

# Systems of Oppression and Privilege

*This quick reference provides basic definitions for common terms and concepts related to oppression and privilege to support discussion and further learning.*

## **Ableism:**

Discrimination and exclusion based on one's abilities (mental, neurological, intellectual, emotional, and/or physical) and productivity. It often exhibits through social stigma, and the maintenance of physical and systemic barriers to resources and opportunities.

## **Ageism:**

Discrimination and exclusion based on one's age, particularly those deemed especially young or especially old. It tends to operate in ways that benefit working-age adults.

## **Cisheterosexism:**

Discrimination at the intersection of cissexism and heterosexism which privileges cisgender and heterosexual norms and identities, and punishes anyone who fails to uphold those norms.

## **Cissexism:**

Discrimination against trans and gender diverse identities and/or expressions. It includes the presumption that all people are cisgender and produces barriers for anyone who fails to align with dominant gender expectations.

## **Classism:**

Discrimination based on one's real or perceived economic status or background. It includes individual attitudes and systems that function to benefit the upper class at the expense of the lower classes.

## **Colonialism:**

The expansion of European sociopolitical and cultural systems into territories already inhabited by Indigenous peoples for the purposes of acquiring new lands and resources. It includes the marginalization and erasure of Indigenous languages, cultures, and traditional ways of life.

## **Fatphobia:**

Fear, hatred, or contempt for fat people and the stigmatization of individuals with bigger bodies. It often exhibits through the treatment of fat bodies as being in need of correction and discipline.

## **Heterosexism:**

Discrimination and prejudice in favour of heterosexuality. It includes the presumption that all people are heterosexual and produces barriers for anyone who fails to uphold dominant expectations of heterosexuality.

## **Intersectionality:**

A concept coined by theorist, Kimberlé Crenshaw, that recognizes how a person's experience is influenced by the interplay of multiple, interconnected systems of privilege and oppression rather than by any single system or component of their identity alone.

## **Misogyny:**

Fear, hatred, contempt or prejudice against women, girls, and the feminine. It may be exhibited in multiple ways, including social and institutional exclusion and discrimination, as well as physical and sexual violence.

## **Oppression:**

The subordination or devaluing of one group by another based on historically rooted social hierarchies and biases. It can be experienced as marginalization, persecution, disenfranchisement, or through other barriers to equity based on a particular social identity (e.g., anti-Black racism, heterosexism).

## **Patriarchy:**

A sociopolitical and cultural system that values men and masculinity over women and femininity. It promotes oppressive and limiting gender roles and the economic subordination of women.

## **Privilege:**

The unfair and unearned advantages individuals are granted for having, or being perceived to have, social identities that align with those deemed to be superior according to societal rules and norms. It is often experienced as an absence of barriers related to a particular social identity (e.g., White privilege, straight privilege).

## **Racism:**

Ideas or practices that establish, maintain or perpetuate the racial superiority or dominance of one group over another.

## **Saneism:**

Discrimination and exclusion of neurodivergent people, people who have been given a mental health diagnosis, or anyone who is presumed to have one.

## **Serophobia:**

Fear, hatred, contempt, or aversion to people living with HIV.

## **Social Identity:**

An individual's real or perceived membership in a given social group or demographic category (e.g., gender, cultural heritage, age, etc.). Social identities influence both the individual's personal self-concept and their interactions with others.

## **Social Location:**

A person's relative position within society based on how closely their various social identities align with societal norms and ideals. It impacts how they are generally perceived by others, their relative access to resources, social acceptance, respectability, representation and visibility, authority, and their overall experiences in the world.

## **White Supremacy:**

A system that maintains the socioeconomic, political and cultural domination of White people over other ethnic/racialized groups. The individuals, groups, and institutions that maintain White supremacy may or may not be conscious of the ways in which they help to uphold this system.