



# INTRODUCTION TO POWER & PRIVILEGE

**people & planet**

# CONTENTS

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- 3 INTRODUCTION**
- 8 TRANSPHOBIA**
- 14 PATRIARCHY**
- 18 RACISM**
- 24 RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA**
- 28 CLASSISM**
- 32 ABLEISM**
- 36 HOMOPHOBIA**
- 42 RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION**
- 44 BEING AN ALLY**
- 46 CALLING-IN**

# INTRODUCTION

Collective liberation means recognising that all of our struggles are intimately connected, and that we must work together to create the kind of world we know is possible. It means understanding power and privilege. We believe that every person is worthy of dignity and respect, and that within systems of oppression everyone suffers, yet in a differential manner.

Collective liberation is not just a value, but a process. When we work together across the barriers kept in place to divide us and hold each other accountable, we strengthen our organising.

When combined, our diverse identities and experiences give us the tools to dismantle systems of economic, political and social oppression, and to create a world in which all people are seen as fully human.

People & Planet are here to give you advice and support on how to run campaigns. Our team of staff can deliver training on any of the skills in this guide, either online or on campus!

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This booklet is based on how we understand oppression to manifest today, but we recognise that these systems are constantly developing.

We must continually challenge our understandings of power and privilege in order to dismantle the systems that perpetuate them. It is crucial that we are led by the most affected communities in doing so.

Join us in understanding and putting an end to oppression in our movements and the world.



# INTRODUCTION

## OPPRESSION & PRIVILEGE

The world we are born into has pre-existing social and cultural norms that influence our experiences and how we view the world. These are organised around systems of power which have evolved across history and still exist to this day - capitalism and imperialism. We'll explain these concepts and how they intersect with different forms of oppression in this guide.

It is important to recognise that we are all privileged in some ways and marginalised in others.

Oppression is the experience of repeated, widespread, systemic injustice. Much oppression is rooted in centuries of economic, political and social exploitation and reproduced by the everyday actions and attitudes of people across the world.

While we may not be consciously classist, sexist, racist, homophobic, transphobic, or ableist, it's inevitable that our interactions are influenced by our position in a society governed by these systems.

Some groups are advantaged because other groups are disadvantaged. People from privileged groups often benefit at the expense of people from oppressed

groups. A man is more likely to be hired or keep his job because women are being denied opportunities or unfairly evaluated. Wealthier students have a greater chance of being accepted into prestigious universities because lower income students are less prepared, less encouraged, or less financially able to do so.

Oppression and privilege are two sides of the same coin. Understanding both provides a clearer picture of how systemic inequality operates, and uncovers more opportunities to intervene to create change.

Recognising the privileges and oppression that derive from one's positionality is an essential step towards taking action to dismantle systems of oppression.

By being open to learning about and challenging our own privileges and the ingrained behaviours that perpetuate the oppression of others, we can create the example that enables other members of privileged groups to do likewise. It will allow us to create a true, embodied form of solidarity within our organising spaces, which reflects the values we seek to advance.

# LEVELS OF OPPRESSION

Oppression is deeply embedded in our society because it operates on different levels with members of different social groups being advantaged and disadvantaged to different degrees. Any attempt to dismantle oppression should involve challenging oppression at all the levels on which it operates.

## THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

The individual level includes how individuals are made to feel about themselves and how they are treated in interpersonal situations by others. Those from marginalised groups may encounter bias or violence, be shunned in social interactions, or overlooked in group settings. For example, women report their ideas are ignored in group meetings while men are credited when making the same point.

## THE STRUCTURAL LEVEL

The structural level encompasses several different forms of oppression. It includes the **institutional level**, which refers to the policies, laws, and customs enacted by governments, companies and social institutions that systematically reflect and produce inequities. For example, research finds significant disparities in employment prospects among UK graduates, with racialised graduates being much less likely to be employed than their white peers six months after graduation.

However, it also includes the **cultural level**, which encompasses the norms, values and ideology of the dominant culture that reinforce the belief that one social group is superior to another. The dominant group universalises its particular way of seeing reality to the extent that its view is accepted as 'common sense', even by those who are disempowered by it. For example, ideals of beauty for women are predominately based on eurocentric norms. As a result, proximity to whiteness is widely regarded as the measure of beauty; those who do not possess the desired attributes are often disadvantaged in various areas of life and may feel pressure to bleach their skin or change their hair to navigate this oppression.

Underlying these forms of oppression is the **capitalist economic structure**, which relies on various forms of injustice to function. For example, the international division of labour illustrates how imperialism and capitalism strategically exploit existing systems of oppression—such as racism—by relegating marginalized populations, particularly in the Global South, to the most devalued and exploitative forms of labour, all so richer countries and companies can make more profit.

# INTRODUCTION

## INTERSECTIONALITY

Different forms of oppression do not exist by themselves but are shaped by and interact with all other forms of oppression and exploitation. For example, on an individual level, a black trans woman might experience sexism, racism, and transphobia. The type of sexism she experiences will be different because she is black and trans.

Privilege is contextual and relational. For example, men enjoy more positions of power in the world and are at much lower risk of experiencing domestic violence. But a white, middle class, gay male would experience a different type of oppression compared to a white, working class, heterosexual man. Similarly, black men are often less privileged than white men and experience different types of racism than brown women, such as heightened levels of police targeting and brutality.

Because systems of oppression are interwoven, they need to be challenged holistically. Different forms of

oppression are able to recreate, reinforce and defend one another. This way of understanding oppression in societies is referred to as intersectionality.

While we focus on confronting one form of domination or exploitation in a particular moment - such as focusing on state oppression and capitalism when we talk about austerity - we can interweave concepts of oppression based on gender, ability and race when we understand that racialised people, women, trans people, and disabled people are most impacted by government cuts.

Divide-and-conquer strategies have been prevalent throughout history. We're made to believe that there's only so much freedom to go around. Working on the basis of collective liberation gives space for each person's lived experience with oppression to be heard and validated, and to be put in the context of structural change that needs to be made.

**"WHEN WE IDENTIFY WHERE OUR PRIVILEGE INTERSECTS WITH  
SOMEBODY ELSE'S OPPRESSION, WE'LL FIND OUR OPPORTUNITIES TO  
MAKE REAL CHANGE."**

— IJEOMA OLUO

# BUILDING INCLUSIVE SPACES

Given the inequality in power, it is often difficult for individuals from marginalised groups to openly share their experiences with people from privileged groups for fear of being discounted. Their voices are systematically silenced, whilst power gets concentrated in the hands of the privileged. It is important to build spaces where all voices are heard, that allow us to operate in social movement spaces that build power beyond repeating forms of privilege.

We need to let go of the arrogant assumption that our groups are not affected by power and privilege, or that unaddressed systemic oppression does not affect how we operate. Being able to identify and label the forms of oppression

is the first step to then envisioning a more just and equitable structure of relations. Also, deepening our knowledge of how systemic oppression operates allows us to better understand how to transform ourselves and our groups, organisations, and communities. This is an active, ongoing and continual process; for if our own social movements reflect wider injustices, it is unlikely we will be able to address the issues we seek to challenge.

To move to a socially, environmentally, economically and culturally fair alternative, we need to build mass social movements that include people from every sphere of life. We need to build leadership, and take leadership from those most impacted by injustice.



# TRANSPHOBIA

## THE GENDER BINARY

The gender binary was created by human society and is a system that artificially divides people into two genders (men and women), seen as opposite and distinct. Some cultures understand gender differently and describe up to five different genders.

The gender binary means that gender is assigned to people based on their biological sex, determined by their genitalia at birth, and comes alongside certain roles in society and cultural meaning. Privilege is afforded to 'cisgender' people, whose gender identity matches the gender they were assigned at birth.

Gender and sex are not the same. While sex is about the physical effect of your chromosomes, gender is a social construct. Rather than a fixed identity, it is shaped by history and keeps evolving differentially across class, cultural and racial lines - it is a performance repeated through everyday actions that shapes and reinforces our understanding of gender itself. Gender is a spectrum with any number of possibilities: people can identify as neither a man nor a woman, or only one of those, or both of them, or anything in between. It's important to understand that a person's gender is defined by that individual alone.

### GENDER GLOSSARY

**Cisgender** - umbrella term for people who identify as the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Transgender** – umbrella term for people who don't identify as the gender they were assigned at birth.

**Non-binary** - describes any gender identity that does not fit the man-woman binary.

**Genderqueer** – another broad term for people who identify outside of cis gender, maybe no gender, multiple genders, or moving between the genders, meaning how they identify their gender moves and is more fluid.

**Genderfluid** – someone who doesn't identify as two genders simultaneously but a different gender depending on what they are feeling.

**Gender neutral** – belonging to neither of the genders within the established gender binary and doesn't have a gender prescription

# GENDER IDENTITY

Gender expression changes depending on how people choose to "perform" their gender, for example through their clothing or behaviour. However, the way a person chooses to perform gender is separate and distinct from how they may define their gender, which is defined by them alone and may not present itself externally. It's vital that we don't make assumptions about a person's gender based on their appearance. It is good practice in group spaces for everybody to share the gender pronouns which they use (he, she, they etc.) so that people may be referred to how they wish.

Trans people's gender identity often does not align with that which they were assigned at birth. Each trans person will make different choices depending on what's right for them. Some might choose to medically and socially transition away from their assigned sex towards their gender identity, while others won't.

Nonbinary people are those that do not identify exclusively as "man" or "woman". Some identify with neither, both, parts of each, or a fluid and changing mix. Nonbinary is often considered an umbrella term for many other identities, including genderqueer, agender, and genderfluid.

Nonbinary and trans people are diverse. Some may experience body or gender dysphoria, which is a condition that causes physical, mental and/or social discomfort, others don't. Some may identify as trans as their gender differs from the gender they were assigned, others don't. Some may refer to themselves with binary pronouns (he or she), while some will use they or other pronouns like ze/hir or xe/xem.

Intersex people are born with genitalia and/or chromosomes that do not conform to traditional XY-male or XX-female characteristics. Though some intersex people are trans and/or nonbinary, many do not identify that way.



Photo: Ted Eytan - Flickr/CC BY-SA 2.0

# TRANSPHOBIA

## CIS PRIVILEGE

The advantages that cisgender people may experience in a society that does not favour transgender or gender non- confirming people is what we call cis privilege.

Cis privilege can manifest itself in a lot of ways. Here are some examples of circumstances where a cisgender person will not face the barriers that someone who is trans or nonbinary may face:

- Buying something that requires ID and being challenged on the validity of their ID.
- Attending family occasions and facing questions or jokes about their gender identity.
- Using a gym changing room and being challenged on which changing room they are using, or else not having a changing room available for their gender.
- Renting a vehicle and being challenged on the validity of their documents.
- First encounters with new people and facing anxiety and questions around their gender identity.
- Being held in a detention centre or prison and being held in a space which is designed for people of a different gender.
- Filling out forms and not having their gender recognised in the documentation.
- Flirting with someone you haven't met before and facing anxiety and questions around their gender identity.
- Shopping for clothes, shoes or accessories and either being questioned about their purchases or else finding difficulties acquiring what is needed.

### OH NO... I USED THE WRONG PRONOUN

Make a conscious effort to use people's correct gender pronouns. But if you don't, make sure to correct yourself, briefly apologise, and don't make a big deal out of it (you risk centering yourself and your own embarrassment if you do).

# TRANSPHOBIC OPPRESSION

## CONTENT WARNING: THIS SECTION INCLUDES REFERENCE TO VIOLENCE AND SUICIDE

Oppression of trans and nonbinary people resulting from a constructed gender binary has clear impacts on trans and nonbinary people's lives. In the UK, 85% of trans women, 71% of trans men and 73% of non-binary people reported being subjected to transphobic street harassment from strangers. In the same study, 99% of trans people surveyed experienced transphobia on social media. One in every twenty trans people have been physically assaulted at work, and trans people are **twice as likely to be victims of crime** in England and Wales.

These experiences have a wider impact on the lives of trans people. Nearly half of trans people who are not living permanently "out" in their preferred gender stated they are prevented from doing so because they fear it might threaten their employment status. 53% of trans youth said they had deliberately hurt themselves, compared with 7% of all 16-24-year-olds. 48% of trans people under 26 attempt suicide and 84% have contemplated suicide.

# INTERSECTIONS WITH OTHER FORMS OF OPPRESSION

Every trans or non-binary person's experience is specific to them and someone's individual experience of oppression can also be affected by race, class, disability, sexuality and immigration status. For example, the experience of a trans person seeking gender reassignment surgery will differ on grounds of their economic status and their ability to access expensive private health care. Racialised trans women are more likely to experience violence and hate crimes than white trans counterparts. Recognising the

way in which the gender binary can intersect with and multiply other forms of oppression is crucial to unpicking it.

## EXTRA RESOURCES

**Video:** Judith Butler on gender theory

**Article:** Why trans liberation is a class issue

**Reading list:** Transfeminine liberation in defiant times

**Video:** Anti-Trans Ideology Threatens All Of Our Freedoms

# TRANSPHOBIA

## HOW TO MAKE YOUR ORGANISING SPACE TRANS-INCLUSIVE

**Make sure people in your space are aware of issues faced by trans people and actively educate themselves. This includes:**

- Understanding the growing institutional and cultural transphobia in the UK, such as declining access to hormone replacement therapy.
- Recognising the history of trans organising and the historical presence of trans people in organising spaces.
- Understanding that trans people's lived experiences are essential to understanding and confronting systems of oppression .
- Making sure trans people are participating in conversations about how your group addresses accessibility and inclusivity.
- Paying attention to how cis-privilege shows up in your group and confronting it. Often, this has to do with decision-making power, access to certain conversations and spaces, and how work is being distributed in the group.
- Actively confront transphobia within your group and ensure action is taken to address it. See our 'Calling-in' section of this guide.



Photo: Alisdare Hickson - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/alisdare/52644320054>

# PATRIARCHY

## PATRIARCHY

Patriarchy is a system of unequal power relations that gives men privileges in all areas of their lives — social, economic, institutional, cultural, political, and spiritual — while women and gender non-conforming people are systemically disadvantaged.

Though patriarchy affects women much more severely, it distorts the humanity of all genders and reduces our ability to be in kinship with one another.

Like all other unjust and arbitrary systems of authority and power, patriarchy must be actively challenged in our organising if we are to achieve collective liberation. "Patriarchy has no gender," thus it's going to take all people to dismantle it.



**"PATRIARCHY IS A POLITICAL-SOCIAL SYSTEM THAT INSISTS THAT MALES ARE INHERENTLY DOMINATING, SUPERIOR TO EVERYTHING AND EVERYONE DEEMED WEAK, ESPECIALLY FEMALES, AND ENDOWED WITH THE RIGHT TO DOMINATE AND RULE OVER THE WEAK AND TO MAINTAIN THAT DOMINANCE THROUGH VARIOUS FORMS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL TERRORISM AND VIOLENCE."**

BELL HOOKS

# PATRIARCHY

## PATRIARCHAL OPPRESSION

### CONTENT WARNING: THIS SECTION INCLUDES REFERENCE TO SUICIDE, DOMESTIC AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE

In the UK, women on average earn significantly less than men. The gender pay gap is currently 7% for full-time employees and 13% including part-time employees. Reasons for this include that women make up a larger portion of lower paid roles, 'feminised' sectors such as care and leisure are undervalued, and most senior positions are held by men.

On average, women do 26 hours a week of unpaid labour (such as childcare, cleaning, and cooking) whereas men do 16 hours a week. For women on maternity leave, this figure rises to 60 hours per week. 54,000 women leave their job early every year due to their treatment after having a baby.

Men hold most of the powerful positions in society. 71% of MPs are men and 95% of the Chief Executives in the top 100 UK

companies are men.

In England and Wales, 2 women are killed every week by a partner or former partner, and 1 in 4 women will experience domestic violence in their lifetimes. It is estimated that every day, almost 30 women attempt suicide as a result of experiencing domestic abuse.

1 in 4 women in England and Wales have experienced some form of sexual violence since the age of 16. Only around 1 in 6 of those who experience sexual violence choose to report to the police, and only around 1 in 33 rape cases end in a conviction. While men also experience domestic and sexual violence, in England and Wales 73% of domestic violence victims and survivors and 94% of people who are raped are women.



# INTERSECTIONS WITH OTHER FORMS OF OPPRESSION

Patriarchy doesn't exist in isolation from other forms of oppression, it intersects and exacerbates oppressive experiences. Racialised women experience gendered racism. Movements to ban burqas or other forms of cultural or religious dress target Islamic women, utilising religious discrimination and oppression to police women's bodies and what they choose to wear. Lesbian and bisexual women experience a specific form of sexualisation and fetishisation in popular culture. Disabled women face greater discrimination in employment than disabled men.



Photo: Evert Barnes - <https://flickr.com/photos/95413346@N00/51322661416>

## PATRIARCHY WITHIN OUR GROUPS

Patriarchal oppression often remains unaddressed within activist groups. Although some men feel they are not capable of sexism, simply believing in gender equality does not erase male privilege. Working with progressive men can have its own frustrations as they may feel they are not guilty of sexism – often because of the lack of intention to be sexist – without truly analysing their actions within a framework of dominance.

Addressing patriarchy in our movements is not about guilt or blame, it is about a lifelong learning process to effectively and humbly confront oppression. Since patriarchy pervades society, it is no surprise that it also pervades social movements. If we want to challenge patriarchy, we must understand how our actions and assumptions are influenced by the prevalence of sexism in our consciousness and social relations.

# PATRIARCHY

## HOW PATRIARCHY CAN MANIFEST IN SOCIAL MOVEMENTS

- 1 Women face an uphill battle to prove their intelligence and commitment as political activists. Men are more readily perceived as experts, whereas women struggle more to prove their capabilities and understanding of political issues, and be taken seriously as committed organisers, researchers, journalists and writers.
- 2 Meetings are dominated by male speakers and leaders, while secretarial work, cooking, childcare, and the emotional labour of supporting community well-being are largely borne by women.
- 3 Women continue to be sexually objectified. Racialised women and femme women in particular are fetishised, obscuring the dynamics of racism, fatphobia, and ableism behind "personal preferences."
- 4 Sexist comments or incidents can leave women and gender non-conforming people feeling humiliated, angry or upset, yet such comments are too often dismissed as harmless. Women discussing sexism can be accused of over-reacting, and women's concerns are belittled unless validated by other men.
- 5 Feminism is not seen as central to campaigning and collective struggle. Instead it is relegated to a special-interest issue. This results in the trivialisation of women's issues, particularly violence against women and reproductive justice.
- 6 Certain forms of feminism, including 'Trans-Exclusionary Radical Feminism' (TERF) and 'white feminism', can be harmful because they exclude certain women. If not challenged, certain patriarchal dynamics can be reproduced, including the policing of women's bodies and the subordination of non-white women's issues

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN YOUR GROUP

- Do you make assumptions about people's gender based on the clothes they wear or how they choose to present themselves?
- When a trans or non-binary person is speaking, are all members actively listening?
- How much of the logistical planning work in your group is undertaken by women/non-binary people?
- How much of the cooking and cleaning in your group is undertaken by women/non-binary people?
- Do the same few men tend to dominate discussions? The facilitator or others in the meeting should consider suggesting a go-round to get more people talking. If you are one of those men, be aware of the space you take up.

Create an atmosphere that is empowering, especially to new women in the group. Share skills and knowledge in a non-paternalistic manner to build the leadership of women, especially racialised women.

Realise that something can be hurtful even if you personally don't find it offensive.

Realise that sexism, in various forms, runs deep and always plays itself out. Don't trivialise women's issues or place the sole responsibility for fighting oppression on the oppressed.

Understand that it's not just about representation - the fact that a group is dominated by men might be a symptom and not the problem itself. To avoid tokenism, make sure your group gives equal consideration to women's/trans/nonbinary voices in a meaningful manner.

## EXTRA RESOURCES

**Article:** 10 Myths About Non-Binary People It's Time to Unlearn

**Video:** Why Pronouns Matter For Trans People

**Video:** What is Social Reproduction? An introduction by Plan C

**Article:** Not a Labor of Love: The Radicalization of Motherhood

**Video:** What is gender? By PhilosophyTube

**Podcast:** The Sexual and Gender Politics of Fascism

**Article:** Intersectionality: Why it's Important & it's Value in the Feminist Movement

# RACISM

## RACE & RACISM

Race is a socially constructed classification of people that is not based on biological truth. There is no gene or cluster of genes shared by all black people or all white people. Instead, racial difference is something humans have created for a social and political purpose. Racism is a set of implicit or explicit beliefs, false assumptions, and actions that suppose the inherent superiority of one racial group over another.

Europe's history of colonialism is fundamental to the modern constructions of race, establishing the relationship of domination and subordination. Race as a classification of human beings served the purpose of legitimising the dominance of white people over non-white people.

Britain's justification for its violent colonial project was famously expressed

by Rudyard Kipling in his 1899 poem, "The White Man's Burden." The poem says it is a moral responsibility to rule over people who were "half-devil and half child" who therefore needed the discipline, and governance that only a "superior" race could provide.

Even if you do not perceive yourself to be racist, your life is affected by this structure. We are born into a racist society and uphold it through our everyday actions. Where you live, where you go to school, your job, your profession, who you interact with, how people interact with you, your treatment in the healthcare and justice systems are all affected by your race. Today, Black and brown people face harassment, are under and unemployed, over-policed, imprisoned, murdered and displaced from their homes by gentrification, climate change and global capitalism.

**"WHITE SUPREMACY IS AN HISTORICALLY BASED, INSTITUTIONALLY PERPETUATED SYSTEM OF EXPLOITATION AND OPPRESSION OF CONTINENTS, NATIONS, AND PEOPLES OF COLOUR BY WHITE PEOPLES AND NATIONS OF THE EUROPEAN CONTINENT, FOR THE PURPOSE OF MAINTAINING AND DEFENDING A SYSTEM OF WEALTH, POWER AND PRIVILEGE."**

[COLOURSOFRRESISTANCE.ORG](http://COLOURSOFRRESISTANCE.ORG)

# INSTITUTIONAL RACISM

Institutional racism in the UK manifests in a range of material impacts across different areas of life.

For example, black students face multiple challenges during the admissions process for UK universities, and research consistently highlights disparities in acceptance rates and a lack of representation in elite institutions.

Black people are 9 times more likely to be stopped and searched for drugs in England and Wales despite using fewer drugs than White people. According to the Institute for Race Relations, "despite making up 18% of the population of England and Wales (2021 census), BME prisoners are significantly overrepresented in the prison system, with approximately 28% of the overall prison population from a BME background in 2022."

Racialised people are persistently disadvantaged in the labour market, consistently receiving lower wages and more insecure contracts. Overall, BME workers are over twice as likely as White workers to face unemployment - the BME unemployment rate in 2023 is standing at 7% compared to 3.2% for White workers.

Within the UK and globally, it is racialised people who are most likely to suffer the effects of climate change, whilst generally contributing the least. An example of such environmental racism is that BME communities are three times more likely to live in areas with high air pollution than their white counterparts, which can put them at disproportionate risk of heart attacks, cancer and strokes.

On a global scale, former colonies continue to be violently exploited for the benefit of shareholders based in the Global North. Not only are natural resources extracted and exported, but the global capitalist system relies on the exploitation of the labour of people in the Global South.



## CULTURAL APPROPRIATION

Cultural appropriation is the practice of taking intellectual property, traditional knowledge, cultural expressions, or artefacts from another culture without permission.

As the UK is made up of diverse ethnicities, it's unsurprising that people pick up dialects, customs and traditions of the cultural groups that surround them. However, cultural appropriation is different to this, and has little to do with one's exposure to different cultures. Instead, cultural appropriation involves members of a dominant group exploiting culture of less privileged groups, often with little understanding or recognition of the roots of such culture or the challenges those who created it faced..

Cultural appropriation can contribute to racial oppression by disparaging a particular culture whilst mimicking it for personal gain. For example, the term 'dreadlocks' is a specifically Rasta notion referring to African hair left in its

natural form as a rejection of Eurocentric beauty standards and an affirmation of Pan-Afrikan solidarity with anti-colonial freedom fighters. When white people imitate what they perceive to be just a 'hairstyle' they are in fact disrespecting a culture which they necessarily cannot partake in. This is even starker when we see white celebrities profiting from black culture praised for setting trends while black people are simultaneously critiqued and oppressed for expressing themselves in the same way.

Even when meant with the best of intent, white people adopting an item closely connected to a particular culture can be insensitive to the experiences of racialised people. For example, a white person may wear an item such as a bindi as a fashion statement, without realising that South Asian immigrant communities are often denigrated or stigmatised for wearing these items that are part of their culture.



# CHALLENGING RACISM IN OUR GROUPS

White privilege can be a barrier to anti-racist movement building – for example, when white people organise actions that involve possible arrest without thinking about how racialised people are treated differently by the police, and often have had experiences of police brutality.

People with white privilege have internalised the idea of whiteness as the norm and non-whiteness as 'other'. To deconstruct white privilege, you will need to listen to others and let go of the idea that your way of organising is the best or only way.

Confronting white privilege requires openly challenging the dynamics of privilege in our groups, and creating forums for addressing oppression. Notice who holds power. Study effective facilitation and group dynamics to foster more democratic processes.

Ensure racism is not denied, minimised or justified. Deracialising an issue restricts the self-determination of the people who are most impacted by that issue to be defining their own struggle.

Build a process for addressing disputes within your groups, and confront everyday racism in yourself, in your communities and campaigns in a way that does not shame people.

Those impacted by racism have the best understanding of how to address it. Racialised people have been leading anti-racist organising for decades, so it's important to look to their leadership and experience.



Photo: Steve Eason - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/127991958@N06/50027059117>

**"GUILT LEADS TO INACTION.  
ONLY ACTION, TO RE-INVENT  
THE EVERYDAY AND MAKE  
IT SOMETHING ELSE, WILL  
CHANGE SOCIAL RELATIONS."**

**CAROL EHRLICH**

# RACISM

## USING PRIVILEGE

Guilt doesn't help anyone, and it frequently just inspires navel-gazing. The people who experience the brunt of white supremacy do not benefit from the guilt felt by white people. Guilt doesn't change police brutality and occupation, nor does it alter a history of colonialism, genocide, and slavery.

Instead, those that have privilege can offer daily commitment and actions to resist racism. Only through action can people learn from mistakes and find ways to work in true solidarity.

### "WE NEED TO GET PEOPLE OF COLOUR IN OUR GROUP" - NO

We should not aim to "get" racialised people to join "our" groups. The right question is, "How can we be anti-racist activists dedicated to bringing down white supremacy?"

Too often we talk about why more racialised people aren't in the group or the need to "reach out" to racialised people to "diversify" our movement. But multiracial doesn't automatically mean anti-racist. Instead of looking to "recruit" in order to increase diversity, we need to make anti-oppressive groups that racialised people will want to/are willing to join (and stay in).

**"WHAT I NEED IS FOR PEOPLE TO COME AND WORK WITH US IN THE TRENCHES AND BE THERE ALONGSIDE US. IT'S NOT ABOUT BEING ON THE OUTSIDE AND SAYING 'YES, I SUPPORT YOU! IT'S ABOUT 'NOT ONLY DO I SUPPORT YOU, BUT I AM HERE WITH YOU, I AM ROLLING UP MY SLEEVES. WHAT DO I NEED TO DO?"**

FEMINISTA JONES



# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN YOUR GROUP

- Racism exists everywhere, every day. Learn about the struggles of racialised people in your community, on campus, where you live.
- Study social movements led by racialised people, past and present, and show solidarity to existing organisations working from an anti-racist foundation.
- When organising and protesting we must take care not to undermine the leadership of racialised people already working on an issue. Ask people who have been leading these struggles what kind of solidarity might be most useful.
- Operating from the belief that your own preferred tactics are the “right/best/most radical ways to organise” - doesn’t take into account the differential risks that different tactics may pose others. For example, for people who are undocumented, or targeted by police due to racial profiling.
- Keep an eye out for social power dynamics and work to interrupt these. Point out and address discrepancies in who is talking, whose voices are being heard.
- When a group is lucky enough to have someone speak up about what’s going on, it’s imperative that we listen, believe and trust in the lived experience and take steps to address the impacts of these systems of oppression.

## EXTRA RESOURCES

**Video:** When were white people invented?

**Article:** Stop changing the subject - the problem is fascism.

**Video:** What is antiracism?

**Guide:** A Troublemakers’ Guide: Principles for Racial Justice Activists In the Face of State Repression by the Catalyst Project

# RACISM AND XENOPHOBIA

## RACISM, XENOPHOBIA AND DISCRIMINATION

Racism, xenophobia and related forms of intolerance occur on a daily basis, affecting millions around the world - especially migrating people. While racism is the belief that one race is inherently superior to another, xenophobia is the fear, prejudice, or hostility toward individuals perceived as foreign or "different" in terms of nationality, culture, religion, or ethnicity. The discrimination that these people face is therefore the unequal treatment based on these ascribed or perceived characteristics. Immigration controls are absolutely central here; borders reproduce racist social relations at different scales.

## THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT

The UK's hostile environment, designed to deter immigration and make it as challenging as possible for migrants to remain, has been progressively worsening over the past decade.

Though different categories of immigrants, such as international students, refugees or those seeking asylum, face varying levels of precarity, the hostile environment is designed to make life in the UK harder for all immigrants. Policies are put in place to restrict immigrants' rights and access to housing and vital services, restrict the right to work, and place harsh conditions on immigrants' right to remain.



**"WE ARE ALL IMPACTED BY THE HOSTILE ENVIRONMENT, WHICH INCREASES RACIAL DISCRIMINATION AND ASKS US TO BE SUSPICIOUS OF EACH OTHER."**

**JOINT COUNCIL FOR THE WELFARE OF IMMIGRANTS (JCWI)**

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN YOUR GROUP

It is important that your group recognizes the effect of hostile environment policies on people with lived experience and the power imbalances that this created between British nationals and immigrants. Those on student visas face a higher risk when participating in organising spaces. Universities can contact the Home Office should they suspect an international student of participating in actions. Whether or not a student's visa is revoked is up to Home Office discretion. Universities will sometimes provide a very limited number of 'sponsored' education positions or grants to those seeking asylum. These students may fear damaging their relationship with the university should they take part in campaigns which challenge university complicity, such as divestment campaigns.

People with lived experience of the hostile environment report feeling traumatized, surveilled, mistrusted, silenced and otherwise marginalized. It is important to be aware of this in your organising spaces. Make sure there is a recognition that not everyone will have the ability to take action equally, and that this does not result in the exclusion/shutting out of those with less secure visa statuses.



# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN YOUR GROUP

- Ensure the safety of immigrants is considered when planning actions, and that their voices are actively listened to when doing so.
- Avoid 'tokenism' when working with people with lived experience of the hostile environment. The efforts made to include them in organising spaces should not be symbolic, and neither should considerations of their safety.
- Avoid asking immigrants to constantly retell stories of their personal experiences, to avoid re-traumatization.
- Actively recognize and challenge the power dynamics between British nationals and those with lived experience of the hostile environment. This includes recognizing language barriers, cultural differences, and the fact that immigrants may be unfamiliar with the usual models of practicing solidarity in UK university spaces.
- Provide the resources to help those with lived experience feel empowered and confident to organise and take action. This can include organising a 'know your rights' training, creating spaces for them to share their experiences of organising and feedback, and setting up clear roles within which those with highly insecure visa status may feel comfortable.





Photo: David Mirzeoff/ Global Justice Now - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wdm/42061322422/>

## EXTRA RESOURCES

**Guide:** Immigrant Justice Now! A Study and Action Guide for Non-Immigrants

**Video:** Why we need to abolish borders

**Article:** Arrest and Immigration Status

**Guide:** Liberty's Guide to the Hostile Environment

**Factsheet:** Hostile Environment and UK Universities - Unis Resist Border Controls

# CLASSISM

**Social class is complicated! You might be familiar with the concept of working, middle and upper classes, however there are also researchers who suggest there may be up to seven different social classes in the UK. While the specific definitions and distinctions may be debated, the existence of class division and its impacts are very real.**

## CLASS OPPRESSION

In the UK, the richest 1% hold more wealth than 70% of Britons. The average boss of Britain's 100 largest companies earns in just 4 days what the average person earns in an entire year. Through benefit and tax changes since 2010, the poorest income groups have lost the biggest share of their incomes on average. By contrast people within the top half of incomes gained from direct tax cuts. 29% of elected MPs attended a private, fee paying school, when only 7% of the UK population have done.

The people with the most resources have the lobbying power to influence governments, and create policies that work in their favour. The UK government's austerity agenda has had the largest impact on the lives of the poor, who have suffered the most from cuts to welfare budgets and to adult social care. At the same time, the most wealthy have seen the benefits of a reduction in corporation tax, inheritance tax and the top rate of income tax. With taxes being the main mechanism

for privately controlled wealth being turned back into public wealth, what we are experiencing under austerity is the stripping away of public wealth as means of oppressing the working class.

Vast levels of economic inequality and the disproportionate impacts of political decision making show that class divisions within society persist.



Photo:Emiliano Melino-<https://www.flickr.com/photos/3705152@N03/5655661292/>

# CLASS PRIVILEGE

Class oppression has existed for a very long time and is enforced by the systemic structures that continue to exist. As with other forms of oppression, class oppression can often go unrecognised, especially by those in the dominant group who enjoy unearned privileges associated with their social position.

Here are a few things that help some people thrive that those from lower social classes are likely to have gone without:

- Not having to worry about food or shelter.
- Having educated parents around to help with homework.
- Being educated in an elite fee-paying school, which gives you confidence and connections.
- Being raised with middle class manners that make it easier to move in influential circles.
- Receiving the benefits of higher quality private healthcare.
- The freedom to focus on studies without having to work through

higher education.

- The financial security to be able to take on significant levels of debt to undertake higher education.
- Well placed family networks and contacts that offer otherwise unavailable opportunities.
- Being able to afford good quality food, clothes and accessories.
- Access to inherited family wealth.
- Financial support from family to obtain higher education or get on the property ladder.
- An upbringing coached in the idea that the world is your oyster, that you can achieve anything you desire or become whoever you want to be.

Class privilege hugely influences a person's financial security, life opportunities, quality of life and access to resources needed to thrive. It provides a safety net, a backup plan and an expanded set of life options all rolled into one.

# CLASSISM

## INTERSECTIONS WITH OTHER FORMS OF OPPRESSION

### CONTENT WARNING: THIS SECTION INCLUDES REFERENCE TO ABUSE

Class analysis must be combined with feminism, anti-racism, and anti-authoritarian analysis to locate those who are most dispossessed and ensure that our struggles fight for the liberation of all.

Single working class mothers will experience oppression on the basis of their class and gender. Many will not be able to stay in work as a result of child care, and now with changes to Income Support won't be able to take time out to care for their children either.

Some women may stay in abusive relationships for fear of their housing situation. All over the UK, refuges for survivors of domestic violence are closing as a result of austerity measures.

Impoverished black communities face disadvantage and alienation both as a result of their class and their race, which intersect. Feminism and anti-racism can also highlight different types of working class relations. For example, traditionally roles involving care have been assigned to women, while physical labour has often been seen as the domain of racialised people. It is no coincidence that these roles are also devalued in the popular imagination.

Working class men may find it more difficult to compete for jobs against middle class women as they often will not have experienced the same educational privileges and opportunities throughout their lifetime.

Having class privilege can reduce the impact of other oppressions. For example, middle and upper class disabled people are more able to pay for private health and social care. Parents with financial and social capital can get more support for their child with special educational needs. Wealthier people often have more options of how they respond to a hate crime where they live.

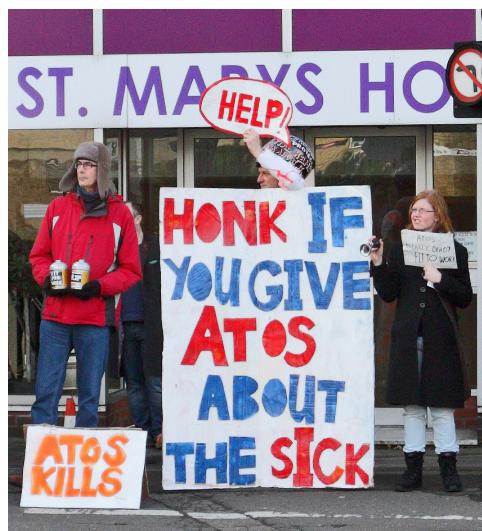


Photo: Roger Blackwell - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rogerblackwell/1263234055/>

# CHALLENGING CLASSISM IN OUR GROUPS

Those with more class privilege are often more comfortable stepping into leadership roles, feel more comfortable articulating their views in a meeting, and have increased educational opportunities to develop the language to do so. People with more class privilege are conditioned into knowing that their voices are valued and deserve to be heard, and can be more likely to push for and obtain what they want out of a meeting or situation even to the detriment of others and irrespective of the needs of the group.

Groups working for social justice need to actively work to create a cross-class culture that makes them accessible and inclusive to people from any background as well as enabling people from working class backgrounds to take up positions of leadership within the group.

The way meetings are organised may determine how accessible they are to everyone, including the timing and length of meetings, how they are advertised, and whether child care has been taken into consideration.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN YOUR GROUP

- Who speaks the most in your groups? Is class privilege deciding this?
- Do we give equal consideration to participating in local grassroots or community organising as we do volunteering abroad in an "exotic" place?
- Be aware of romanticising working class culture. Growing up in poverty as a lived experience is very different from a dalliance with poverty as a lifestyle choice.
- Avoid jargon and unnecessarily intellectualised language.

### EXTRA RESOURCES

**Video:** Jobcentre sanctions 'Your money is stopped, you go into freefall'

**Website:** The Activist Class Cultures Kit

**Video:** Geographies of racial capitalism with Ruth Wilson Gilmore

**Report:** The colonial roots of global south debt by Debt Justice

**Book:** Feminism for the 99%, A Manifesto by Cinzia Arruzza, Nancy Fraser and Tithi Bhattacharya

**Video:** How Rich Countries Keep Poor Countries In Poverty (and why)

# ABLEISM

Disability is defined in the Equalities Act as "a physical or mental impairment that has a 'substantial' and 'long-term' negative effect on your ability to do normal daily activities". This is an example of the medical model of disability, which describes the way in which a particular illness, ailment or impairment impacts on an individual's ability to carry out activities.

The disability rights movement tends to reject the medical model in favour of social and political understandings of disability. The social model of disability sees individuals with access needs being "disabled" by the structures of an ableist society. For example, the problem isn't that you are a wheelchair user but that this building does not have a lift.

It's important to remember that many disabilities are not visible. It might not be possible, for example, to tell if someone has depression, autism or chronic fatigue, and some disabilities will be visible at some times and not at others.

Recognising that invisible disabilities exist, and taking steps to improve access for those who have them is crucial to ensuring spaces, and our society, are open and inclusive.

**Key statistic:** People with disabilities currently make up **24%** of the total UK population.

**"DISABLED PEOPLE ARE AN EASY TARGET BECAUSE SOCIETY HAS ACCEPTED THE VIEW THAT GENERALLY SPEAKING DISABLED PEOPLE ARE UNABLE TO FULLY PARTICIPATE WITHIN SOCIETY DUE SOLELY TO OUR IMPAIRMENTS. THIS VIEW, SUPPORTED THROUGH NEGATIVE AND PEJORATIVE STEREOTYPING, DISTORTS WHO WE ARE AND THE CAUSES OF THE DISABLING BARRIERS WE FACE."**

**DISABLED PEOPLE AGAINST CUTS**



Photo - Roger Blackwell - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/rogerblackwell/28547605942/>

# ABLEST OPPRESSION

In 2024, only 54% of women with disabilities are in work, compared to nearly 79% of women without, and 55% versus 85% for men with and without disabilities respectively.

More striking still, just 6% of people with learning difficulties are in paid employment. Reasons for this include negative attitudes from employers and recruitment agencies, inaccessible workplaces and inflexible working practices.

On top of lack of employment, disabled people face average extra costs of £570 a month related to their impairment or condition. This includes equipment and adaptive clothing, high energy bills, and high insurance premiums.

Disabled people are not a priority for policy makers, and this has lethal consequences. 38% of people with a learning disability die from avoidable causes, compared with 9% of the

general population. Research suggests a lack of training for health professionals could be contributing to 1,200 avoidable deaths of people with a learning disability happening every year.

Disabled people have faced the brunt of government austerity measures. A 2021 study found that the joint impact of cuts to healthcare, public health and social care since 2010 were linked to 57,550 more deaths than would have been expected between 2010 and 2014.

Disabled people are regularly the victims of prejudice, discrimination and hate crime. TUC research uncovered that 49% of disabled people have experienced bullying or harassment at work in the past year because of their impairment or condition. One in five disabled people felt they could not disclose their disability to their employer. People with disabilities are four times more likely to be the victim of a hate crime.



Photo -Peg Hunter - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/43005015@N06/48666545086>

# ABLEISM

## MAKING OUR GROUPS MORE ACCESSIBLE

How many buildings do you use that have no lift access? How many public spaces are only, or primarily, built around stepped access? How many events have you attended that have had signers, hearing loops or text relay? How many resources have you produced or read that include Braille? How many events have you been to that have had no access breaks?

All of these are important things to consider because they have an effect on people and their ability to engage in activities. It's vital that thought is given to how to improve the accessibility of your activities, not just to those who are already involved, but to those who aren't yet as well. Failing to address access issues can immediately shut the door to people who may want to participate in a group.

Don't feel bad if there's something you haven't thought of, but make sure you listen to people with access needs and do everything you can to make adjustments. For example, an autistic member of your group might experience sensory overload in a room full of small group discussions, but perhaps the group that they're in could sit in a quiet side room.

Language which is discriminatory and oppressive towards disabled people is common and accepted. Words like 'crazy', 'mad' and 'insane' are frequently used in common speech. People joke about friends who are "a bit OCD" or "a bit autistic". Language like this has a damaging impact on the lives of disabled people, and ensuring your group don't use this language in meetings, materials and campaigns is an important first step to building an inclusive and safe space.

### EXTRA RESOURCES

**Video:** Things Not To Say To Someone Who Uses A Wheelchair

**Video:** Things Not To Say to An Autistic Person

**Blog post:** Disability Politics

**Book review:** Empire of Normality

**Video:** 10 Principles of Disability Justice in ASL

# THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN YOUR GROUP

- Are you organising your events and meetings in rooms that are wheelchair accessible?
- Do you have regular access breaks in long meetings or events?
- Have you thought about having signers for your meetings or events?
- Do you book rooms with hearing loops for your meetings or events?
- Do you ensure there are a range of ways that people can participate in your group?
- Do you ensure you have a person designated for welfare support for any actions or events?
- Does your group actively seek to challenge the workload of members of your group and tackle burnout among your activists?
- Do you add alt text on your social media photos and graphics so that people who use screen-readers can fully understand your posts?
- Have you advertised the accessibility arrangements in place for your event or meeting? Have you asked attendees if they have any further access needs?

**"DISABILITY ONLY BECOMES A TRAGEDY WHEN SOCIETY FAILS TO PROVIDE THE THINGS WE NEED TO LEAD OUR LIVES – JOB OPPORTUNITIES OR BARRIER-FREE BUILDINGS, FOR EXAMPLE... IT IS NOT A TRAGEDY TO ME THAT I'M LIVING IN A WHEELCHAIR."**

- JUDY HEUMANN



# HOMOPHOBIA

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Sexual orientation is an enduring emotional, romantic, sexual or affectional attraction to another person. Sexual orientation is different from sexual behavior because it refers to feelings and self-concept. People may or may not express their sexual orientation in their behaviors.

Throughout British history, heterosexuality has been established as the norm of sexual and romantic attraction. People who experience other forms of sexual and romantic attraction have suffered discrimination and oppression as a result of this.

**HETEROCENTRISM** - is the ideology and assumption that all people are heterosexual.

**HETEROSEXISM** – is the system of oppression that gives privileges to heterosexual people to the disadvantage of those who are not.

**HOMOPHOBIA** - is the fear, discomfort, or hatred of non-heterosexual people that is manifested on the individual level.

**HETEROCENTRISM**  
Ideology

**HETEROSEXISM**  
System

**HOMOPHOBIA**  
Manifestation



# HETEROSEXIST OPPRESSION

Discrimination and oppression against sexual minorities has taken many forms.

Legislative discrimination has existed for many years in the form of laws and regulations that have restricted people who are not heterosexual from accessing the same rights as heterosexual people.

Over the last fifty years, the UK has seen massive advances for the rights of sexual minorities, but discrimination still exists. LGBTQIA+ awareness training may be given to a high percentage of NHS staff but health outcomes for LGBTQIA+ people as a group are still lower than for heterosexual people. Men who have sex with men are still restricted from donating blood unless they have been celibate for 12 months. Married LGBTQIA+ couples do not have the same pension rights as married heterosexual couples. Over half of LGBTQIA+ young people suffer homophobic bullying at schools. 25% of young homeless people are LGBTQIA+ due to family estrangement.

42% of young LGBTQIA+ people suffer from anxiety or depression.

The creation and implementation of legislation and the prevailing trend of improvement creates a false sense of progress and the sense that the imbalance and the discrimination have been addressed. Yet many areas and opportunities remain closed off to LGBTQIA+ people. Changing attitudes and legislative protection have worked to mask enduring inequalities and an increase in violence towards LGBTQIA+ people.



**"HETEROSEXUALITY - WHATEVER THE CURRENT VERSION OF THAT CONCEPT HAPPENS TO BE - IS UNREMARKABLE BECAUSE IT IS THE STANDARD BY WHICH EVERYTHING ELSE IS MEASURED. THAT IS HETEROSEXUAL PRIVILEGE."**

HANNE BLANK

# HOMOPHOBIA

## BEYOND THE BINARY - QUEER IDENTITIES

Many of the legislative and societal gains that have been made are in relation to the rights and acceptance of homosexual men and lesbian women, but sexual identities can be much more complex than this. Despite the historically normalised split between the norm of straight identities and the 'other' of homosexual identities, many people do not experience sexuality in such binary ways.

Many people identify as bisexual, which typically refers to somebody who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction to people of other genders, or pansexual, which typically refers to somebody who experiences sexual and/or romantic attraction towards people regardless of their sex or gender identity.

Bisexual or pansexual people often experience oppression through the societal erasure of their identities. As homosexuality becomes more normalised, people and institutions have become accustomed to acknowledging the existence of both heterosexual and homosexual identities. While this is good progress, bisexual and pansexual identities are often ignored and forced into having semi-closeted homosexual identities. Bisexual and pansexual people face erasure in both the straight

and LGBT+ community.

Another identity that is frequently erased is asexuality. Asexuality refers to people who experience limited or no sexual or romantic attraction. Some asexual people do not experience sexual attraction, but do experience romantic attraction, and vice versa. Others will experience sexual attraction only in relation to people they have a romantic relationship with.

In a society which has become increasingly sexualised, there is an expectation that all people will experience sexual attraction. Asexuality is an identity that is almost completely erased from mainstream media, culture and art and asexual people will often be told that their identity does not exist. Asexual people suffer substantially from their lack of visibility, and will often face bullying and discrimination on the grounds of their sexuality.



Photo - Ken Fager - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/kenfagerdotcom/50006324817>

## THE MYTH OF "COMING OUT"

A large part of the discourse around LGBTQIA+ identities surrounds the idea of 'coming out'. Coming out is based on the presumption of heterosexuality until stated otherwise - a problematic notion in and of itself.

What is additionally damaging is the belief that coming out is a one time only event, when in fact, any LGBTQIA+ person will have to go through a coming out process on numerous occasions throughout their lives: when meeting new people, moving city, or starting a new job or course.

This can inhibit somebody's ability to form new and trusting relationships, and they can be forced to either repeatedly undergo what can be a traumatic and anxiety-ridden process or else live with others making inaccurate presumptions about their sexuality.

## INTERSECTIONS WITH OTHER FORMS OF OPPRESSION

Heterosexism and other forms of oppression overlap and intersect. For example, the experience of a black gay man in a city in the UK will be different than that of a white gay man in that same city.

A black gay man may experience both homophobia and racism simultaneously. In the same way, the experiences of being a lesbian, old, disabled, poor, trans woman, or any other identity, are unique and different.

Due to the inter-linked nature of the systems of oppression, individuals will experience different types of

discrimination and disadvantages as a consequence of expressing a combination of identities.

A black lesbian may experience homophobia, racism and sexism. An East Asian man may be disadvantaged by racism in ways that are similar to the ways a gay man is disadvantaged by homophobia and heterosexism.

Understanding the different ways these different forms of oppression intersect with heterosexism is crucial to tackling it.

# HOMOPHOBIA

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN YOUR GROUP

Engage in inclusive practices. Create work, study and living environments in which sexual diversity is included, modeled and valued.

Use gender inclusive and non-heterosexist language. Do not assume that you know someone's sexual orientation and/or the gender of one's romantic/sexual interests. Use inclusive language even if you know someone is heterosexual. Help educate and encourage others to use inclusive language, as well.

Speak up against homophobic jokes, comments, slurs or other behaviours when you witness them. If you don't, your silence condones and encourages such behaviours.

Don't "out" people. Do not force anyone to disclose one's sexual orientation. Also, if you know that someone is LGBTQIA+ or is questioning one's sexual orientation, don't assume that you may tell anyone else. Be sensitive to the fact that some people are "out" in some areas of their lives, but not in others.

### EXTRA RESOURCES

**Timeline:** Key dates for lesbian, gay, bi and trans equality

**Article:** 3 Differences Between the Terms 'Gay' and 'Queer' — and Why It Matters

**Article:** Queer liberation as anti-capitalism

**Blog Post:** How capitalism harms migrants + queer people

**Article:** Palestine is a queer issue



# RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION

**Freedom to believe and practice one's own religion is a fundamental human right that many people are unable to exercise. While religions are globally practised, they are far from universally respected, with persecution and violence against individuals on the basis of their religion rife in many countries.**

Religion plays a very important role in peoples' lives, in identity formation, and in building communities and entire societies. But it has also been associated with stereotypes or negative preconceptions.

For example, popular discourse often links Islam and terrorism, influencing social attitudes and resulting in an obvious resurgence, particularly since 2001, of racial and religious discrimination. It is incredibly problematic to tie Islam and terrorism together, particularly considering that "anti-terrorist" discourse and policy has historically existed as a guise to justify Islamophobia.

Our movements must not reinforce the religious oppression of society, but embrace inclusivity by accommodating for all spiritual needs. Building an inclusive movement doesn't happen overnight. Striving for inclusion is a continual, evolving process that requires us to work hard and think critically, often about ourselves and our movements.



Photo: Tim Pierce - <https://www.flickr.com/photos/qwratty/32230177240>

# RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION

While the UK claims to uphold the values of equal treatment, irrespective of religious identity, multiple forms of subtle discrimination take place. Some examples are:

- Students in a school are ridiculed or even physically attacked because they wear articles of faith.
- A city allows only certain religious organisations to register and to have places of worship.
- An organisation organises a meeting, to which all members are invited, but it's taking place on a religious holiday.
- When people who practice a faith are assumed to be homophobic or intolerant in some way.
- An employer decides not to shortlist a candidate on the basis of their name, even though they are just as well – or more – qualified than another person without an “unusual” sounding name.

A 2012 Parliamentary Inquiry report focusing on black, Pakistani and Bangladeshi workers, found that many job applicants of an ethnic minority had changed their name or appearance to try to overcome racial and religious prejudices. When they did, their employment prospects increased.

In the UK, British Muslims are increasingly facing victimization, including through state-sponsored projects such as Prevent which encourage teachers and lecturers to report students who depict radicalized behaviour. While Muslims make up approximately 6% of the national population, nearly 60% of reports under Prevent are in relation to Muslim students.

Recent years have seen a rise in religiously aggravated vandalism, hostility, harassment, and physical assaults on individuals belonging to “visible” minorities, who are distinguished by distinctive clothing or other signs of faith and religious identity. Since 2023, this has included a sharp rise in religious hate crimes targeted at Jewish people across the UK.



Photo: Pexels.com

# RELIGION & RACISM

Racism and religious persecution are often intertwined. In the UK, Islamophobia is both racial and religious prejudice as racial characteristics are used to distinguish Muslims. Because of this, Hindus and Sikhs often experience anti-Muslim hate crimes. Following the 7/7 bombings of 2005, a Sikh Temple or gurdwara in Kent was the first place to be attacked, followed by two others in Merton and Leeds.

In some countries, religious persecution operates through state-sponsored violence and is connected to race. For example, Kurdish people in Turkey face state and cultural oppression on the basis of their ethnicity and their religion.

## THINGS TO THINK ABOUT IN YOUR GROUP

- Try to ensure the events and meetings you organise don't clash with a religious holiday.
- If you're providing food at an event, have you sought to ensure it is suitable for people with dietary requirements (eg. halal, kosher).
- At events you organise, do you have adequate and suitable space for prayer?
- If an event or meeting falls within Ramadan, you might want to think about the time of day, temperature of the room etc. to help participation for those fasting.

## EXTRA RESOURCES

**Article:** On Antisemitism, Anti-Zionism and Dangerous Conflations

**Video:** The problem with Prevent

**Article:** Palestine, Islamophobia and the policing of solidarity

**Learning resource:** 20 Years of the 'Global War on Terror,' 20 Days of Education and Resources by the Catalyst Project

**Article:** Our approach to Zionism by JVP

# BEING AN ALLY

At the core of the principles of collective liberation is the notion that those who have the direct, lived experience of the every day and structural forms of oppression should be at the forefront of the resistance to those forms of oppression. However, it's also vital that other people within in society support those struggles and offer practical solidarity. This solidarity is referred to as '**being an ally**'. Being an ally is an active process, whereby you stand with people who are experiencing oppression, take leadership from them and take action to dismantle oppressive systems and structures with them.

## LISTENING AND TAKING LEADERSHIP

If you don't experience the form of oppression being discussed, the most effective thing you can do is to sit back, to listen, and to learn from those discussing their experiences of how power, privilege and oppression manifest themselves.

It is vital in solidarity work to take leadership from those most affected by injustice. This helps to centre the voices of those most marginalised and oppressed in campaigns. It also works to ensure that the actions taken in pursuit of social change empower, rather than impact negatively upon, the communities that are affected.

For example, if you're campaigning around issues of climate justice, have you researched what action indigenous communities on the frontlines of extraction are calling for? Have you looked into what people in small island states and countries facing the worst impacts of climate change think should

be the priorities for solidarity?

If you're campaigning around workers' rights or economic justice, have you spoken with workers' organisations or trade unions to ascertain their position on the issues and what their solutions would be? Have you looked at whether there are claimant led welfare activist groups or worker organised campaigns?



## DO YOUR OWN WORK

Listening and taking leadership from those directly experiencing injustice is important, but it's not the responsibility of people facing oppression to act as your encyclopedia.

There are loads of resources that have been produced that detail the experiences of people facing oppression - do what you can (acknowledging this amount will be different for everyone) to educate yourself.

## CHALLENGE OPPRESSION

For people who suffer oppression, challenging problematic behaviours and resisting systemic forces are daily struggles. Women can't take a break from experiencing patriarchy. Racialised people can't step out of systems of racism for a day.

This is emotionally draining, so it's important that people who have power and privilege also challenge oppression, whilst being careful not to speak over those who face oppression. This is a crucial aspect of being an effective ally. Not only are all of our struggles interconnected, but we'll only overcome oppression by working together.

## STEP BACK

If, as someone who possesses power and privilege, you find yourself taking leadership roles more often than other people in your activist group, it might be worth considering stepping back and allowing other people to step into those roles.

## GETTING THINGS WRONG

We will all make mistakes and get things wrong from time to time, and it's important to respond in a productive way.

Being told that you've done something wrong is never easy and is often uncomfortable. Many people's reactions are often to be dismissive or defensive.

It is important to refer back to the principles of liberation in the first place. Listen and take leadership from those experiencing oppression, apologise for your mistakes, acknowledge you understand the issue, and endeavour to make improvements for the future.

People aren't out to trip you up or force you to make mistakes. We're all on a journey of learning together, and being open, reflective and willing to learn is a crucial part of that journey.

# CALLING IN

We all live in a world that upholds systems of oppression, which means that we all have internalised forms of oppression. It takes time to unlearn these and work towards building safer spaces in our movements. One way towards this is for each of us to be open to being 'called-in'.

## CALLING IN VS CALLING OUT

Calling-in is a term that developed in response to the term calling-out. Calling-out is the act of bringing public attention to someone's problematic oppressive behaviour.

Calling-out can be received as shaming, potentially damage relationships, and hinder moving forward constructively. Calling-in aims to address problematic behaviour in a more personal, compassionate way, allowing for learning and development.

However, we still need to be mindful

of the levels of compassion we are expecting those experiencing oppression to have towards those who are, albeit sometimes unintentionally, oppressing others.



## ADDRESSING OPPRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR

- Acknowledge the harm.
- Seek out guidance from the person or persons who were impacted.
- Make sure that it's not always the people on the receiving end of problematic behaviour that are doing the emotional labour of setting up mediation processes that address the problems. How can responsibilities be shared by allies?
- Assess whether the oppression is one-off and unintentional, or part of a larger pattern of problematic behaviour. If it's the first, the issue might be resolved with a compassionate conversation. If the second, a process that is patient, transparent and accountable should be designed. People both responsible and impacted by the behaviour will should involved, as well as skilled moderators.

# INTERSECTIONAL ORGANISING

**1**

Learn more about oppression through research, self-study and group discussions.

**2**

Notice which voices are heard most often in meetings, or which are marginalised. Ask people who have spoken a lot to 'step back' and create space for others.

**3**

Look for what might be invisible. For example, if we are organising for disability rights, do we consider the specific oppressions faced by racialised disabled people?

**4**

Build alliances. Different groups will have different perspectives on an issue. Building connections and strengthening our understanding of the complexity of particular injustices make our movements stronger.

**5**

Take leadership from those most impacted by injustice. People with direct experiences of particular injustices are likely to better understand issues and their complexities, and suggest more appropriate solutions.

**6**

Make time for self-reflection in your group. How are power dynamics manifesting and impacting people in your group? What can the group do to change them?

**"IN POLITICAL STRUGGLES THERE WOULDN'T BE ANY 'YOUR' AND 'MY' ISSUES,  
IF WE SAW EACH FORM OF OPPRESSION AS INTEGRALLY LINKED TO THE  
OTHERS."**

**BARBARA SMITH**

# THANK YOU

Thank you for taking the time to read this **Introduction to Power & Privilege**. It's important to remember that all of us are on a journey of learning and unlearning when it comes to the topics covered within this booklet. **Remember you can always contact People & Planet:**

- For assistance with all the different areas covered in this guide
- For support planning any aspect of your campaign
- To let us know what you're up to so we can share it with the movement

If you're not yet organising, check out People & Planet's current student campaigns: **Fossil Free**, **Fossil Free Careers** and **Divest Borders**. If there isn't already a group on your campus, we'll help you to set one up!

✉ admin@peopleandplanet.org

ƒ facebook.com/peopleandplanet

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