious groups, people who identify as a sexual or gender minorities, women, the elderly, people of size, etc. It harms the victim's self-concept, suppresses the human potential, creates tension and strife among groups, and even instigates wars by affecting the perception of individuals and groups.

Privilege:

a. The concrete benefits of access to resources and social rewards and the power to shape the norms and values of society which certain groups receive, unconsciously or consciously, by virtue of their skin color, their class status, their gender, their size, their sexual identity, their abilities, their age, etc.

b. A right, advantage, or immunity granted to or enjoyed by a person or group of people beyond common advantages of others; an exemption in a particular case from certain burdens or liabilities; a special advantage or benefit.

Power:

Possession of control or command over others. The ability to affect a person or group.

Prejudice + Privilege / Power = Oppression

The definitions for each type of oppression listed below each carry the same basic idea. The only thing that changes in each definition is the target groups and agent groups. Forms of Oppression include:

Racism:

The systematic subordination of members of targeted racial groups who have relatively little social power in the United States (Blacks, Latino/as, Native Americans, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Middle Easterners), by the members of the agent racial group who have relatively more social power (Whites). This subordination is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society. Racism is the systematic mistreatment experienced by people of color.

Sexism:

The systematic subordination of members of the targeted gender group who have relatively little social power in the United States (women), by the members of the agent gender group who have relatively more social power (men). This subordination is supported by the actions of individuals, cultural norms and values, and the institutional structures and practices of society. Sexism is the systematic mistreatment experienced by women.

Ableism:

The subordination of people with physical or cognitive disabilities by able-bodied people. Ableism is the systematic mistreatment experienced by people with physical or cognitive disabilities.

Classism:

The subordination of poor or working class people by middle class or wealthy people. Classism is the systematic mistreatment experienced by people not in the upper class.

Ageism:

The subordination of young or old people by middle-aged people. Ageism is the systematic mistreatment experienced by young or old people.

Heterosexism / Sexual and Gender Minority Oppression:

The subordination of lesbian, gay, bi, pan, queer, or trans people by heterosexual or non-trans people. Heterosexism is the systematic mistreatment of lesbian, gay, bi, queer, pan, or trans people.

Sizeism:

The subordination of people of size by people who fit into societies idea of "acceptable size." Sizeism is the systematic mistreatment experienced by people of size.

.....
Other related terms and ideas

Bigotry:

Obstinate and irrational devotion to one's own church, party, belief, or opinion.

Stereotype:

A cluster of characteristics that is associated with all group members of a specific social group. These characteristics may have positive or negative associations. Stereotypes create problems because they often perpetuate inaccurate information, and they put individuals and groups into "boxes" that can suppress human potential.

Discrimination:

Unjustifiable negative behavior towards a group and its members. Usually this involves behaving differently, usually unfairly, towards members of a group.

Institutions:

Social arrangements and practices through which collective actions are taken. Institutions include schools, churches, courts, police, government, business, medical institutions, etc.

Race:

A social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups.

Ethnicity:

A social construct which divides people into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base. Examples of different ethnic groups are Cape Verdean, Haitian, African American (Black);

Chinese, Korean, Vietnamese, Japanese (Asian); Cherokee, Mohawk, Navajo (Native American); Cuban, Mexican, Puerto Rican (Latino); Polish, Irish, German, French (White).

Individual Racism:

The beliefs, attitudes, and actions of individuals that support or perpetuate racism. Individual racism can occur at both an unconscious and conscious level, and can be both active and passive. Examples include telling a racist joke, using a racial epithet, or believing in the inherent superiority of Whites.

Institutional Racism:

The network of institutional structures, policies, and practices that create advantages and benefits for Whites, and discrimination, oppression, and disadvantages for people from targeted racial groups. The advantages created for Whites are often invisible to them, or are considered "rights" available to everyone as opposed to "privileges" awarded to only some individuals and groups.

Horizontal Racism:

The result of people of targeted racial groups believing, acting on, or enforcing the dominant (White) system of racial discrimination and oppression. Horizontal racism can occur between members of the same racial group (an Asian person telling another Asian wearing a sari to "dress like an American"; a Latino telling another Latino to stop speaking Spanish), or between members of different, targeted racial groups (Latinos believing stereotypes about Native Americans; Blacks not wanting Asians to move into a predominantly Black neighborhood.)

Internalized Racism:

The result of people of targeted racial groups believing, acting on, or enforcing the dominant system of beliefs about themselves and members of their own racial group. Examples include Blacks using creams to lighten their skin, Latinos believing that most competent administrator or leaders are white, Native Americans feeling that they cannot be as intelligent as Whites, Asians believing that racism is the result of People of Color not being able to raise themselves "by their own bootstraps."

INSTITUTIONAL POWER CHART

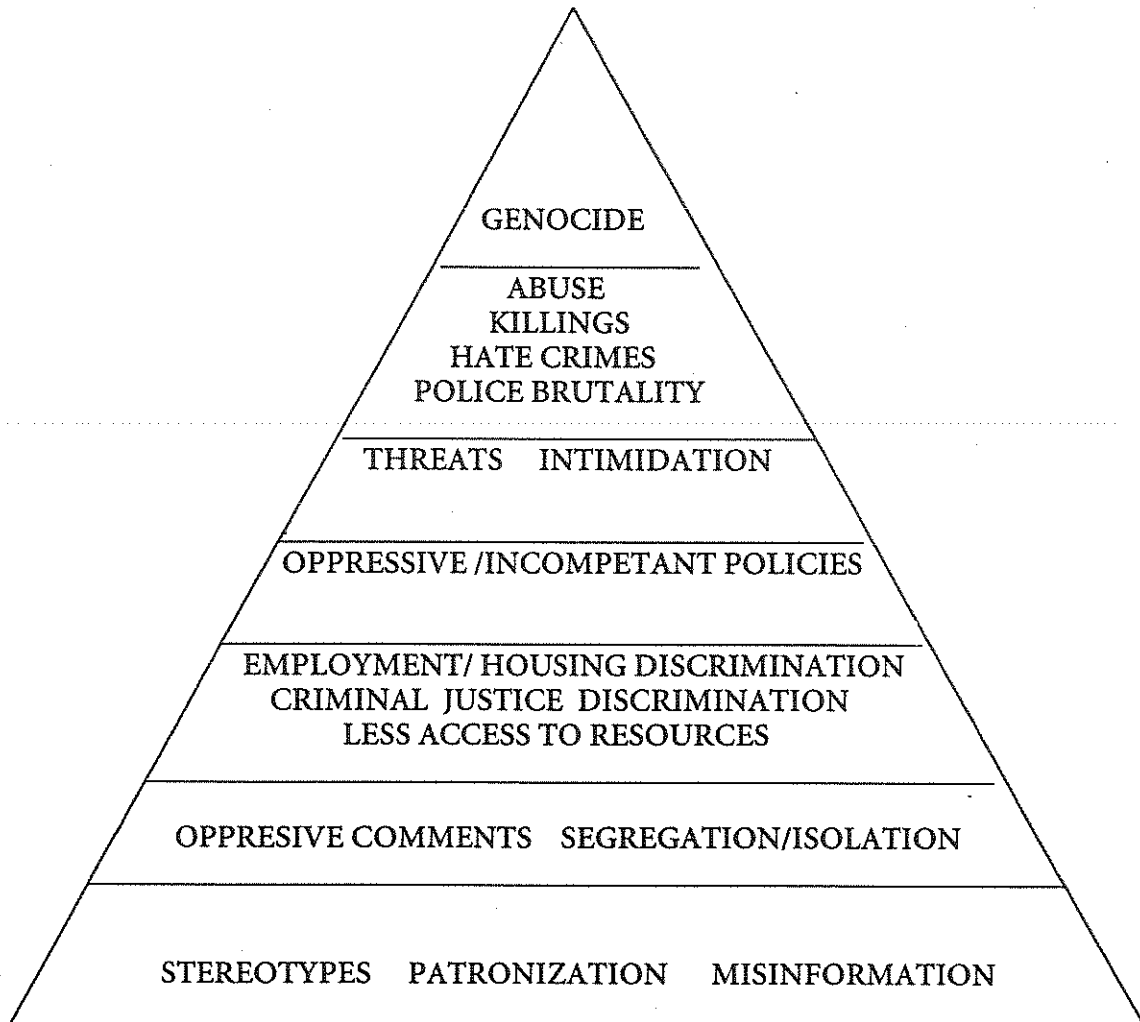
AGENTS	White	Male	Middle Class/ Wealthy	Middle-aged	English Speaking/ US citizen	Heterosexual	Non-Trans	Christian	Accepted Standard of size	College Educated	Norm
	Racism	Sexism	Oppression Class	Ageism	Xenophobia	Homophobia	Transphobia	Religious Imperialism	Size Oppression	Educational Elitism	Oppression
TARGETS	People of color	Female	Poor / Working class	Young or old	Non-English Speaking/ ESL, Un / documented immigrants	Lesbian, gay, bi, pan, queer	Trans	Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim, atheist, pagan, etc.	Non-accepted standards of size	Life Educated	Other

All of us will personally experience both the "Agents" and the "Targets" side of the chart.

Institutional Oppression = Prejudice + Power + Privilege

- The idea of reverse "isms" aren't realistic in light of institutional power. Even though all people can be privileged, different people have access to institutional power and privilege at different times.
- Institutional power is controlled by a minority of people.
- The "agents" side of the chart define "norms" which lead to the following:
The terms on the non-power side of the chart are too general to encompass the group it is supposed to represent (i.e. non-Christian.) Sometimes a term does not exist to describe the "Non-power" group that is not considered derogatory by mainstream standards (example: an unaccepted standard of size is "Fat," even if the group members themselves use this term.

Pyramid of Oppression



"Internalized oppression is not the cause of our mistreatment, it is the result of our mistreatment. It would not exist without the real external oppression that forms the social climate in which we exist.

Once oppression has been internalized, little force is needed to keep us submissive. We harbor inside ourselves the pain and the memories, the fears and the confusions, the negative self-images and the low expectations, turning them into weapons with which to re-injure ourselves, everyday of our lives."

—From "Internalized Oppression" by Micheline Mason.

External oppression is the unjust exercise of authority and power by one group over another. It includes imposing one group's belief system, values and life ways over another group. External oppression becomes INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION when we come to believe and act as if the oppressor's beliefs system, values and life way is a reality.

The result of internalized oppression is...

- Wanting to be like the more valued group
- Shame and disowning of individual and cultural reality
- Fracturing of community, division, separation and isolation
- Self doubt, self-blame, an inferiority complex and self-hate
- Loss of culture and language
- Chronic patterns of distress
- Violence/abuse and insults among own group
- "Feel good now" patterns of behavior such as drug and alcohol abuse
- Introduction, toleration, proliferation and internalization of other oppressions taught by dominant group

Internalized oppression is an extremely effective tool used by the oppressors. There is a lot to that old saying of divide and conquer; internalized oppression can create so much division or violence among a group that we work to keep ourselves oppressed. Examples could include the Europeans turning African tribes against each other in what became the slave wars and women victim blaming other women.

Like domestic violence, the process of forcing oppression to become internal is deliberate, methodical and happens over a span of time. Within the process there is violence as well as the continual threat of violence to reinforce the negative messages. Naturally most of us want to stay safe and avoid violence. As a result, some forms of internalized oppression have come out of a need for survival for some groups. An example could be behaviors developed in slavery era to assimilate to white culture as a necessary response to hatred and violence against Africans and African-Americans.

Also like domestic violence, the abuse that creates and fosters internalized oppression can be subtle and hard to identify; yet over time the constant barrage of such covert oppression can begin to seem "normal". Low self-esteem makes us blind to the process of oppression. It may be so far internalized that even the oppressed group may come to believe that "it's just the way we are."

It is also an effective tool for the dominant group because it weakens communities to fight against oppression by separating people and turning them against each other. Also, when we internalize oppression we may be afraid to fight against oppression because if we do we will be labeled with one of the stereotypes we are trying to fight. For example women may be seen as bitchy and aggressive, a lesbian maybe labeled militant, and a person of color labeled "angry" as if it were an insult, and a person with a disability may be labeled as too sensitive.

Abusers very often play on the survivors internalized oppression and use it to blame them and break them down.

SOURCES:

- Suzanne Lipsky, The Re-evaluation Counseling Communities, www.rc.org/
- www.letswrap.com/nadvinfo/examples.htm
- "Internalized Oppression: Looking Inside for the effects of racism" by Aticia Scott, from www.metropulse.com

What is Privilege?

Privileges are rights, advantages, or immunities granted to or enjoyed by a person or group or people beyond common advantages of others. Privilege isn't something that anyone earns or asks for. Instead, it is something that people receive based on arbitrary characteristics such as race, gender, age, ability, etc. Below are examples of how privilege operates. Most people experience privilege in at least one category.

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Male Privilege

From Allan G. Johnson *Privilege, Power, and Difference*. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2001. Pages 30-32.

I can walk alone at night without taking extra precautions for my safety.

People are more likely to take my ideas seriously because of my gender.

I can sleep with many women and be admired for it in some circles.

I make 25% more per hour, on average, than women.

Statistically, I will spend less time in jail than a woman will for committing the same crime.

I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my gender.

As a man, I can generally assume that when I go out in public, I won't be sexually harassed or assaulted, and if I am victimized, I won't be asked to explain what I was doing there.

As a man, I am charged a lower price for new and used cars.

As a man, I can generally assume that national heroes, success models, and other figures held up for general admiration will be men.

In general, men are more likely than women to control conversations and be allowed to get away with it, and to have their ideas and contributions taken seriously, even those that were suggested previously by a woman and dismissed or ignored.

As a man, I don't have to deal with an endless and exhausting stream of attention drawn to my gender (for example, to how sexually attractive I am.)

The standards used to evaluate men as *men* are consistent with the standard used to evaluate them in other roles such as occupations. Standards used to evaluate women as women are often different from those used to evaluate them in other roles. For example, a man can be both a "real man" and a successful and aggressive lawyer, while an aggressive woman lawyer may succeed as a lawyer but be judged as not measuring up as a woman.

Age Privilege

From Volunteers of America Family Center and Clackamas Women's Services

My driving abilities are never questioned because of my age.

Because of my age, I can vote and my opinions are taken seriously.

Because of my age, I can be sexual without people thinking it's weird.

My behavior isn't dismissed as being rebellious or a result of senility.

People within my age range are widely represented in places of power such as media, government, etc.

Because of my age, I am not as likely to be dependent on others to have my daily needs met, for finances, etc.

Size Privilege

From Volunteers of America Family Center and Clackamas Women's Services

Because of my size, I can shop where I want and find clothes that fit right.

Because of my size, I am never asked to pay for two airline seats.

Because of my size, no one accuses me of being unhealthy or lazy.

Because of my size, I can eat whatever I choose without people scolding, laughing, or judging me.

I can easily buy newspapers, magazines, posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, toys, and dolls featuring people of a similar size.

I can visit my health care professional and count on the fact that my weight won't be immediately labeled as a health issue.

Because of my size, I can take yoga classes, swimming lessons, and go the gym without being stared at. The instructors of fitness classes are comfortable working with people of my size.

Able-Bodied Privilege and People without cognitive, developmental, or learning disabilities.

From Volunteers of America Family Center and Clackamas Women's Services

Because I don't have cognitive or learning disabilities, I don't get labeled as stupid by standardized tests or others.

When trauma happens, people believe me and don't pass it off as a delusion or mental health issue.

I can be sure that people with similar abilities to me will be positively portrayed in the media.

Because I am able-bodied, I did not have to think about how I would enter the building today.

Because I don't have a cognitive or learning disability, I know that I'll be able to read instructions on tax, medical, and other important forms.

I can always find a bathroom that is accessible to me in public places.

If I decide to buy a car, I don't have to pay to have it customized.

I am not labeled because of my ability.

Straight Privilege

From Volunteers of America Family Center and Clackamas Women's Services

I am not asked to think about why I am straight.

Nobody calls me "straight" with maliciousness.

My individual behavior does not reflect on all people who identify as heterosexual.

I can be pretty sure that my roommate, neighbors, and co-workers will be comfortable with my sexual orientation.

If I pick up a magazine, watch TV, or play music, I can be certain that my sexual identity will be represented.

When I talk about my heterosexuality (such as in a joke, or talking about my relationships,) I will not be accused of pushing my sexual orientation onto others.

I do not have to fear that if my family or friends find out about my sexual orientation there will be economic, emotional, physical, or psychological consequences.

If there's an emergency involving my partner, I know I'll have a say in medical decisions and a right to visit them.

I do not have to fear revealing my sexual orientation to friends or family. It's assumed.

Because of my sexual orientation, I do not need to worry that people will harass me.

I can easily find a religious community that will not exclude me for being heterosexual.

I can live in the comfort of knowing that other people's assumptions about my sexual orientation are correct.

I can count on finding a therapist or doctor willing and able to talk about my sexuality. I can walk in public with my partner and not have people double-take or stare.

Class Privilege

From Volunteers of America Family Center and Clackamas Women's Services

Financial decisions don't play a prominent role in seeking out health care for myself or my family.

Because of my class, I have more options for continuing education.

I can choose to buy clothes and house-wares that are new.

I don't have to worry about how my family will pay for my funeral.

If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.

I can sometimes afford to take a vacation.

Homelessness does not top my list of financial worries.

Because of my class, I am more likely to have a financial safety-net such as a savings account, help from family, property or other investments to fall back on if need be.

I can provide myself and my family with basic needs: food, shelter, clothing, etc.

White Privilege

From Peggy McIntosh. "White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Backpack." Wellesley College, MA. 1988.

I can be sure that my children will be given curricular materials that testify to the existence of their race.

I can go shopping alone most of the time, pretty well assured that I will not be followed or harassed.

I can easily buy posters, postcards, picture books, greeting cards, dolls, toys, and children's magazines featuring people of my race.

I can choose public accommodation without fearing that people of my race cannot get in or will be mistreated.

If my day, week, or year is going badly, I need not ask of each negative episode or situation whether it has racial overtones.

I can take a job with an affirmative action employer without having co-workers on the job suspect that I got it because of race.

I can remain oblivious of the language and customs of persons of color, who constitute the world's majority, without feeling in my culture any penalty for such oblivion.

I can choose blemish cover or bandages in "flesh" color that more or less match my skin.

If a traffic cop pulls me over, or if the IRS audits my tax return, I can be sure I haven't been singled out because of my race.

I am never asked to speak for all the people of my racial group.

I can be pretty sure that if I need legal or medical help my race will not work against me.

I can arrange to protect my children most of the time from people who might not like them.

I can swear, or dress in second-hand clothing, or not answer letters without having people attribute these choices to the bad morals, the poverty, or the illiteracy of my race.

I can speak in public to a powerful male group without putting my race on trial.

Whether I use checks, credit cards, or cash, I can count on my skin color not to work against the appearance of financial reliability.

I can do well in a challenging situation without being called a credit to my race.

I can be pretty sure that my neighbors will be neutral or pleasant to me.

I can turn on the TV or open to the front page of the paper and see people of my color widely represented.

I can, if I wish, arrange to be in the company of people of my race most of the time.

If I should need to move, I can be pretty sure of renting or purchasing housing in an area that I can afford and in which I would want to live.

When I am told about our national heritage or about "civilization" I am shown that people of my color made it what it is.

"Being an ally is the process of working to develop individual attitudes, institutions and a culture in which people who are different feel they matter. This work is motivated by an enlightened self interest to end oppression." J.Jay Scott and Vernon Wall

Qualities of an Ally:

1. Has worked to develop an understanding of oppression, identity, and the needs of oppressed groups.
2. Chooses to align with the oppressed communities and responds to their needs.
3. Believes that it is in his/her self-interest to be an ally.
4. Is committed to the personal growth (in spite of the probability of discomfort and possible pain) required.
5. Is quick to take pride in personal success in responding to oppression and overcoming fears.
6. Expects support from other allies.
7. Is able to acknowledge and articulate how patterns of fear have operated in their lives.
8. Expects to make some mistakes but does not use it as an excuse for non-action.
9. Knows that both sides of an ally relationship have a clear responsibility for their own response to the oppression whether or not persons on the other side choose to respond.
10. Knows that in the most empowered ally relationships the persons in the non-oppressed role initiate the change toward personal, institutional, and societal justice and equality.
11. Knows that he/she is responsible for humanizing or empowering their role in society, particularly as their role relates to responding to oppression.
12. Promotes a sense of community with oppressed groups and teaches others about the importance of outreach.
13. Has a sense of humor.

Strategies for Being an Effective Ally:

1. Assume that all people want to be allies to people in oppressed groups. Assume that you in particular are good enough and smart enough to be an effective ally.
2. Assume that you have a right to be concerned with other people's liberation issues.
2. Assume that all people in the targeted group want members of your group, and you in particular, As an ally.
3. Assume that any apparent rejections of you as an ally are the result of the targeted groups' experience of oppression and internalized oppression.
5. Assume that people in the targeted group are already communicating to you in best way that they can at the present time. Assume they can and will do better.
6. Assume that the targeted individuals are experts on their own experience and that you have much to learn from them.
7. Recognize that as an agent of change you are an expert on the experience of having been conditioned to take the oppressor role.
8. Assume that the targeted group are survivors and that they have a long history of resistance.
9. Become an expert on this history and assist the targeted group to take full pride in their history.
10. Become an expert on all the issues which are of concern to people in the targeted group, especially the issues which are most closely tied in to their internalized oppression.

11. Assume that making mistakes is part of the learning process of being an even more effective ally.

Acknowledge and apologize for mistakes; learn from the, but don't retreat.

12. Don't attempt to convince the targeted group that you are on their side; just be there.

13. Do not expect gratitude from people in the targeted group; remember, being an ally is a matter

of your choice. Graciously accept the gratitude that you may get but don't expect it.

A Half Dozen Tips:

1. Educate yourself. Read, research, and talk directly with the people that are experiencing the oppression and challenges.

2. Know yourself. Get in touch with how you feel about the issues, yourself, and your comfort level with the pros/cons of being an ally.

3. Use inclusive languages. For example, use terms such as significant other instead of girlfriend or boyfriend, relationships instead of marriage.

4. Create a comfortable setting. Be conscious of the things you use to decorate your living and work environment.

5. Confront jokes and slurs. Silence may communicate your condoning the oppressive statement.

6. Educate and challenge your staff and colleagues. Take every opportunity to share your information with them, but do not judge them when they do not agree with your views.

Benefits of Being an Ally:

1. You open yourself up to the possibility of close relationships with more people.

2. You may become less likely to stereotype.

3. You have opportunities to learn from, teach, and have an impact on a population with whom you might not otherwise interact.

5. You may be a reason an individual finds comfort that his/her life is more valued for who they are.

Things that Discourage People from Becoming Allies:

1. Being labeled, for example an ally to the GLBT community may be labeled a gay, lesbian, or bisexual by the heterosexual population (by association). The label is not negative itself but it can affect the ally's commitment and support for the LGBT community.

2. Allies are often mocked and ridiculed by people that view the issue as unimportant and unpopular.

3. Allies may be alienated by friend and colleagues that are not comfortable with the topic. These people may noticeably distance themselves from the ally in order to avoid conflict or labels.

4. Allies may become victim of overt or subtle discrimination such as not getting appointed to a committee, a negative reflection on an evaluation or needing to look for a position that is more supportive of their views.

5. Learning the culture and language may be difficult if not impossible without assistance from a member an oppressed group you are an ally to.

7. Due to some past experiences with people in the agent group, people in the oppressed/target group may question the ally's motivation.

Interrupting Oppressive Remarks

Some techniques you might find useful

Education: Share Information

- "What I know about that word is that it has been used to hurt people."
- "I believe that everyone deserves to be safe. Women are hurt by other women in relationships and lots of times they are afraid to talk about it because society has such negative views of lesbians. But I really believe that all people deserve to be safe and respected."
- "You know, even though it sounds like it's a compliment when you say 'all Asian people are so smart,' I think it might not always be such a compliment. I think it sets up a hard standard – what if you're Asian and you struggle in school, or don't feel like you're smart? The message then is that you're not a real Asian person if you're not smart, and that there's something wrong with you."
- "Really? That hasn't been my experience with that group of people. Actually, I think it isn't very useful to make generalizations about groups of people because people really are quite different. This is what my experience has been..."
- "In my experience, people prefer to be called Asian if you don't know their specific nationality, rather than 'Oriental' because 'Oriental' actually refers to an object (like a rug or a vase) where Asian refers to people."
- "You know, many women who are in relationships where they are being hurt feel like it's their fault and they're crazy. It's actually very common to feel those things."
- "Often people ask me, 'why doesn't she just leave?' Think about what a woman has to do if she wants to leave an abusive partner. She has to find a job, an apartment, health care, child care, fear for her life, ... Sometimes I'm amazed that so many women do leave, considering how hard it is."
- "Often people ask me, 'why doesn't she just leave?' I think that's victim-blaming and that a more poignant question is 'why doesn't he leave, or why doesn't he stop abusing?'"
- "Sometimes people tell us stuff about others that isn't true, or sometimes we get ideas about people before we get to know them. What I have learned is that people are all different. Some people are mean, and some are nice, and some are scary, and some are safe. The way people look doesn't mean you can tell what they are like on the inside."

Interruption Skills

- Think well of others!
- Know your objective and stay on track
- Teamwork – use friends (if it would help) and policies as back-up
- Ask clarifying questions
- Use statistics and facts
- Speak from personal experience
- Use humor (when applicable)
- Demonstrate patience
- Think about ways the person you're interrupting might be oppressed
- Make / draw parallels (when applicable)
- Dispel generalizations / myths
- Follow your instinct (Listen to your body – is the situation making you feel weird?)
- Make / include positive, validating comments while interruption
- Know what you know... don't be afraid to access resources, know your heart.
- Breathe, step away, take a break, use the hold button
- Use "I" statements – don't accuse or attack
- Give new information, think education
- Take charge – demonstrate your leadership skills
- Use non-verbal communication skills (demonstrate warmth and understanding with your body language)
- Give invitation to dialogue (if you feel comfortable doing so)
- Be non-judgmental
- Don't lecture, converse

Present your thoughts – point out what you see happening

- "I noticed that you are talking really negatively about yourself."
- "I noticed that you used the word _____. What did you mean by that?"
- "That sounds kind of racist to me."
- "It sounds like you're uncomfortable with her because she's Mexican."
- "It seems like you're being pretty judgmental."

Stop the behavior. Offer alternatives if you want to.

- "What you just said isn't okay with me. Please don't do it around me again."
- "I would like you to stop using that word."

Questions

- "It sounds like you think that all African-American people are on welfare. Is that what you really think?"
- "Do you have any idea why what you said might hurt someone's feelings?"
- "Can you say more about what you mean?"
- "Where did you hear that information?"
- "What does that person's (race, ethnicity, sexuality, age, ability) have to do with this conversation? Do you specify if someone is white, heterosexual, and able-bodied?"
- "Do you know how that word has been used historically?"

Humor

- "You know every single person who is Native American and they are all exactly like that?"
- "You'd think that people could just all be people, wouldn't you?"

Developed by Clackamas Women's Service and Volunteers of America Family Center

OPPRESSION

Marilyn Frye

It is a fundamental claim of feminist that women are oppressed. The word "oppression" is a strong word. It repels and attracts. It is dangerous and dangerously fashionable and endangered. It is much misused, and sometimes not innocently. The statement that women are oppressed is frequently met with the claim that men are oppressed too. We hear that oppressing is oppressive to those who oppress as well as to those they oppress. Some men cite as evidence of their oppression their much-advertised inability to cry. It is tough, we are told, to be masculine. When the stresses and frustrations of being a man are cited as evidence that oppressors are oppressed by their oppressing, the word "oppression" is being stretched to meaninglessness; it is treated as though its scope includes any and all human experience of limitation or suffering, no matter the cause, degree or consequence. Once such usage has been put over on us, then if ever we deny that any person or group is oppressed, we seem to imply that we think they never suffer and have no feelings. We are accused of insensitivity, even of bigotry. For women, such accusation is particularly intimidating, since sensitivity is one of the few virtues that has been assigned to us. If we are found insensitive, we may fear we have no redeeming traits at all and perhaps are not real women. Thus are we silenced before we begin: the name of our situation drained of meaning and our guilt mechanisms tripped.

But this is nonsense. Human beings can be miserable without being oppressed, and it is perfectly consistent to deny that a person or group is oppressed without denying that they have feelings or that they suffer....

The root of the word "oppression" is the element "press." *The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button.* Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gases or liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain,

restrict or prevent the thing's motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce.

The mundane experience of the oppressed provides another clue. One of the most characteristic and ubiquitous features of the world as experienced by oppressed people is the double bind – situations in which options are reduced to a very few and all of them expose one to penalty, censure or deprivation. For example, it is often a requirement upon oppressed people that we smile and be cheerful. If we comply, we signal our docility and our acquiescence in our situation. We need not, then, be taken note of. We acquiesce in being made invisible, in our occupying no space. We participate in our own erasure. On the other hand, anything but the sunniest countenance exposes us to being perceived as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous. This means, at the least, that we may be found "difficult" or unpleasant to work with, which is enough to cost one one's livelihood; at worst, being seen as mean, bitter, angry or dangerous has been known to result in rape, arrest, beating and murder. One can only choose to risk one's preferred form and rate of annihilation.

Another example: It is common in the United States that women, especially younger women, are in a bind where neither sexual activity nor sexual inactivity is all right. If she is heterosexually active, a woman is open to censure and punishment for being loose, unprincipled or a whore. The "punishment" comes in the form of criticism, snide and embarrassing remarks, being treated as an easy lay by men, scorn from her more restrained female friends. She may have to lie and hide her behavior from her parents. She must juggle the risks of unwanted pregnancy and dangerous contraceptive. On the other hand, if she refrains from heterosexual activity, she is fairly constantly harassed by men who try to persuade her into it and pressure her to "relax" and "let her hair down"; she is threatened with labels like "frigid," "uptight," "man-hater," "bitch" and "cocktease." The same parents who would be disapproving of her sexual activity may be worried by her inactivity because it suggests she is not or will not be popular, or is not sexually normal. She may be charged with lesbianism.

If a woman is raped, then if she has been heterosexually active she is subject to the presumption that she liked it (since she is supposedly "repressed and frustrated"). Both heterosexual activity and heterosexual nonactivity are likely to be taken as proof that you wanted to be raped, and hence, of course, weren't *really* raped at all. You can't win. You are caught in a bind, caught between systematically related pressures.

Women are caught like this, too, by networks of forces and barriers that expose one to penalty, loss or contempt whether one works outside the home or not, is on welfare or not, bears children or not, raises children or not, marries or not, stays married or not, is heterosexual, lesbian, both or neither. Economic necessity; confinement to racial and/or sexual job ghettos; sexual harassment; sex discrimination; pressures or competing expectations and judgments about *women*, *wives* and *mothers* (in the society at large, in racial and ethnic subcultures and in one's own mind); dependence (full or partial) on husbands, parents or the state; commitment to political ideas; loyalties to racial or ethnic or other "minority" groups; the demands of self-respect and responsibilities to others. Each of these factors exists in complex tensions with every other, penalizing or prohibiting all of the apparently available options. And nipping at one's heels, always, is the endless pack of little things. If one dresses one way, one is subject to the assumption that one is advertising one's sexual availability; if one dresses another way, one appears to "not care about oneself" or to be "unfeminine." If one uses "strong language," one invites categorization as a whore or slut; if one does not, one invites categorization as a "lady" – one too delicately constituted to cope with robust speech or the realities to which it presumably refers.

The experience of oppressed people is that the living of one's life is confined and shaped by forces and barriers which are not accidental or occasional and hence avoidable, but are systematically related to each other in such a way as to catch one between and among them and restrict or penalize motion in any direction. It is the experience of being caged in:

all avenues, in every direction, are blocked or booby trapped.

Cages. Consider a birdcage. If you look very closely at just one wire in the cage, you cannot see the other wires. If your conception of what is before you is determined by this myopic focus, you could look at that one wire, up and down the length of it, and be unable to see why a bird would not just fly around the wire any time it wanted to go somewhere. Furthermore, even if, one day at a time, you myopically inspected each wire, you still could not see why a bird would have trouble going past the wires to get anywhere. There is no physical property of any one wire, *nothing* that the closest scrutiny could discover, that will reveal how a bird could be inhibited or harmed by it except in the most accidental way. It is only when you step back, stop looking at the wires one by one, microscopically, and take a macroscopic view of the whole cage, that you can see why the bird does not go anywhere; and then you will see it in a moment. It will require no great subtlety of mental powers. It is perfectly *obvious* that the bird is surrounded by a network of systematically related barriers, no one of which would be the least hindrance to its flight, but which, by their relations to each other, are as confining as the solid walls of a dungeon.

It is now possible to grasp one of the reasons why oppression can be hard to see and recognize: one can study the elements of an oppressive structure with great care and some good will without seeing the structure as whole, and hence without seeing or being able to understand that one is looking at a cage and that there are people there who are caged, whose motion and mobility are restricted, whose lives are shaped and reduced.

The arresting of vision at a microscopic level yields such common confusion as that about the male door-opening ritual. This ritual, which is remarkably widespread across classes and races, puzzles many people, some of whom do and some of whom do not find it offensive. Look at the scene of the two people approaching a door. The male steps slightly ahead and opens the door. The male holds the door open while the female glides through. Then the male goes

through. The door closes after them. "Now how," one innocently asks, "can those crazy womenslibbers say that is oppressive? The guy *removed* a barrier to the lady's smooth and unruffled progress." But each repetition of this ritual has a place in a pattern, in fact in several patterns. One has to shift the level of one's perception in order to see the whole picture.

The door-opening pretends to be a helpful service, but the helpfulness is false. This can be seen by noting that it will be done whether or not it makes any practical sense. Infirm men and men burdened with packages will open doors for able-bodied women who are free of physical burdens. Men will impose themselves awkwardly and jostle everyone in order to get to the door first. The act is not determined by convenience or grace. Furthermore, these very numerous acts of unneeded or even noisome "help" occur in counterpoint to a pattern of men not being helpful in many practical ways in which women might welcome help. What *women* experience is a world in which gallant princes charming commonly make a fuss about being helpful and providing small services when help and services are of little or no use, but in which there are rarely ingenious and adroit princes at hand when substantial assistance is really wanted either in mundane affairs or in situations of threat, assault or terror. There is no help with the (his) laundry; no help typing a report at 4:00 a.m.; no help in mediating disputes among relatives or children. There is nothing but advice that women should stay indoors after dark, be chaperoned by a man, or when it comes down to it, "lie back and enjoy it."

The gallant gestures have no practical meaning. Their meaning is symbolic. The door-opening and similar services provided are services which really are needed by people who are for one reason or another incapacitated — unwell, burdened with parcels, etc. So the message is that women are incapable. The detachment of the acts from the concrete realities of what women need and do not need is a vehicle for the message that women's actual needs and interests are unimportant or irrelevant. Finally, these gestures imitate the behavior of servants toward masters and thus

mock women, who are in most respects the servants and caretakers of men. The message of the false helpfulness of male gallantry is female dependence, the invisibility or insignificance of women, and contempt for women.

One cannot see the meanings of these rituals if one's focus is riveted upon the individual event in all its particularity, including the particularity of the individual man's present conscious intentions and motives and the individual woman's conscious perception of the event in the moment. It seems sometimes that people take a deliberately myopic view and fill their eyes with things seen microscopically in order not to see macroscopically. At any rate, whether it is deliberate or not, people can and do fail to see the oppression of women because they fail to see macroscopically and hence fail to see the various elements of the situation as systematically related in larger schemes.

As the cageness of the birdcage is a macroscopic phenomenon, the oppressiveness of the situations in which women live our various and different lives is a macroscopic phenomenon. Neither can be *seen* from a microscopic perspective. But when you look macroscopically you can see it — a network of forces and barriers which are systematically related and which conspire to the immobilization, reduction and molding of women and the lives we live...

INSTITUTIONAL POWER AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

- **Men's ability to batter is mirrored and supported by their institutional power.**

Example: The economic, social and political imbalance of power men have over women is one of the primary reasons for domestic violence. Men/boys are socialized to be in control and powerful in intimate relationships as well as institutionally. However it is important to remember that battering is still a choice.

- **The availability of resources for survivors are partially determined by other oppressed groups to which she belongs.**

Example: A battered Vietnamese speaking woman will find fewer resources in her language and fewer social service that are culturally sensitive. A battered woman under 18 will have fewer housing options and laws that she can access.

- **The stereotypes, which label some communities or relationships as more or less likely to be violent, stem from oppressions and decrease the safety of survivors.**

Example: A stereotype that African-American men are violent results in increased arrests, convictions and jail sentences. This may cause African-American families to be more hesitant in calling the police. This stereotype also suggests that domestic violence is "normal" in African-American families and therefore less serious. A stereotype that there is not domestic violence in lesbian relationships may result in social workers overlooking the warning signs of abuse or not seeing the violence as dangerous.

- **The individual relationship between a survivor and a case manager is affected by the institutional power represented in the manager. This relationship will also be affected by the power relationships defined in the chart.**

Example: Service providers need to be aware of the amount of power they have over people who need those services. Most specifically affected will be the relationship between a male caseworker and female survivor.

NO PUBLIC SAFETY

I can't tell you how much
they want to lock her up
She sleeps in their building It's trespassing How would you
like to come to work in the morning & have to step over her
See how little she has compared to you
Chronic Paranoid Schizophrenic they say
The law is ambiguous Can she take care of herself
or not
Obviously not if she thinks the building for Public Safety
means just that
There are laws against the literal interpretation of words
She has been taken to Western State Hospital & observed
They say she hallucinates
Join the army murder a lot of people you don't know but don't
hallucinate That's crazy
Incompetent to stand trial they say Would you
let her live in your house sleep on your porch
keep her bags in your garage pitch a tipi for her on your lawn
What would the neighbors think
Better lock her up We don't want to look at failure scares us
isn't safe They say for her to sleep alone in that building
why anything could happen to her
Let's keep the building warm & lit all night even after
the janitors go home We like to take better care
of our papers file cabinets metal desks plastic chairs
potted plants posters of trees in Yosemite
than an old woman
Who does she think she is anyway expecting us to help
to give her safety Anyone who doesn't take care of themselves
should be locked up we have lots of places for it
We're all terrified not of growing old but of being unable
to take care of ourselves
Would you rather sleep in the Public Safety Building
or be locked up on a back ward at Western State Hospital
the food the drugs regular & terrible
This is her second trial Keep the lawyers off the streets
They can take care of themselves with a little help
from their wives who clean buy groceries take the suits

to the cleaners change the bed cook meals raise
the children & admire
Who admires Anna Mae Peoples besides me
What is shelter the judge asks rhetorically
you won't catch HIM sleeping under bridges or begging
\$40,230 buys a lot of shelter a king size bed
hot massage shower wall to wall carpeting or probably
oriental rugs A long time ago Anna Mae Peoples
probably waxed judges' floors
Too old now her back hurts all the time
the cool floor of the Public Safety Building is all she asks
They want to label her gravely disabled
they think there's a very good chance they'll win
Nowhere in the six column article
is one word
that Anna Mae Peoples has to say

for Anna Mae Peoples

CHRUSTERS