

# MODULE

# 5

## GROUNDING IN AN ANTI-OPPRESSION FRAMEWORK

This section offers critical grounding in understanding how sexual violence intersects with forms of oppression. It offers an introduction to basic concepts and terminology related to oppression, describes the intersectionality of oppressions, and the implications for survivors of sexual violence. This session is intended as an introduction to oppression and it is recommended that programs establish follow up and ongoing opportunities for advocates to continue to learn about oppression, how it impacts their work, and how they can be active agents of change in their work.

### *Sexual violence and anti-oppression*

**LESSON 1: Introduction**

**LESSON 2: Creating a shared understanding**

**LESSON 3: Starting with ourselves**

**LESSON 4: Anti-oppression work and supporting survivors**



### OBJECTIVES

#### Participants will be able to:

- Identify the connections between oppression and sexual violence.
- Describe the intersectionality of oppressions and the implications for survivors of sexual violence.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the definitions of both oppression and privilege.



### MATERIALS

- Training agenda (if you create one)
- Flipchart paper or dry erase board and markers
- Pens/pencils and paper for each trainee
- Anti-oppression Terminology Trainer's Reference (at the end of this module)
- Anti-oppression terms posters (at the end of this module)
- Anti-oppression definitions posters (at the end of this module)
- Copies of Power and Oppression Chart handout (at the end of this module)
- Copies of All Oppression is Connected handout (at the end of this module)
- Computer with screen, projector, internet, and audio (optional)



### TIPS FOR PREPARATION

- This section requires thoughtfulness and advance planning. Anti-oppression and trauma-informed frameworks are woven throughout the entirety of this advocacy training guide. However, this section is intended to serve as the foundation for understanding the overlap and intersections between anti-sexual violence advocacy and anti-oppression work. It will cover the intrinsic nature of centering anti-sexual violence work in an understanding of oppression and how it impacts survivors. This section is just a starting place. Advocacy programs should establish plans for ongoing dialogue and education about oppression, how it impacts survivors' experiences, and how an anti-oppression framework informs and shapes an advocate's work.
- Review and become familiar with all materials in this section and make copies of handouts for participants.



### POINTS TO CONSIDER

As with each of the sections of this training guide, it is essential that trainer/s reflect on their advocacy program, community, and training cohort and adapt, revise, and supplement to meet the unique needs of each training group. We are all at different places in our relationship to and understanding of oppression. It is critical that this section of the training meets people where they are at *and* offers an opportunity to stretch and expand their comfort zone. Guiding questions that can aid in customization include:

- **Who is in our community?**

**Think about:** Consider the diversity of people and experiences in your community. Think about the culture and subcultures. Where are there similarities and where are there differences in experiences and needs? Who is represented and who is underrepresented? Who is being served well? Who is underserved? Who is unserved?

- **Who is in our training cohort?**

**Think about:** Consider the diversity of people and experiences in your training cohort. Where are there similarities and where are there differences (age, race, ethnicity, education, ability, culture, etc.)? Who from your community is represented and underrepresented within the training cohort? Do training participants have prior experience with anti-oppression work?

- **Who is best to provide this training?**

**Think about:** Who are the best trainers to facilitate learning and discussion about oppression? Have trainers done (and do they continue to do) their own work related to anti-oppression? Have they facilitated conversations about oppression before? How will the advocacy program include diverse voices while not tokenizing staff members of color or other marginalized identities? How will co-trainers plan for the training in a way that avoids and minimizes harm to staff of color or other marginalized identities? What support will the advocacy program provide to staff facilitating this training?

- **How will we create a space for brave conversations?**

**Think about:** How will this section be developed and offered in a way that meets training participants where they're at, without sidestepping critical conversations about oppression or talking above where participants might be at? What measures will be taken, in particular, in predominantly white or white privilege-holding cohorts, to decenter whiteness and not fall into habits of white fragility? How will trainers navigate difficult conversations? How will trainers challenge harmful statements or problematic actions? How will trainers create a safe and brave learning environment that does not do harm to participants of color and other marginalized identities?

- **What does foundational training for this training cohort look like?**

**Think about:** We often start in different places when we come to understanding and working to challenge racism and other forms of oppression. This means that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach to foundational training on oppression does a disservice by suggesting that we all come to the conversation from the same place. Consider what you know about your training cohort. Be sure to tailor this section based on the cohort's needs. Tailoring the section will make it relevant to your training cohort and the unique needs of the community that the advocacy program serves.

- **What additional opportunities for dialogue and education will be made available for new advocates?**

**Think about:** It's essential that training participants understand that anti-oppression and anti-sexual violence work are intrinsically tied. It's also critical that they know that to truly do work rooted in anti-oppression and trauma-informed frameworks, it requires continued work both personally and organizationally. What type of additional opportunities for dialogue and education can new advocates expect? What is the expectation of them? How will they be supported?

### *Trainers should take care to:*

- Practice awareness of and challenge your own biases and how they show up in your actions, beliefs, and teaching.
- Coordinate roles and responsibilities among co-trainers.
- Not speak for people or groups of people.
- Not make assumptions about what one's identities and experiences mean for them.
- Take ownership of your own mistakes and actively do better.
- Name harm if/when it occurs and prioritize taking the time needed to process what has happened.
- Avoid tokenization. No person should be asked to speak on behalf of a group of people.

## LESSON 1: INTRODUCTION

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Introduce this section by establishing the bridge between sexual violence and oppression, and more specifically, advocacy and anti-oppression work.

***Incorporate the following talking points into the discussion:***

**We root ourselves in anti-oppression work because:**

- We are not, just as survivors are not, single-issue people. We are all impacted by the ways our identities, cultures, and experiences interact with other forces in the world. To provide good care to survivors, we must use a lens that enables us to see survivors as their whole selves, including how their experiences and options are impacted by systems of oppression.
- Working from anti-oppression and trauma-informed frameworks also enables us to better understand how our own identities intersect with our work as advocates and change-makers.
- Rooting in anti-oppression work enables us to understand systemic and societal barriers that both uphold sexual violence and make it difficult for survivors to seek support.

**What we mean by oppression and anti-oppression –**

- “The root of the word ‘oppression’ is the element ‘press.’ *The press of the crowd; pressed into military service; to press a pair of pants; printing press; press the button.* Presses are used to mold things or flatten them or reduce them in bulk, sometimes to reduce them by squeezing out the gases and liquids in them. Something pressed is something caught between or among forces and barriers which are so related to each other that jointly they restrain, restrict, or prevent the thing’s motion or mobility. Mold. Immobilize. Reduce.” [Frye, 2001, pp. 139–140]
- Racism as a form of oppression is “a system of dominance, power, and privilege based on racial group designations... where members of the dominant group create or accept their social privilege by maintaining structures, ideology, values, and behavior that have the intent or effect of leaving nondominant group members relatively excluded from power, esteem, status, and/or equal access to societal resources.” [Harrell, 2000, p. 43]
- “Anti-oppression refers to all the ways an individual, community, institution or system actively prevents, challenges and ends oppression against other people. It

means taking a stand against and addressing the ways that oppressed peoples are prevented access to crucial resources let alone choices. It means addressing violence, abuse of power, and the ways people are manipulated, limited, controlled, silenced, incarcerated and erased. It is widely understood that oppression in all its forms can cause mental, emotional, physical and spiritual trauma to people, communities and ecologies. Trauma can cause deep, devastating and sometimes irreparable damage, particularly when it is rooted in harms passed through many generations” [Tremblay et al., 2014].

### **The connection between sexual violence and anti-oppression –**

- All of our individual and social identities are overlapping and intersecting. Race, ethnicity, class, ability, sexual orientation, and gender identity all have an impact on the risk of experiencing sexual violence. For survivors, this also influences access to the options available for healing and support after violence. “Anti-oppression work is at the core of the kinds of lasting social change that will ultimately prevent sexual violence” [Perrotto, 2016, para. 2].

## **REAFFIRM COMMUNITY AGREEMENTS**

Before delving deeper into the content of this section, revisit the community agreements established earlier in the training. Check in with the group to see if they would like to add any additional agreements.

### **Examples might include:**

- One mic.
- Use “I” statements.
- Ask when you don’t understand something.
- Do not ask people from marginalized communities to educate you on all things related to that community.
- If you’re from a group who holds more privilege than others, be actively present, but do more listening than talking.
- Own your mistakes.
- Acknowledge impact over intent.
- Recognize we all have something to learn.

## LESSON 2: CREATING A COMMON LANGUAGE

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To start to consider how each of us interact with systems of oppression and how oppression impacts the lives of survivors, it is important to establish a foundation of shared concepts and terms that describe experiences related to oppression. This section will provide an opportunity for participants to gain increased understanding of the words we use to talk about oppression and anti-oppression work.



### ACTIVITY INSTRUCTIONS

***Using the terminology and definitions handouts, place a row of the terms on the wall or board and pass out the definitions evenly among participants.***

Depending on the size of the group, some participants may have more than one definition. Ask participants to read their definition/s and match the definition/s with the correct term/s. Once complete, come back together as a group and ask each person to read their respective definition and term. Pause after each term to make time for clarification and discussion as needed. The Trainer's handout offers additional context and information for each definition.

After taking a closer look at the definitions of the concepts that are important to understanding oppression, invite participants to take a closer look at specific systems of power and oppression in US culture. Using the "Power and Oppression Chart" handout provided, ask participants to reflect on the current systems in society that elevate some at the expense of others.

### **Consider using the discussion questions:**

- *What do you notice in the chart?*
- *What do you think happens when forms of oppression overlap?*



Recap this section by summarizing what oppression is — oppression is different from prejudice or discrimination in that it affects whole groups of people, not just individuals. It is a system upheld by institutions (such as: media, the government, education, health care, religion, financial systems), laws and policies, economic systems, and societal beliefs and norms (Fierce, 2010). Provide participants with the “All Oppression is Connected” handout, a visual representation of the interconnectedness of oppression.

Oppression, in itself, is a form of trauma that is often complex and longstanding. Forms of oppression often intersect, creating compounding effects to those who are impacted. Experiencing oppression impacts how people exist in the world, how they are treated by others, and the access they have to resources that can help them to heal and thrive.

## LESSON 3: STARTING WITH OURSELVES: JOURNALING

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***Transition into the next section by reminding participants that anti-oppression work needs to start with each of us. Consider reading the following quote aloud and/or writing it in a prominent place for participants to see.***

“Social justice requires the power of many people working together, however each person is their own agent of change. One person’s actions can have an immense ripple effect on others around them. For better or worse. In fact anti-oppression work begins with the ways we uproot our own prejudices, and learn to see others and ourselves as whole and dynamic. In order to be most effective in anti-oppression work, it is crucial to understand how you’ve experienced & been affected by oppression, as well as the ways you have power and privilege at other peoples expense” [Tremblay, 2014, p. 6].

This activity invites participants to take some time to write or draw in response to the following prompt. Write the prompts on the board and provide paper for participants. Let them know they will have an opportunity to share, but it will not be required.

- *My experience of how I’m connected with systems of oppression looks like...*
- *My experience with power and privilege looks like...*

Give participants at least fifteen minutes to write or draw. Come back together as a large group and offer an opportunity for participants to share what they created. It may be useful to revisit community agreements or ask the group if there are any group commitments they would like to establish prior to individual sharing. For example, some groups may prefer that participants are able to share what they created without comment or feedback from others in the group. Other groups may want to leave it up to individuals to share what (if any) comment they want from other group members. Trainers should be cognizant of group dynamics and work to create balance where learning from others is understood as part of the learning process, with attention given to ensure people from marginalized communities do not have their experiences exploited or challenged.

This section requires strong facilitation skills and an ability to manage conversations that may become difficult. Trainers should be attentive to group dynamics and the ways that power and privilege play out in the group environment. It is not uncommon for people who hold privilege, and in particular, white privilege, to demonstrate disbelief,

frustration, or even hostility amidst conversations about racism and other forms of oppression, especially if they are new to thinking about oppression. This is commonly referred to as “white fragility” and it can be detrimental to group work and particularly harmful to people of color. Trainers should plan in advance ways that they will intercede if problematic things are said or done in the group. Examples should be responsive to the particular issue that arises and may include things like:

- Recognizing when something harmful has been said or done by naming it and prioritizing space for repair.
- Connecting problematic statements or behavior to a lapse in adherence to group commitments.
- Encouraging white people to process guilty or complicated feelings with other white people outside of the training.

After the group has finished sharing, thank participants for sharing and showing up in a brave space with one another. Remind participants that we have different and sometimes overlapping experiences with oppression and our ability to work with survivors is strengthened by our continued commitment to do our own personal work related to oppression, power, and privilege. Be sure to allow adequate break time, opportunity for movement, and space for the group to practice good self-care and re-center for the remainder of this section.

## LESSON 4: ANTI-OPPRESSION WORK AND SUPPORTING SURVIVORS

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Supporting survivors means understanding that they hold multiple identities and experiences that often shape their needs and healing. This section invites participants to reflect on the ways oppression may impact survivors, drawing a bridge between anti-oppression and advocacy.

***As a large group, ask participants what challenges survivors may experience related to oppression they experience. Write responses on a flipchart or board.***

**Possible responses include:**

- Face racism, classism, transphobia, etc. when seeking help
- Are blamed or disbelieved based on their identity
- Are treated as less worthy of safety or support because of identity
- Encounter stereotyping
- Do not identify with the services, language, etc. being offered
- Have one's experience minimized or silenced
- Cannot find services or support that are culturally relevant
- Have trouble believing that another person will understand their experience, especially if the people one has to seek support from hold different identities than oneself
- Distrust in systems (social services, police, medical, etc.) because of the ways these systems have treated one's community
- Fear for safety and sovereignty
- Lack of financial resources to seek help
- Lack of access to supportive resources
- Insufficient access to services that meet specific needs
- Multiple experiences of trauma that exacerbate current experience
- Interact with service providers who lack cultural competence
- Feeling loss of hope; as though services and systems were never designed to meet one's needs

Add responses to participants' to ensure that the variety of ways survivors are impacted by oppression are covered in the list created. You may want to remind participants that racism, ableism, heterosexism, transphobia, classism, and other forms of oppression affect people's experiences of violence as well as their access to resources for healing.

### ***Ask participants to reflect on the list.***

- *What do you notice?*
- *Are there any themes you identify?*

## **SUMMARIZE**

As you begin to wrap up this section, summarize key points from this section and make space for questions from participants. Offer suggestions for additional reading and resources, and remind participants of ongoing opportunities for learning that are essential to advocacy built on anti-oppression and trauma-informed frameworks.

### ***Include the following points:***

- Oppression has a direct impact on survivors, both in how they experience trauma, as well as what resources are available to them as they heal.
- Additional sections will continue to integrate anti-oppression and trauma-informed frameworks in advocacy work. Three key things for advocates to keep in mind:
  - Anti-oppression work first starts with ourselves. We all have biases we need to work through. It's easier to notice things "out there" that are problematic, but we first must start with ourselves.
  - An advocate's work is to provide safe and supportive services for all survivors, in a manner that allows for one to show up as their whole selves, with all of their identities and experiences.
  - Advocates must practice awareness that because oppression exists in our society, options and experiences are not the same for each person. Advocacy should center the person's self-identified needs and trust the survivor as the best expert on their own experiences.

### Additional resources:

- [Artful Anti-Oppression](#) by Nat Tremblay [online toolkit]
- *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* by Austin Channing Brown [book]
- [LGBTQ Youth of Color Organizing Summit Workshop Curriculum](#) by FIERCE [online curriculum]
- [Me and White Supremacy Workbook](#) by Layla F. Saad [online workbook]
- *White Fragility* by Robin DiAngelo [book]

### References:

- Fierce. [2010]. *LGBTQ Youth of Color Organizing Summit: Workshop curriculum*. Rutgers University, Digital Library of Nonviolent Resistance. <http://nonviolence.rutgers.edu/files/original/f3451e17636c45507610cc716f1da2618d88a011.pdf>
- Frye, M. [2001]. Oppression. In P. Rothenberg [Ed.], *Race, class, and gender in the United States: An integrated study* [5th ed., p. 139-143]. Worth Publishers.
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- Tremblay, N., Malla, A., Tremblay, J., & Piepzna-Samarasinha, L. L. [2014]. *Artful anti-oppression: A toolkit for critical & creative change makers: Isms* [Vol.2]. ArtReach. <https://www.artreach.org/artful-anti-oppression-2-isms>

## ANTI-OPPRESSION TERMS: POSTER

**EQUITY**

**OPPRESSION**

**INTERNALIZED OPPRESSION**

**DISCRIMINATION**

## ANTI-OPPRESSION TERMS: POSTER

**PREJUDICE**

**MARGINALIZATION**

**NORMATIVITY**

**ANTI-OPPRESSION WORK**



## ANTI-OPPRESSION TERMS: POSTER

**RACE**

**RACISM**

**WHITE PRIVILEGE**

## ANTI-OPPRESSION TERMS: DEFINITIONS

This refers to systems and strategies for understanding and influencing the idea and practice of “fairness.” For example, the distribution of resources in political, professional and social situations. These resources can include basic needs like food, housing, clothing, and money, but also education, employment, and safety from violence among other things.

This is the use of power to marginalize, silence or otherwise subordinate one social group, often in order to further privilege the oppressing and/or dominant person or group. It is Prejudice + Power.

This is a belief that there is something wrong with being part of a marginalized group. Shame, self-hatred, and low self-esteem results when members of an oppressed group take on society’s attitudes toward them and adopt myths and stereotypes about themselves.

This is any action that denies social participation or human rights to an individual or categories of people based on prejudice.

This is an attitude, perspectives and assumptions based on limited information, often stereotypes. Usually, but not always, negative.

This is the effect of people being considered outside of, different or other than the ruling class and dominant ideas of what is normal. It often results in people being “othered” in society, creating social and systemic exclusion resulting in limited access to resources and opportunities.

## ANTI-OPPRESSION TERMS: DEFINITIONS

This refers to the values, standards and models in society that are considered normal, what we ought to think, how we are supposed to behave.

A classification system used to categorize humans into large distinct groups through anatomical, cultural, ethnic, genetic, geographical, historical, linguistic, religious and/or social characteristics and affiliations. The term is often used today to describe a person's skin color, ethnic features, and traits. For example, the color of one's skin, the color of their eyes, shape of their facial features, and hair texture. It is a social construct, meaning, something developed within legal, economic and socio-political contexts.

This is a set of beliefs, which assert the superiority of one racial group over another, at the individual and institutional levels. It goes beyond ideology; it involves discriminatory practices that protect and maintain the position of certain groups and sustain the inferior position of others.

Inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice.

This includes but is not limited to individual and group strategies for:

- Seeking & holding the complex histories that have gotten us here,
- Interrogating and dismantling systems and social practices that are oppressive,
- Excavating & leveraging the power & privileges we have in the world,
- Healing from personal, community and ancestral oppressions,
- Creating & fighting for community based resources and spaces that are accessible, inclusive, and affirming for all people, especially those underserved and exploited in our society.
- Celebrating the resilience of folks surviving and thriving creatively in spite of oppression.

## ANTI-OPPRESSION TERMINOLOGY<sup>1</sup>: TRAINERS' REFERENCE

### Equity

This refers to systems and strategies for understanding and influencing the idea and practice of “fairness.” For example, the distribution of resources in political, professional and social situations. These resources can include basic needs like food, housing, clothing, and money, but also education, employment, and safety from violence among other things. In order to have equity in diverse communities we must be able to identify the forms of oppression and discrimination that causes inequity and challenge these. [p. 4]

### Oppression

This is the use of power to marginalize, silence or otherwise subordinate one social group, often in order to further privilege the oppressing and/or dominant person or group. It is Prejudice + Power. [p. 4]

### Internalized oppression

This is a belief that there is something wrong with being part of a marginalized group. Shame, self-hatred, and low self-esteem results when members of an oppressed group take on society’s attitudes toward them and adopt myths and stereotypes about themselves. Internalized oppression can manifest through a sense of inferiority, lowered expectations and limited imagination of possibilities, among other things. Consider how this plays out in the different forms of oppression explored in this toolkit.

### Discrimination

This is any action that denies social participation or human rights to an individual or categories of people based on prejudice. [p. 4]

### Prejudice

This is an attitude, perspectives and assumptions based on limited information, often stereotypes. Usually, but not always, negative. Prejudiced beliefs, language and practices are damaging on personal and social levels because they deny the individuality and complexity of the person. It forces people into basic (often derogatory) caricatures, one-dimensional identities, and hurtful labels. No one is free of prejudice because we have unfortunately all been raised with prejudiced ideologies all around us. Even if our families taught us about equity many dominant narratives in society teach us prejudice in so many ways. Examples of prejudiced perspectives: Women are weak; Asians are good at math, Youth can’t make wise decisions, etc. [p. 4]

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## ANTI-OPPRESSION TERMINOLOGY: TRAINERS' REFERENCE

### Marginalization

This is the effect of people being considered outside of, different or other than the ruling class and dominant ideas of what is normal. Often marginalization is directly connected to a person or groups real or perceived class, education, social networks, race, ability, age, gender and sexuality among other things. People who are marginalized or “othered” in a society will often experience social and systemic exclusion resulting in limited access to resources and opportunities. [p. 4]

### Normativity

This refers to the values, standards and models in society that are considered normal, what we ought to think, how we are supposed to behave. For example in the West it is considered normal to shake hand when you greet someone. People that deviate or stray from these norms or prescribed ways of being are often punished in a variety of ways by society ranging from being ostracized or excluded, looked down upon and even legal consequences like imprisonment. [p. 5]

### Anti-oppression work

This includes but is not limited to individual and group strategies for:

- Seeking & holding the complex histories that have gotten us here,
- Interrogating and dismantling systems and social practices that are oppressive,
- Excavating & leveraging the power & privileges we have in the world,
- Healing from personal, community and ancestral oppressions,
- Creating & fighting for community based resources and spaces that are accessible, inclusive, and affirming for all people, especially those underserved and exploited in our society.
- Celebrating the resilience of folks surviving and thriving creatively in spite of oppression. [p. 5]

## ANTI-OPPRESSION TERMINOLOGY: TRAINERS' REFERENCE

### Race

This is a classification system used to categorize humans into large distinct groups through anatomical, cultural, ethnic, genetic, geographical, historical, linguistic, religious and/or social characteristics and affiliations. The term Race is often used today to describe a person's skin color, ethnic features, and traits. For example, the color of one's skin, the color of their eyes, shape of their facial features, and hair texture. Common racial classifications include "Black," "Native," "Asian," "Arab," "White," etc. However, there is much debate over Race as a biological classification given that there are so many nuances and blurry lines between ethnic groups, differing ethnic traits that get flattened, or "mixed-races" that get invisibilized. As such, Race is said to be a social construct. Something developed within legal, economic and socio-political contexts. [p. 5]

### Racism

This is a set of beliefs, which assert the superiority of one racial group over another, at the individual and institutional levels. It goes beyond ideology; it involves discriminatory practices that protect and maintain the position of certain groups and sustain the inferior position of others. [p. 17]

### White privilege

Inherent advantages possessed by a white person on the basis of their race in a society characterized by racial inequality and injustice.

1 From *Artful Anti-Oppression: A Toolkit for Critical & Creative Change Makers: Isms* [Vol.2, pp.4, 5, 15, 17] by N. Tremblay, A. Malla, J. Tremblay, & L. L. Piepzna, 2014, ArtReach.  
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## POWER AND OPPRESSION CHART

GROUPS WITH SOCIETAL POWER	SYSTEM OF OPPRESSION	GROUP WITHOUT SOCIETAL POWER
Men	Patriarchy, binary, genderism, sexism	Women, transgender people, gender non-conforming people, and intersex people
White people	Racism	People of color
Upper/middle class and rich people	Classism and capitalism	Economically poor and working class people
Adults	Ageism and adultism	Youth and elderly people
Heterosexuals	Heterosexism, homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia	Queer, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, Two-spirit, and questioning people
U.S. born & U.S. citizens	Xenophobia	Immigrants and people born outside of the U.S.
Able-bodied and able-minded people	Ableism	People with disabilities or who are differently abled
People who fit dominant beauty standards	Sizeism, fatphobia, lookism	People who don't fit dominant beauty standards
Christians	Religious oppression, Christian hegemony, Anti-Semitism, Islamaphobia, etc.	People who aren't Christian [Muslims, Jews, Atheists, etc.]
"First World" countries and global north	Colonialism and imperialism	"Third world" countries, global south, indigenous groups, people living under occupation

[FIERCE, 2010, p. 9]





