

**GLOSSARY OF TERMS**  
**Compiled by *Allies for Change***  
**[www.alliesforchange.org](http://www.alliesforchange.org)**

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

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

**STEREOTYPE:** An exaggerated or distorted belief about a group that attributes characteristics to member of a particular group, simplistically lumping them together and refusing to acknowledge differences among members of the group.

**OPPRESSION:** The combination of prejudice and institutional power which creates a system that discriminates against some groups (often called “target groups”) and benefits other groups (often called “dominant or nontarget groups”). Examples of these systems are racism, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, ageism, and anti-Semitism. These systems enable dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom, and access to basic resources such as health care, education, employment, and housing.

**TARGETS OF OPPRESSION**

Targets of oppression are members of social identity groups that are disenfranchised, exploited, and victimized in a variety of ways by members of nontarget or dominant groups and the nontarget's systems or institutions. Targets of oppression are subject to containment, having their choices and movement restricted and limited; are seen and treated as expendable and replaceable, without an individual identity apart from their group; and are compartmentalized into narrowly defined roles.

Targets of oppression are people subjected to exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism, and violence. Targets of oppression are kept in their place by the dominant (nontarget) group's ideology, which supports oppression by denying that it exists and blames the conditions of oppression on actions of the targets.

Targets of oppression have fewer "life chances" or benefits as a result of their membership in a particular social group. As examples, there is a higher likelihood that African American males will be arrested than will Caucasian males, there is a greater chance that males will have a salary higher than females; and a higher probability that persons using a wheel-chair for mobility will have fewer job opportunities than non-disabled people.

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

white people;  
able-bodied people;  
heterosexuals;  
males;  
Christians;  
middle or owning class people;  
middle-aged people;  
English-speaking people.

Privilege is characteristically invisible to people who have it. People in dominant groups often believe that they have earned the privileges that they enjoy or that everyone could have access to these privileges if only they worked to earn them. In fact, privileges are unearned and they are granted people in the dominant groups whether they want those privileges or not and regardless of their stated intent.

Unlike targets of oppression, people in dominant groups are frequently unaware that they are members of the dominant group due to the privilege of being able to see themselves as persons rather than as stereotypes.

### **NONTARGET GROUP MEMBERS**

Nontarget group members are members of the dominant social groups in the United States, privileged by birth or acquisition, who knowingly or unknowingly exploit and reap unfair advantage over members of groups that are targets of oppression. Nontargets are also trapped by the system of institutionalized oppression that benefits them, and are confined to roles and prescribed behaviors. In United States culture, nontargets have the power to define the "norm" for what is reality, they see themselves as normal or proper, whereas targets are likely to be labeled as deviant, evil, abnormal, substandard, or defective.

**RACISM** : Racism is a system in which one race maintains supremacy over another race through a set of attitudes, behaviors, social structures, and institutional power. Racism is a “system of structured dis-equality where the goods, services, rewards, privileges, and benefits of the society are available to individuals according to their presumed membership in” particular racial groups. (Barbara Love, 1994. *Understanding Internalized Oppression*). A person of any race can have prejudices about people of other races, but only members of the dominant social group can exhibit racism because racism is prejudice plus the institutional power to enforce it.

**ALLY**: An ally is a person whose commitment to dismantling oppression is reflected in a willingness to do the following:

- educate oneself about the oppression;
- learn from and listen to people who are targets of the oppression;
- examine and challenge one's own prejudices, stereotypes, and assumptions;
- work through feelings of guilt, shame, and defensiveness to understand what is beneath them and what needs to be healed;
- learn and practice the skills of challenging oppressive remarks, behaviors, policies and institutional structures;
- act collaboratively with members of the target group to dismantle oppression.

## **INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION**

The process whereby people in the target group make oppression internal and personal by coming to believe that the lies, prejudices, and stereotypes about them are true. Members of target groups exhibit internalized oppression when they alter their attitudes, behaviors, speech, and self-confidence to reflect the stereotypes and norms of the dominant group. Internalized oppression can create low self-esteem, self-doubt, and even self-loathing. It can also be projected outward as fear, criticism, and distrust of members of one's target group.

## **CULTURAL APPROPRIATION**

The use by people in the dominant group of the artifacts, traditions, cultural creations, or rituals of people in a target group without their permission. Cultural appropriation usually involves taking these customs, traditions, objects, or rituals out of their cultural or spiritual context and using them for the personal edification or financial gain of people in the dominant group.

Examples of cultural appropriation include:

- The use or purchase by white North Americans of Native American sacred objects and ceremonies such as eagle feathers, pipes, chants, dances, vision quests, and sweat lodges;
- The writings, teachings, workshops, and rituals by white people posing as indigenous people or using fictitious characters that portray the "Indian" way of life. Example: author Lynn Andrews, a white woman whose books have sold more copies than all Native authors combined.
- The use of cultural group names as names for mascots of sports teams, schools, and other institutions. Often these mascots are portrayed in images that demean Native peoples. Sacred objects are also utilized as a way of whipping up team spirit. Examples: The Cleveland Indians and the Fighting Illini of the University of Illinois. In the case of the latter, the team mascot is an "Indian chief" who wears a Native costume and headdress and does mock chants and dances during halftime.
- Removal of human remains and artifacts from burial mounds for placement in North American or European museums.

*This glossary was compiled by Allies for Change, P.O. Box 138, Lyons, MI 48851 ~  
www.alliesforchange.org. We are indebted to these sources: cultural bridges in Questa, New Mexico; The Women's Theological Center in Boston, Massachusetts; and The National Council for Community and Justice in New York City.*