

Exploring Power and Privilege

Privilege

often gives

a person

or group

power

Ready... What is power?

A good definition of "power" is "the ability to get what you want."

Groups and individuals both pursue and exert power. On an individual level, people find power within themselves in different ways; what makes one person feel powerful may not make someone else feel the same way. For example, one person might find power in being tall, while another person might feel that being tall diminishes their ability to get what they want.

What is privilege?

Privilege is a special advantage or right that a person is born into or acquires during their lifetime. Privilege is not available to everyone in society. Privilege and power are closely related: Privilege often gives a person or group power over others.

Prejudice, "Isms" and Oppression

Oppression

is based on

**power and
privilege—**

while

prejudice

is based on

stereotypes

What is prejudice?

Prejudice is an attitude or belief about another person or group that is based on stereotypes instead of on experience or reason.

When thinking about prejudice, it's important to remember that power is not involved with the definition or with the act of being prejudiced. A woman—who in our society does not have as much power as a man—can be prejudiced against men. She may, for example, think that all men are weak. We know that this is not a true statement; this is one woman's prejudiced belief about men. If we reverse that situation and think about a man who believes all women were weak, that would be sexism. Let's look a little more closely at why this is sexism by understanding what an "ism" is.

What are "isms"?

"Isms" are prejudiced beliefs, behaviors and institutional practices by a group or a person with power directed against specific groups of people.



Sexism is one example of this phenomenon. Men in our society have more privilege than women. In schools today, men's sports often get more funding than women's sports. Men often make more money than women who do the same job. If a man is a political figure, the media often focuses on his opinions, while if a woman is a political figure, the media often comments on her clothing, hair or smile. Each of these is a form of sexism.

Prejudice + Power = sexism, racism, or other "isms"

What is oppression?

Oppression is a pattern or system of inequality that gives power and privileges to members of one group of people at the expense of another.

Oppression Circles

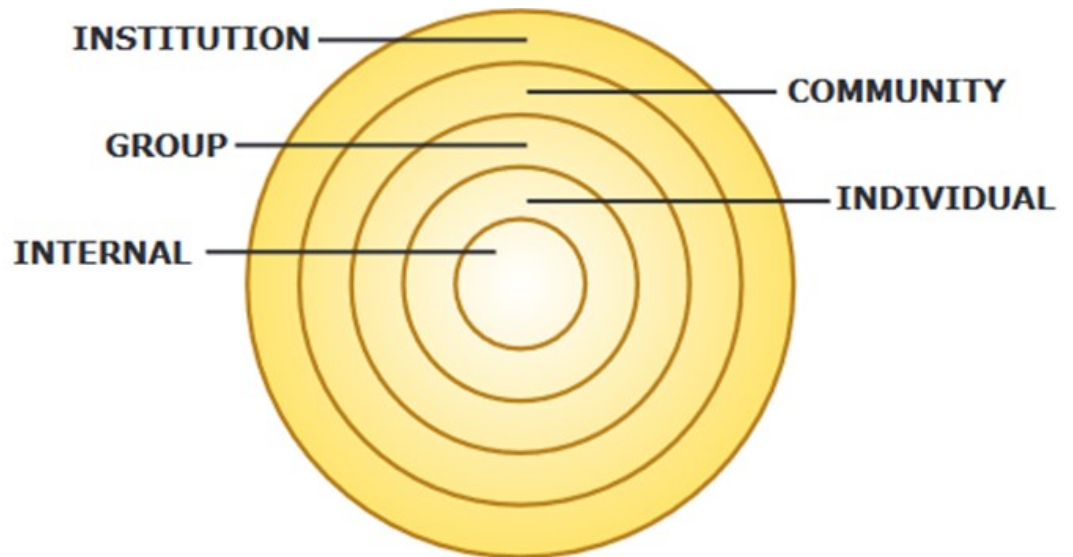
Ready... Oppression takes different forms in different cultures, countries, communities, families and relationships. To fully understand how oppression works, it is illuminating to examine oppression on all levels.

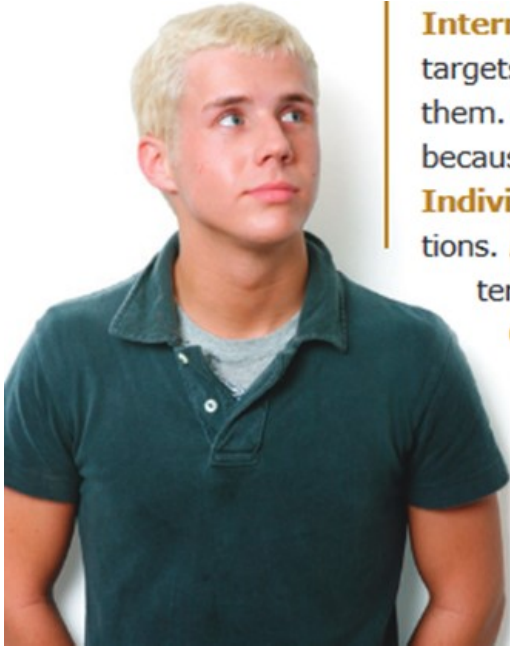
What steps

can you take

to help

**end
oppression?**





Internalized oppression is the process by which people who are the targets of oppression begin to believe the prejudices directed against them. *Example:* A deaf man thinks that he deserves to be treated poorly because he is deaf.

Individual oppression occurs between people in one-on-one interactions. *Example:* A landlord refuses to rent an apartment to a prospective tenant because of the tenant's race, gender or sexual orientation.

Group oppression is oppression a person feels within a group of people. *Example:* A group of friends makes plans to take a trip together without recognizing that one member of the group cannot afford to participate.

Community oppression is oppression that one experiences within a community to which they belong. *Example:* A lesbian attends a house of worship that preaches homosexuality is a sin.

Institutionalized oppression occurs when society gives privilege to one group at the expense of another through the use of language, media, education, religion, economics and laws. *Example:* When a person watches TV, they see primarily white people as actors, anchors and talk-show hosts.