

Institutionalized Oppression

Definitions

The following definitions reflect some of concepts used to describe the process of institutionalized oppression:

Institutions are fairly stable social arrangements and practices through which collective actions are taken. Examples of institutions in the U.S. include the legal, educational, health care, social service, government, media and criminal justice systems.

Institutional Oppression is the systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions, solely based on the person's membership in the social identity group.

Institutional Oppression occurs when established laws, customs, and practices systematically reflect and produce inequities based on one's membership in targeted social identity groups. If oppressive consequences accrue to institutional laws, customs, or practices, the institution is oppressive whether or not the individuals maintaining those practices have oppressive intentions.

Institutional Oppression creates a system of invisible barriers limiting people based on their membership in disfavored social identity groups. The barriers are only invisible to those "seemingly" unaffected by it.

The practice of institutionalized oppression is based on the belief in inherent superiority or inferiority. Institutionalized oppression is a matter of result regardless of intent.

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.

Prejudice is favorable or unfavorable opinion or feeling about a person or group, usually formed without knowledge, thought or reason. It can be based on a single experience, which is then transferred to or assumed about all potential experiences.

Overt forms of oppression are open and observable, not secret or hidden. The target of overt oppression is very aware of the intention and action of the oppressive act, and of the oppressive person or group.

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Created by Carol Cheney, Jeannie LaFrance and Terrie Quinteros, 2006.
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Covert forms of oppression may be secret, hidden and not openly practiced, or so subtle that they are not readily obvious, even to the intended target. The person targeted with covert oppression may not even realize that an oppressive act has occurred until after the fact, nor be aware of who committed the act. Often, targets of covert forms of oppression may second guess themselves and their reactions to covert oppression.

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