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# **Examining Concepts of Privilege Workshop**

# Definitions

- **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 judgment or opinion that is formed on insufficient grounds before facts are known or in disregard of facts that contradict it. Prejudices are learned and can be unlearned.
- **STEREOTYPE:** An exaggerated or distorted belief that attributes characteristics to members of a particular group, simplistically lumping them together and refusing to acknowledge differences among members of the group.

# Definitions

- **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 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.

# Definitions

- **OPPRESSION:**
  - **Four Levels of Oppression/”isms” and Change:**
    - **Personal:** Values, Beliefs, Feelings
    - **Interpersonal:** Actions, Behaviors, Language
    - **Institutional:** Rules, Policies, Procedures
    - **Cultural:** Beauty, Truth, Right

# Definitions

- **PRIVILEGE:** Privilege operates on personal, interpersonal, cultural, and institutional levels and gives advantages, favors, and benefits to members of dominant groups at the expense of members of target groups. In the United States, privilege is granted to people who have membership in one or more of these social identity groups:
  - White people; Able-bodied people; Heterosexuals; Males; Christians; Middle class people; Middle-aged people; English-speaking people

# Privilege Exercise Instruction

- We're going to explore our privilege around various identities.
- Please do not talk during this phase of the exercise. Focus only on your experience.
- This is not meant to make anyone feel guilty or ashamed around having or not having particular privileges, but rather to explore how we ALL have SOME privilege, and therefore how to engage that aspect of that part of our life in the spaces we navigate.
- Please read each list carefully. As you read a list, for every item on the list to which you can answer, "Yes," take one bead.

# Privilege Exercise Instruction

- As you read each item, know that while some peers in the room may be taking a bead, while others may not be.
- Do this for each list. When you are finished with every list, you will have a set of beads that represent your composite of privileges.
- Don't over-analyze the statements: our goal is to begin reflection and discussion, not nitpick statements.
- If you can quickly answer “basically yes,” take the bead.
- If your answer is “basically no,” do not take a bead.



# References

- **Definitions were abridged from:**
  - © Leaven 2003 *Doing Our Own Work: A Seminar for Anti-Racist White Women*
  - © Visions, Inc. and the MSU Extension *Multicultural Awareness Workshop*
- **Activities were abridged from:**
  - Brenda J Allen, University of Colorado Denver Adapted/revised from instructions written by Dr. Thomas E. Walker, University of Denver, for Colorado Leadership for Equity, Advocacy and Discovering Social Justice