

Access, Equity, and Social Justice In Practice

common definitions

Institutional Oppression is the systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions [legal, educational, health care, social service, government, media and criminal justice systems] solely based on the person's membership in the social identity group. Institutional Oppression occurs when established laws, customs, and practices create oppression and disadvantages for people from marginalized groups. Institutions can be oppressive whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have oppressive intentions.

Stereotypes are attitudes, beliefs, feelings and assumptions about a target group that are widespread AND socially sanctioned. Can be positive and negative, but all have negative effects. Stereotypes support the maintenance of institutionalized oppression by seemingly validating misinformation or beliefs.

Microaggression refers to brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory, or negative messages to target persons based solely upon their marginalized group membership. They often reinforce a stereotype.

Privilege is unearned [conscious and unconscious] access and power. Privilege is about how society accommodates you. It's about advantages you have that *you think are normal*. It's about you being normal, and others being the deviation from normal. **On White Privilege:** White skin privilege is not something that white people necessarily do, create or enjoy on purpose. Unlike the more overt individual and institutional manifestations of racism, white skin privilege is a transparent preference for whiteness that saturates our society. White skin privilege serves several functions. It provides white people with "perks" that people of color do not have. It is a subtle system that also contributes to the maintenance of the racial status quo.

Equity of Access refers to all people having the opportunities they need, which means different people/groups receive different things. Equity takes into account context [history, current realities, future outcomes] while equality does not. Equitable practices take into account that some do not have access because of lack the knowledge, income, equipment, or training necessary to participate fully in public discourse. Equitable programs attempt to remedy historic injustices that have prevented or diminished access in the first place.

Diversity & Inclusive Practices create a space where all participants feel valued and their differences are respected so they can participate in the community with dignity. These practices include all members of the group having representation or participation in decision-making processes. Working toward an inclusive community is a constant process of unpacking racism, identifying homophobia, working against sexism, denying ableist influences, and overall ensuring that oppressive social structures have as little influence as possible within the group.

The Action Continuum

The way forward: going from supporting to confronting oppression

Source: Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook, 1997 by Adams, Bell, and Griffin

Actively Participating: Telling oppressive jokes, putting down people from target groups, intentionally avoiding target group members, discriminating against target group members, verbally or physically harassing target group members.

Denying: Enabling oppression by denying that target group members are oppressed. Does not actively oppress, but by denying that oppression exists, colludes with oppression.

Recognizing, No Action: Is aware of oppression, recognizes oppressive actions by self or others and their harmful effects, but takes no action to stop this behavior. This inaction is the result of fear, lack of information, and confusion about what to do. Experiences discomfort at the contradiction between awareness and action.

Recognizing Action: Is aware of oppression, recognizes oppressive actions of self and others and takes action to stop it.

Educating Self: Taking actions to learn more about oppression and the experiences and heritage of target group members by reading, attending workshops, seminars, cultural events, participating in discussions, joining organizations or groups that oppose oppression, attending social action and change events.

Educating Others: Moving beyond only educating self to question and dialogue with others too. Rather than only stopping oppressive comments or behaviors, also engaging people in discussion to share why you object to a comment or action.

Supporting, Encouraging: Supporting others who speak out against oppression or who are working to be more inclusive of target group members by backing up others who speak out, forming an allies group, joining a coalition group.

Initiating, Preventing: Working to change individual and institutional actions and policies that discriminate against target group members, planning educational programs or others events, working to pass legislation that protects target group members from discrimination, being explicit about making sure that target group members are full participants in organizations or groups.

- from Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in the Cafeteria,
Flipping the Script, Solid Ground, A Primer of Privilege & Marilyn Cochran-Smith