

# Defining Oppression<sup>i</sup>

**Recommended Age: 14+**

## Goals

- To explain the difference between individual experiences of harm and oppression.

## Have Ready

- Flipchart paper and tape or whiteboard.

## Instructions

- Draw 3 overlapping circles on the board (see example).
- Write the word Oppression in the middle.
- As you explain each level, add the corresponding word to one of the circles.
- It can help to use an example as you explain, such as fatphobia as a system vs. skinny-shaming of an individual, or racism and why reverse racism isn't a thing.

## Debrief

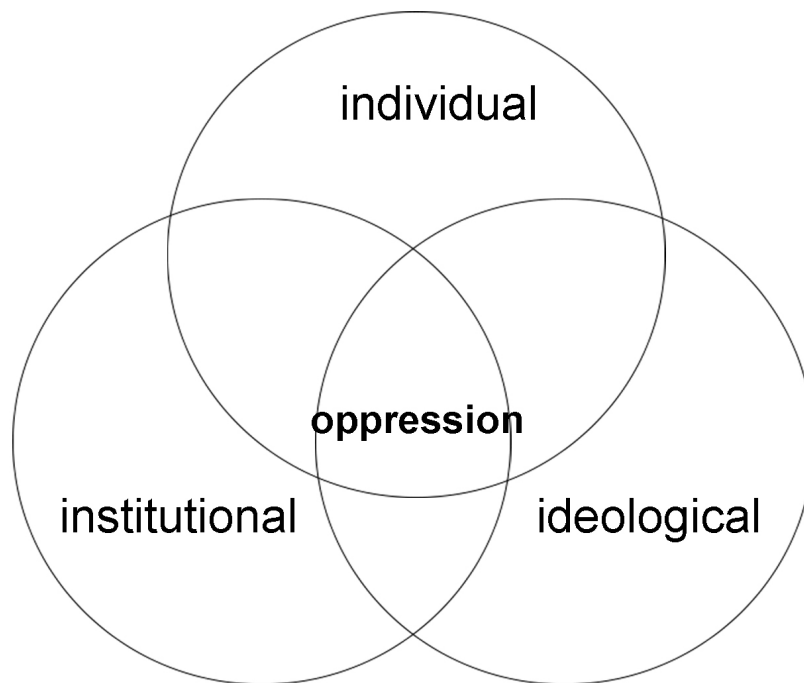
- **When someone is made to feel bad about their differences, this is called discrimination.**
- **When systems create differences in power and access to resources based around differences, this is called oppression.**
- To consider something oppression, it must exist on three levels.
- **First, there is the individual level.** This is a personal interaction and experience. This includes comments, bullying, etc. It hurts and is never okay, but without the next two levels, it is not oppression. E.g., being made fun of because of our body size (fat, skinny, short, etc.).
- **The second level is the ideological level. This is where an idea is deeply embedded into the thoughts and assumptions of a group of people.** Sometimes, so much so that they may not even realize it exists or question if it is right. E.g., assuming fat people must be unhealthy.

- **The third level is the institutional level.** This is the level that gets talked about the least, because it can sometimes seem invisible to those with privilege. **This is when the discrimination is built into systems like government, school, the justice system, healthcare, etc.** E.g., when doctors tell fat people they need to lose weight instead of running tests when people come in with a health issue.
- We can all be hurt, in a very real way, on the individual level. **But it's not oppression without all of these levels.**

## Additional Activities

Ideally, this activity should be followed by:

- Dispelling Stereotypes Discussion Cards
- Dealing with Discrimination Action Planning



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<sup>1</sup> Snailypo [Username] (2021). [TikTok video].