

# Privilege and Oppression

*Privilege* operates on personal, cultural, and institutional levels to give advantages, favors, and benefits to those who have the greatest access to resources in our society. For persons with privilege, it is characteristically invisible, the advantages it gives are unearned, individuals who have it are unconscious of it, and the advantage it gives is the direct result of the oppression of others.

*Oppression* exists when one social group knowingly or unconsciously exploits another social group for its own benefit. Social oppression is an interlocking system that involves ideological control as well as domination and control of the social institutions and resources of society,

resulting in a condition of privilege for the dominant social group relative to the disenfranchisement and exploitation of the subordinate social group.

Privilege and oppression and power and vulnerability are relative and contextual. A person has power or is vulnerable in relation to another person in a given context. Power is a measure of one person's or one's group's resources as compared to another person's or group's resources. Those who have greater resources than others have power relative to them; those who have fewer resources are vulnerable relative to them.

	Sources of Power	Sources of Vulnerability
<b>Ability</b>	ability, large physical size, strength	disability, small size, lack of strength
<b>Age</b>	status as adults or middle-aged people	youth or old age
<b>Class</b>	wealth, job skills, credentials	poverty, lack of skills and credentials
<b>Education</b>	knowledge and information	lack of knowledge and information, lack of access to these
<b>Ethnicity/ Race</b>	status as white (Caucasian)	status as people of color (African, Asian, Hispanic, Native American)
<b>Gender/Sex</b>	status as male	status as female
<b>Gender Identity</b>	conformity of gender identity with biological sex characteristics	nonconformity of gender identity with biological sex characteristics
<b>Psychological Resources</b>	life experience, stability	inexperience, lack of coping skills
<b>Role</b>	status as professional, leader, clergy	status as client, congregant, student
<b>Sexual Orientation</b>	status as heterosexual people	status as gay, lesbian, or bisexual people
<b>Social</b>	support, community, contacts	isolation