HOMOPHOBIA
ABLEISM
RACISM
TRANSPHOBIA
AGEISM
ISLAMOPHOBIA
COLONIALISM
EQUITY 101

RESPECT EXISTANCE OR EXPECT RESISTANCE
Thank you for picking up the Equity 101 Guidebook, a part of the University of Toronto Students' Union’s Equity 101 Campaign. A commitment to the principles of equity and social justice is core to the UTSU’s mandate. However, discourse around issues of equity can become convoluted if all parties have differing understandings of certain terms and concepts. More often than not, this can derail the conversation and quickly become unproductive.

The theoretical definition of the term would recognize equity as an interdisciplinary field of study encompassing social justice theories and practices including critical anti-racism, disability studies, queer theory, and transnational studies. However, at its base, equity itself is about theories and practices that ensure that individuals and groups are given what they need to survive and thrive. This differs from equality, which is often defined as simply “treating everybody the same.” Equity acknowledges that equal treatment is simply not enough to ensure that the most marginalized in the society are treated fairly. The reasons for this are described in more depth in this guidebook. Some of these factors include tackling the origins of inequities, including various kinds of privilege, as well as discussing things some of us often take for granted, such as citizenship.

This is by no means meant to be an exhaustive overview meant to make one an expert on equity topics. Instead, the guidebook is meant to be a resource for individuals who want to self-educate themselves on these topics and develop at least a basic understanding of equity. It is encouraged that this be used as a starting point towards further reading and education on social justice.

To further engage with the Equity 101 campaign, visit utsu.ca/campaigns.

Yours in Service,
The University of Toronto Students’ Union Executive
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ORIGINS OF INEQUITY

PRIVILEGE

Privilege is a tricky term. It does not mean that a person’s life is easy or that one has never experienced social or economic hardship. It simply means that there are hardships that, due to some segments of your identity, you will either not face or you will face to a significantly lesser degree. Privilege is defined as an advantage, which is unearned and, “granted to a particular group of people who (often unintentionally) gain from the oppression of another group.”¹

There are several kinds of privilege and they are intimately connected to historical events that laid a foundation for society today. One such example of this is colonialism as it privileged certain races over others; primarily the white race over all others. This is often referred to as “white privilege”. Today these advantages continue to give white people “greater access to certain social, political and cultural benefits, such as higher social status and income levels, positions of authority and greater control over decision-making. This privilege reinforces and perpetuates the power imbalance between white people and racialized groups.”²

Often, folks will say that they don’t have any kind of privilege, they just “worked very hard” which illustrates how the “advantages incurred may come to be seen as ‘normal’, thereby reinforcing beliefs in the superiority of white people.”³ In this way, we see that the concept of privilege is a tricky one and can be seen as a personal attack, when in reality, it is just a means of describing power relations in society.

Another example of privilege is cisgender privilege. This means that there are specific issues that cisgender⁴ people will either not face or face at a lesser frequency. For example, if you are cisgender, and read as such, you are less likely to face harassment or violence for using a bathroom that aligns with your gender.⁵
PASSING PRIVILEGE

Privilege is not an on/off switch. It is complex and fluid. Passing or “conditional” privilege is often defined as society assuming somebody is a member of a privileged group when they are not. The term “passing privilege” is often used when talking about trans people who “pass” as cisgender or people of colour whose appearances lead to them being read as white.

However, passing privilege is often linked to complex feelings about identity and identity erasure (which is discussed further in section 1.02).

OPPRESSION

Oppression is intimately linked to concepts such as privilege, intersectionality, and identity as well as historical events such as colonialism and imperialism. Oppression is defined as the “systemic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions.” Oppression is the opposite of privilege. In this way, “oppression occurs when established laws, customs, and practices systemically reflect and produce inequities based on one’s member in targeted social identity groups.”

While those with varying levels of privilege are given varying levels of access to power, those who experience varying levels of oppression experience barriers that limit them based on their membership in certain social identity groups. Oppression is an often misunderstood concept because the experience of oppression is often only visible if it is part of one’s life experience. Therefore, these barriers are “only invisible to those ‘seemingly’ unaffected by [them]”.

Colonialism in Canada: Effects on Race, Gender, and Class

The creation of a social hierarchy within Canada laid the foundation for privilege and oppression to become institutionalized. With respect to racial hierarchies, the discriminatory laws, beliefs, and practices that aimed to keep Black individuals in a lower social ranking created an environment wherein colourism could flourish.
Activist and author Alice Walker is credited with coining the term colourism. In *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (1983) Walker defined colourism as “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same-race people based solely on their colour.” This means that lighter skinned people have privilege over darker skinned people. This does not mean that life is wholly easier for lighter skinned people, rather it means that there are struggles that lighter skinned people will not face to the same degree that darker skinned individuals will experience. It is important to note that the concept of colourism operates worldwide. It’s felt across several cultures including “Latin American, East and Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and Africa.”

Colourism often affects women differently than other genders. This is because light skinned women of colour are often viewed through a more sensitive and humanizing lens. Most of us are conditioned to think that physical features associated with whiteness are simultaneously neutral yet superior to characteristics typically associated with people of colour. Race and gender are often linked to concepts such as misogynoir.

**Indigenous**

Other ways colonialism affected, and continue to affect, gender and gendered relations of power is illustrated through Indigenous oppression in Canada. Colonization attempted to dismantle Indigenous views of gender and family. The Indian Act (1876) adversely affects Indigenous individuals, women in particular. The Act attempted to define what “Indianness” was. “Differences between Metis, non-status Indians, and status Indians were created by the Act and those differences became accepted in Canada and being cultural in nature when, in fact, they were social constructions imposed by legislation.” A significant consequence of this Act is that Indigenous women who have status can lose their status and band membership if they marry an individual who is not Indigenous.

In these ways, colonialism laid the groundwork for the gendered and racial societal dynamics that we know and experience today.
Cultural Appropriation

Cultural appropriation is heavily linked to colonialism because the racial stereotypes that subjugated groups of people are often the same stereotypes that are performed by individuals who are not members of those groups for “fun” or a “joke”. While many argue that it is fundamentally an issue of free speech, it relies on harmful stereotypes that perpetuate hatred and/or prejudice towards particular groups. What many are actually arguing for is to “continue speaking over those whose voices have historically been silenced.”

Examples of cultural appropriation include doing blackface (which means wearing dark make up or some other liquid on one’s face to make it appear darker, particularly for the purposes of trying to “look Black”) or dressing like an “Indian Princess” – which is really just a stereotypical caricature of an Indigenous person.

The foundation of these kinds of actions is “the belief that these people aren’t quite equal to what we are or aren’t as [North American] as we are, or that you as a person who’s not a member of that group should be able to dictate how painful the stereotype should be.” One way to combat racial stereotypes is to be mindful of the costumes we wear and the kinds of dress we view as “serious” and the kind we view as “items to make fun of” – especially if they are not ours.

“We Are a Nation of Immigrants!”

This is often a way of derailing the conversation when issues of colonialism come up. It is also a very reductionist statement that is often made when describing the history of countries such as Canada and the United States.

“It makes it seem as if there are no walls crossed and no lives risked, there is no degrading bureaucracy to contend with and no uniformed mercenaries waiting to harass, profile, and deport certain immigrants. It pretends as though there are not human beings designated as “legal” and “illegal.” It fails to recognize the sovereign territories of Indigenous peoples—the original inhabitants of this land—that exist within this “nation of immigrants.” (Source: “Whites Educating Whites”)
INTERSECTIONALITY

This is a term coined by American civil rights advocate, law professor, and critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw. It describes how different types of discrimination or oppressions interact—or intersect—with each other. First coined in the 1980s, Crenshaw coined this term to explain how power structures interact and shape lived experiences. In the 1980s, however, she was specifically referencing how power structures intersect to negatively affect Black women.

“In every generation and in every intellectual sphere and in every political moment, there have been African American women who have articulated the need to think and talk about race through a lens that looks at gender, or think and talk about feminism through a lens that looks at race. So [the term “intersectionality”] is in continuity with that.”

But, what if you’re the kind of person who “does not see” colour, ability, gender, sexuality, or another factor of identity? Pretending that intersecting power dynamics do not negatively affect individuals does not make inequity go away it simply makes it hard to acknowledge, discuss, and tackle meaningfully. Often, “not seeing” those characteristics encourages individuals “who endorse this perspective to ignore the ongoing processes that maintain racial stratification in schools, neighborhoods, health care, and other social institutions.”

FREEDOM OF SPEECH

Freedom of speech is an important pillar of society. Often, however, when freedom of speech is discussed it is fundamentally a theoretical argument. This is unfair when, much of the time, theoretical arguments are being used to argue against the realities of several individuals and groups. Some argue that freedom of speech is actually regulated more than we realize to “promote other desirable ends, including discovery of the truth.” Speech, particularly an exchange of ideas and perspectives, is necessary. However, it does not exist in a vacuum and can “contribute to fascism, genocide, and even less egregious kinds of injustice.” Many argue that words are simply “just words” but words have histories and meanings attached to them that render them more powerful than many of us realize.

When discussing oppression(s), it is important to acknowledge that language has played a fundamental role in further marginalizing social groups. “Being asked to change your language in a lot easier than being a [marginalized] person in this world. [Marginalized] people experience very real violence and exclusion, and it feels really horrible when these experiences are reduced to debate points in a theoretical argument.”

IDENTITY/IES – ERASURE

Identity is a historically and socially constructed concept. Many individuals and groups have slightly different notions of identity that are specific to certain times, places, cultures, and lived experiences. Broadly, identity is formed based on how we interact with others, how the world interacts with us, and how we reflect on these interactions personally. Identity plays a fundamental role in how we experience the world, “as well as shaping the types of opportunity and challenges we face.”
Social norms, language, and historical circumstances such as colonialism and slavery, have come to inform how we view social groups and identity. Our identities are not neutral. Our identity/ies “can play a significant role in determining whether we have social, political, and economic power, how we get that power, and how we use it. Our identity can fundamentally shape our life experience, how we’re treated, whom we meet and become friends with, what kind of education and jobs we get, where we live, what opportunities we’re afforded, and what kind of inequities we may face.”

Identities are not static. Some are fluid for some, such as those who feel that their sexuality or gender is not always the same or will not always be the same. For some, a segment of their identity might not have a name yet. Sometimes people say that they “can’t keep up” with all of the new terms constantly being created. Terms such as agender or polysexual might seem confusing for those who are unfamiliar with different kinds of genders and sexual orientations. However, language is about creating new terms for feelings, behaviours, and objects. The creation of new terms for any part of one’s identity is not “inconvenient” or “adding to the list” – it is simply naming something that already exists. Everyone has a right to use identifiers that feel right for them!

**DISABILITY STUDIES**

A disability is “a pervasive cultural system that stigmatizes certain kinds of bodily variations. [D]isability is a culturally fabricated narrative of the body, similar to what we understand as the fictions of race and gender. The disability/ability system produces subjects by differentiating and marking bodies”. In other words, disability is a socially constructed category that is used to categorize certain bodies. A disability can affect the way an individual interacts with others and the world around them because the world has been constructed to privilege able-bodied individuals. For example, able-bodied people will not have to worry about how to communicate with hearing individuals or will not need to be concerned about whether a restaurant they want to visit is wheelchair accessible.
SOCIAL DETERMINANTS OF HEALTH

Social determinants of health are the “complex, integrated, and overlapped social structures and economic systems that are responsible for most health inequities.”

These systems include social and physical environments, access to health services, and societal factors. The aforementioned historical and social circumstances have produced many kinds of inequities, including health inequities. These inequities affect several Canadians, particularly those living in poverty. In all countries, including Canada, “health and illness follow a social gradient: the lower the socioeconomic position, the worse the health.”

The primary factors that shapes our health are the living conditions we experience. The significance of “living conditions was established in the mid-1800s and has been enshrined in Canadian government policy documents since the mid-1970s.” However, most of us are ignorant of the fact that “our health is shaped by how income and wealth is distributed, whether or not we are employed, and if so, the working conditions we experience” on top of the environment we are living in. Moreover, access to education and food play fundamental roles in health as well. Often it is identity that plays a role in accessing all of these things, for example, at a York University Conference held in Toronto in 2002, some social determinants of health included Indigenous status, disability, gender, and race.

Therefore, when we talk about health and lifestyle, some of the focus must be on the source of the health issue, and the role identity plays, rather than the symptoms or consequences that the health problem produces.
INVISIBLE ILLNESSES

We cannot discuss health and dis/ability without mentioning invisible illnesses. “Invisible illness” is a term to describe an illness which affects the body, “but is not visually or readily apparent to [an] onlooker.” Invisible illnesses can be acute such as a virus or chronic such as an autoimmune disease such as rheumatoid arthritis or mental illness. Invisible illnesses occupy a unique position in disability discourse and policymaking because they do not present outwardly and therefore do not easily mark an individual as having a disability.

Therefore, when discussing disability, it is important to recognize that just because one’s disability is not outwardly visible, that does not mean it does not exist. For example, if you witness a person pulling into an accessible parking space with the appropriate sticker on their car but they don’t “seem sick enough” to you – there are several illnesses they could have that have left them with chronic pain, limited mobility, or something else that has significantly affected how they interact with the world around them.

AUDISM

“Audism” is not a frequently used term. In scholarly articles, it is only used a handful of times and as of 2013 not one of those was published outside of the journal Deaf Cultural Studies. Audism describes oppression that deaf and hard of hearing individuals face. There is a history of discrimination and medicalization of individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing. For example, “illegal detainments that included forced use of antipsychotic drugs, and commitments of deaf people to asylums for the criminally insane without due process are very much part of the [Western] landscape in postmodern times.”

Those who are not deaf or hard of hearing are afforded privilege because they do not need to carry that historical baggage and do not have to constantly confront societal and institutional barriers. This is referred to as audiocentrism.
Consider this:

“A cashier at a local grocery store starts to talk to a customer who is purchasing some food items. The customer is uncertain what the cashier is saying. The cashier ignores the shopper and continues to talk. The Deaf shopper gets the cashier’s attention by pointing to his or her ears and then shaking their head in a sideways motion, the shopper forces the cashier to understand. The cashier realizes that the customer is Deaf and stops talking. The shopper gestures as if writing on his or her hand and tries to encourage the cashier to write what was just said. The cashier replies by shaking their head and hands, once again voicing, “No, no that’s OK.” Who is that omission of information OK for? Why is it OK for the cashier to not have to communicate with the Deaf customer? What makes it OK for the Deaf shopper to not have the same information as other customers?”

Considering the way we expect to communicate with others or the ways we think of certain forms of communication as “normal” is crucial in acknowledging and meaningfully dismantling audiocentrism and making the world more accessible for individuals who are deaf and hard of hearing.

“MADNESS” AND SANISM

“Madness as a phenomenon has existed throughout the course of human history, but it was not until the 18th century that the organized field of psychiatry materialised.”

“Madness” is an old fashioned term for what is often referred to today as “mental illness”. However, “mad” is a term that is being reclaimed, as an identity, by those with mental illness. This movement began in the 1960s to “protest the mistreatment and involuntary confinement (or ‘imprisonment’) of those deemed mentally ill.” Sanism is defined as a “deeply embedded form of discrimination and oppression affecting those who experience madness.”

Many individuals with mental illness have been denied adequate healthcare, housing, and employment due to their illness. Due to the stigma of mental
illness, many individuals have a fear of seeking help for fear that their friends and/or family will treat them differently. We can stop the stigma surrounding mental illness by accepting that mental illness/madness is political and is being reclaimed by many people who seek meaningful acknowledgement and safety. Furthermore, questioning the way we use language surrounding mental illness is crucial. Using terms such as “crazy” and “psychotic” ignores the history of violence inflicted upon those who are considered “crazy” and experience episodes of psychosis.

Furthermore, we must also question stereotypes about mental illness and violence. Frequently, when we turn on the news, we see mental illness being linked to violence acts. A popular myth is that mentally ill individuals “don’t try hard enough. They give in too easily to their basest instincts, and do not exercise appropriate self-restraint” therefore, making them exceedingly prone to violence.43

But, the truth is “people with psychiatric disabilities are far more likely to be victims than perpetrators of violent crime.”44 Combatting this, and protecting those with mental illnesses against violence means acknowledging sanism as an irrational and very damaging prejudice.

CITIZENSHIP: IMMIGRATION, UNDOCUMENTED PERSONS, AND REFUGEES

“ALIEN?”

A citizen is a member of a state who owes allegiance to a government and is entitled to protection from it. Since citizen is a category of individuals within a state, non-citizen is also a category of individuals within a state. Sometimes these non-citizens are referred to as “aliens”. This problematic term “creates the allusion that a person does not belong, and that an immigrant is someone to be feared.”45 A non-citizen can be a refugee, a person seeking asylum, or an undocumented immigrant. All of these groups can be locked up indefinitely in Canada.
“Alien” is a dehumanizing term. Furthermore, it ignores the fact that, in Canada, non-citizens regularly contribute to our economy and society with very little protection for their health and safety. (For example of this see: Migrant Workers)

CANADIAN CONTEXT

Immigration Detention

The Canada Border Services Agency and the Immigration and Refugee Board are routinely unable to solve long-term detentions. For example, Ebrahim Toure Wakes, a failed refugee claimant who has been in detention for 4 years, “wears an orange jumpsuit, is regularly strip-searched and is subject to the same restrictive rules as prisoners convicted of criminal offences.” In the 2015-16 fiscal year, Canada detained 6,596 people to immigration purposes, including over 200 children.46

Often the rhetoric around “illegal aliens” cause us to see immigration detentions as some sort of unavoidable reality that is far removed from us. But, many individuals and families in detention in Canada have not done anything wrong besides come here and often they are coming from either war torn or economically deprived countries and want to come here for a safer life.

Migrant Workers

In Canada, the Temporary Foreign Worker Program (TFWP) has existed in one form or another for over 40 years. The TFWP was created to address “critical labour shortages”.47 In this program, workers pay employment insurance and income tax. Furthermore, these workers are entitled to provincial health coverage, yet those who get injured on the job are often “medically repatriated” to their home country. Between 2001 and 2011 787 migrant farm workers were medically repatriated.48 There are several concerns regarding the TFWP – many of which can lead to direct injury of the worker. For example, complaints that are often communicated by workers are: denial of necessary breaks, use of dangerous chemicals or pesticides with no training or safety equipment, living in substandard housing with inadequate bathrooms, and working between 12-15 hours (without overtime or holiday pay).49
Therefore, when we talk about non-citizens in Canada, we must acknowledge the cruel treatment many of them endure that the rest of us benefit from. Even though the TFWP benefits many Canadians, some workers return to the same workplace for years yet see no long term benefit for themselves. For example, one individual who worked in a green house for 27, “for nearly three decades [...] laboured to produce Canadian food [has] no possibility of citizenship, no pension, and no guarantee of health care after an injury.”

ALLYSHIP

ASKING QUESTIONS AND THE IMPORTANCE OF LISTENING

Allyship is an important part of making the world fairer for all. Two main ways of making the world more accessible for all is to question why we believe what we believe. Asking yourself what you believe about LGBTQ communities, about Black people, about disabled people, or about any other marginalized group is a good way to begin the process of unlearning these beliefs. Asking yourself how privilege shows up in your life, how it benefits you, and how you feel about it is also useful.

The point of this is to first acknowledge that many individuals and groups experience hardships that you don’t – and acknowledging it occurs is the first step to dismantling it.

The second step is to listen to those who share a different experience. For example, cisgender people cannot and should not speak on behalf of trans people. Listening to the lived experiences of trans people (and more importantly, believing them) is important because they experience oppression that cisgender people don’t, and as we’ve covered, oppression is often invisible to those who do not experience it.
“ALLY” IS NOT AN IDENTITY

Allyship is a meaningful act, not an identity. Many argue that one cannot be an ally but can act in meaningful ways that are categorized as allyship. There are also ways of performing allyship that are not about creating change. Writer Princess Harmony Rodriguez refers to this as “ally theatre”. For Rodriguez, ally theatre is described as individuals who call themselves “allies” performing their allyship solely for others to see it.

It is often wrapped up in the notion that ally is an identity that one can be instead of an ongoing process and sometimes this can do more harm than good.

“If someone came running to me, an oppressed person, to let me know about every single time something violent toward my people happened, that would be an act of violence in itself. Repeatedly showing me how much I, personally or as part of an oppressed class, am despised, detested, and reviled for being who I am is a form of mental and emotional violence.”

Tips for responsible allyship include: actively acknowledging privileges and openly discussing them, listening more and resisting the urge to “save” people, taking guidance and direction from the people you seek to work with, don’t expect to be educated by others, and not seeking rewards or special recognition for your allyship.

THEORY

This section is a brief rundown of theories associated with equity. It is not meant to be comprehensive. There are recommended authors to check out after each section. This is just a 101.

POST-COLONIALISM

Post-colonialism is a discipline which seeks to understand and describe the consequences of colonialism. To do this, scholars study the social, economic, and political power dynamics that sustain colonialism and neocolonialism.
by primarily focusing on the consequences of external control and economic exploitation. It is categorized as a genre of contemporary history (that is, a category of history after World War Two). Post-colonialism focuses on culture and its role in “the imposition of imperial rule and in liberation from this imperialism.”

This field emerged when individuals in colonized countries acknowledged and contested colonial dominance. According to scholar Kevin V. Mulcahy, focusing on changing culture is “an essential element in the creation of a post-colonial public culture. For the decolonized, a policy of cultural reclamation of a necessary complement to political reconstruction. Reclaiming the past by a newly independent people is a necessary element for regaining political sovereignty.”

Authors to check out:
Frantz Fanon
Edward Said
Arundhati Roy
Ngugi wa Thiong’o

**CRITICAL ANTI-RACISM**

Critical anti-racism began as a movement within legal discourse in the 1980s. Some significant themes in critical anti-racism include the notions that white supremacy and dominance are maintained over time and that the law institutionalizes and maintains this and the law can possibly play a role in transforming this and eventually pursue racial emancipation. Critical anti-racism sees racism as constantly shifting. This is why history and context are important themes in the field.

At its crux, critical anti-racism is about “a decentering of whiteness and dislodging it from the position of dominance and the standard marker and bearer of all that is good, pure, civilized, moral, and virtuous. Anti-racist educators have to deal with the colonial and re-colonizing fantasies of
whiteness and challenge the seduction of whiteness as ‘innocent, normal, natural, and objective.’

Critical anti-racism is about challenging legacies of colonialism and how it has informed how we conceptualize and think about race and racism.

Authors to check out:
Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw
Derrick Bell
Mari Matsuda
Patricia Williams

QUEER THEORY

The term “queer theory” was coined by Theresa de Lauretis, an Italian author and academic. Lauretis coined the term for a 1990 University of California, Santa Cruz conference and a special edition of the journal Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies. Queer theory draws from several other disciplines, including feminism, history, and political science traditions. Queer theory expands on gay and lesbian studies’ stance on identity and natural and unnatural behaviour by encompassing normative and deviant categories. These categories may refer to sexual behaviours and identity, but may also focus on several kinds of identity that may fall outside the category of sexual orientation (e.g. class, immigration status, etc).

Authors to check out:
José Esteban Muñoz
Cathy Cohen
Rinaldo Walcott
David Halperin
FEMINIST THEORY

Feminist theory is a philosophical and academic branch of feminism. Feminism is primarily concerned with equality, choice, and ending sexual violence. The institutionalization of feminism is broad but at its core it examines history, gender roles, and political ideas across several disciplines such as linguistics, film, political science, criminology, science and technology, and legal theory. Feminist theory has several subfields including black feminism and transfeminism.

Authors to check out:
Simone de Beauvoir
Audre Lorde
Hillary Potter
bell hooks

COMMON MYTHS

Invisible Disabilities:

Behaviour that doesn’t fit the norm are written off as ‘quirks’ to be fixed/dealt with in some way (a prime example is that time when Jennifer Lawrence wished she had a mental illness like Jesse Eisenberg so she, too, could be ‘quirky’)

• Disability is not a novelty of any sort - it is an integral part of disabled individuals, not a quirk - treating it as such is dehumanizing, erasing of disabled people’s experiences, and is immensely patronizing

• There are a lot of barriers faced by the disabled community as a result of ableism, so writing off their disability belittles those experiences

Judging based on appearance - “But you don’t look sick”

• Invisible illnesses don’t necessarily manifest in a way that you can see - hence the name

• Assuming that people are/are not disabled based on the way they look or act is also highly problematic - we have constructed an idea of how a ‘normal’ body/mind
looks and behaves, and projecting both disability or ability onto people based on our assumptions is harmful, because it could hinder their ability to have access to services, as well as potentially perpetrating harmful ideas about disability

• Examples of invisible illnesses include: cancer, arthritis, lupus, heart conditions, mental illnesses (depression, bipolar disorder, etc)

• Not everyone who needs accessibility seating or mobility devices will be ‘visibly’ disabled

“It’s all in your head”

• Even if it is technically ‘in your head’ (not manifesting necessarily physically, perhaps autism or any other cognitive/developmental/intellectual disabilities), that doesn’t make it any less of a disability that needs to be addressed

• Cannot discredit disability on the basis of being made up because it is not ‘obvious’ - the validity of illness does not lie in the extent that which other can understand/sympathise, but in the experiences/needs/feelings of the person who is experiencing illness in whatever way

• This also discredits mental illnesses as legitimate, as mental illnesses are just as debilitating and harmful as physical illnesses. Mental illnesses can manifest in a number of different ways, and they are all highly individual, so there is not a singular experience that everyone can relate to. Regardless of how they manifest, they are illnesses nonetheless and deserve to be treated with the same gravity and importance as physical illnesses.

Racism:

“We live in a post-racial world”/“Racism doesn’t exist because slavery is over”

• Racism is a system that is implemented in every part of the legal/social/economic structure of this country, and continues to this day due to these systems being upheld

• The end of slave labour (in the 1800s) does not mean that racism is over - slavery also takes place in the present (see: the prison industrial complex) so that is not a good way to discredit this

• Slavery is not the only way in which antiblack racism manifested in history - Jim Crow laws (laws in the Southern United States that served to segregate black people as well as continue to put forth blatantly racist laws), gerrymandering (changing voting boundaries to favour a particular party)

“Everyone can be racist!”

• Racism is not a personal thing per se - people can act in ways that are racist, but racism operate within a larger system
• This is a nuanced issue, as people of colour can be antiblack, or they can be racist towards other communities of colour (i.e., rampant anti-black sentiment within the South Asian community).

• Not everyone can be racist though - people can have racial prejudices, but that doesn’t necessarily equate to racism based on their (lack of) power within the larger system of race relations.

• Racism is power + prejudice, not just racially based opinions.
  

“Systemic racism isn’t a real thing”

• There are three core types of racism: individual, cultural, and institutional.

• Individual racism is specific to a person, in their beliefs, behaviours, and actions of an individual which further notions of racism within society - this operates out of larger systems of racism but is not a large system in and of itself.

• Cultural racism refers to larger cultural perceptions about race, which often perpetuate white supremacy and racist notions. For example, this can be seen in advertisements which feature whiteness as the desired outcome (i.e., the recent Dove commercial), or shows and movies which tokenize and stereotype people of colour to support the dominant narrative of white normalcy.
  
  - http://www.stopracism.ca/content/racism-and-media
  - https://www.ted.com/talks/jamila_lyiscott_3_ways_to_speak_english

• Institutional racism refers to the systemic ways in which racist policies, laws, and organizations contribute to the oppression of certain racialized groups. These are barriers set by different institutions (such as the government, legal systems, schools, etc.) which have racist policies/ideals ingrained in their systems.

“White privilege” is simply things people who are white happen to experience living in a majority white nation.” (verbatim from Reddit!!!!!)

• Canada was built on the ideas of white supremacy enacted through the ongoing process of settler colonialism and colonization, so since the colonizers were all white,
there are, yes a lot of white people here but that doesn’t equate to white supremacy in and of itself. It’s the systems that they planted that are the root of white privilege

- The system was made by and made for white people, and there are laws/structures in place that were and are specifically made to oppress black people, people of colour, indigenous people, etc.
  
  - For example, the government forcibly removed Indigenous children from their homes with their families and put them into residential schooling, where they were punished unless they spoke English, and were forced to conform to European ideas of beauty, language, religion, culture, and knowledge. Aside from discrediting and discounting the well-developed Indigenous ways of knowing, these children were abused sexually, verbally, physically, and emotionally. The trauma of residential schools contributed greatly to a cycle of abuse that can be seen today in reserves.

“I’m not racist, I don’t see colour/race”

- The concept of ‘colourblindness’ is problematic in that it erases the lived experiences of people of colour, indigenous people, and black people

- The goal is not to pretend everyone is the same/not see colour, but to embrace diversity and different experiences of race and culture

- Ignoring the problem of racism by claiming race does not affect the way you, as an individual, see people, does not do anything. Rather, it discredits racism as an actual issue that needs to be addressed and fixed.

“Stop turning everything into a race issue!”

- If you are a racialized person, race has an impact on everything you do whether you realize it or not. Race is a key factor in the ways you are hierarchical ized within society, and can often play a defining role in how people perceive you.

- Race is a socially constructed concept, but it still matters in that it very much dictates the ways in which people are treated on every level

- This is a matter of intersectionality, as there is no part of a racialized person’s life that goes untouched by their race, whether that plays out in overtly or covertly racist ways. Race is critical to the identity of a person.

Reverse racism as a thing

- Racism must be considered within the historical context of how anti-blackness, racism, and colonialism are at the root of this nation, and the legal/economic/social systems are built to favour white people/whiteness, as they are the ones who created this structure and were responsible for the racism and genocide in Canada

- Racially-prejudiced comments are not the same as racism - racism is a system and the power dynamics need to be examined
Cultural Appropriation

The assumption that ‘sharing culture’ should not be spun as offensive (part of celebrating diversity should be sharing our culture with others)

• The issue is that dominant groups ‘borrowing’ from marginalized groups is bad because these marginalized groups have faced backlash because of their cultural practices, so it is unfair for dominant groups to suddenly approve of certain features/clothes/practices etc. when they deem it ‘trendy’

• Sets up a double standard - POC who are doing their thing face backlash (ie: Black women weird their hair in more or less any way, generally speaking) while white people are praised for being ‘trendy’

• “I am (insert race here) and I don’t find (insert appropriated thing) here offensive!”

• One person doesn’t speak for the entire community

“________ is not exclusive to a specific culture!”

• One specific example that is used in this argument a lot is dreadlocks and how they have existed in different culture (ie: celtic)

  • Rastafarian belief that knotted hair prevents energy from escaping through the top of the head and hair, which then allows for this energy to remain in the body and helps to strengthen the mind/spirit/body

  • Black people are the ones who face backlash for having their hair in dreadlocks/natural/etc, whereas when other people, namely white people, wear their hair in that same way (ie: Kylie Jenner for a ‘rebel-themed photoshoot’ and Kendall Jenner for a Marc Jacobs fashion show) are considered fashion forward and trendy. Conversely, there are black children, especially girls, who are getting removed from school because their hair is considered ‘dirty’ or ‘unkempt’. It is all rooted in base ideas what is ‘acceptable’ and what is not.

“Isn’t black women straightening/relaxing/dyeing their hair/wearing wigs etc cultural appropriation?”

• Assimilation is not appropriation - it is often done as a means of survival, as conforming to the dominant culture is a way to be accepted to a certain degree.

• Hair texture doesn’t belong to a single group/race, and in addition, there is not any specific history tied to straight or curly hair. There is no one race or ethnicity who has straight or curly hair.

• As mentioned before, black women and girls are often berated and punished for their hair, as it is considered unkept and messy due to racist notions about the black community as whole. There is a history of how black women’s hair choices were integral to where they worked in the era of slavery - black women with a kinky hair
texture worked in the fields, and black women with a less kinky hair texture worked in the house. In this way, hair became a key strategy for survival for black women.

• This is not to say that all black women who relax/straighten their hair are conforming to Eurocentric ideals of beauty and should be stopped. The way their hair is worn is ultimately their choice, and can be affected by a number of different factors, such as time for maintenance. Black women’s hair is complex and political, but ultimately, it is not up for speculation by other people.

• Source: http://cornerstone.lib.mnsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1003&context=jur

Cultural exchange

• Misrepresentation and disrespect of marginalized cultures is the problem, especially because the dominant group doesn’t face the consequences that the marginalized group does, as well as the lack of credit that the marginalized group gets for these cultural elements - learning about cultures is not the problem

• Cultural exchange is mutual and respectful, not dependent on dominant powers taking what they want from marginalized groups

• Cultural appreciation is being invited by members of a particular culture to participate in their culture in any way, shape or form, given that it is done respectfully and with an understanding of the history surrounding the garment/event etc. The aforementioned example of wearing a sari to an Indian wedding is an example of cultural appreciation, as it is appropriate for the event and a way to respectfully participate in Indian culture. It would become appropriative if a white person wore a sari for Halloween or as a costume. In that case, there is no regard for the history and context in which saris are culturally significant.
Freedom of Speech

I can say whatever I want bc freedom of speech!

• Yes, technically you can, but that doesn't mean you are free to speak without facing consequences. While freedom of speech protects you from persecution from the government, you are not protected from the court of public opinion or others’ ability to be able to criticize you.

• You are not exempt from the responsibility of considering the effects your words have with respect to their histories/social effects

Telling me what kind of language to use (ie: “politically correct” language) is censorship

• No it is not censorship, because you are not lawfully required to say/not say certain things, but it is recommended because of the legacies and histories certain words, phrases, etc.

• By using offensive language, the groups that are targeted by these phrases are being silenced, as these things have become normalized in everyday speech, that works to normalize the intentions/context/histories behind the words as well

• Freedom of speech does mean that people can contest what you are saying, especially if it has a violent history of oppression

• This doesn’t necessarily oppose freedom of speech, but it opposes violence and oppression through the means of language

Political correctness is miniscule/useless, there are “real” problems in the world that should be fought, rather than fixating on language

• The way we think shapes the way we speak and the way we speak shapes the way we think. By perpetuating harmful terms/phrases/words etc. we continue to perpetuate the ideas behind them.

• Language/vernacular/ slang are built over time and are reflective on the dominant ideals of society at that time. As a result, language can be a facet of systemic racism/sexism/queerphobia/transphobia/ableism which can precipitate, bolster, and reinforce the oppression of marginalized communities.

  • I.e. the homophobic slur “fag” was used to harm and oppress those who identified as queer. As the fight for queer rights became more visible, that was accompanied by a pushback against homophobic slurs such as “fag” and “that’s so gay”

• Political Correctness is leading down the road to having people imprisoned for disagreeing with you
While yes, you can be prosecuted for hate speech under sections 318, 319, and 320 of the Canadian Criminal Code, charges on hate speech are rare and there is no evidence that they are becoming more frequent.

Laws such as Bill C-16 aren’t threatening anyone’s right to freedom of speech—only their freedom to discriminate

**Colonialism**

**Colonialism is over, it was a single historical event of the past**

- Surprise, settler colonialism is a system that is prevalent to this day - the genocide of Indigenous people is a continuous act which is largely enacted through legal, economic, and social systems

- Settler colonialism is when the colonizers settle on the land, and this is a means for the continuous propagation of white supremacy, in that the settlers are the ones who create the laws, systems, and society, and it was based off whiteness as personhood

**Colonialism was good because it modernized parts of the world/spread progressive ideas/technology etc.**

- This is very much a not true fact

- The definition of modernization, in this case, is equated to Westernization, which upholds the racist notion that Western nations and peoples are more advanced than other people, and that their job is to ‘help’ other countries ‘progress’ by Westernizing them in their policies, governmental structure, media and social structure, and economic systems

- An example of how this is illustrated is Rudyard Kipling's poem, “The White Man’s Burden” (1899). In the poem, Kipling urged the United States to and colonize the Philippines, under the guise of helping the “primitive people” incapable of self-governance become civilized and Christian.

- The notion that Colonialism helps to modernize communities was simply used to justify the racism and genocide that characterized the practice

- This notion of Westernization as modernization does not credit other modes of technology, progress, education, etc.

- Papoose as an example of Indigenous technology

- Intersectional lens - it shows how European heteropatriarchal values were implemented within colonized nations
Privilege

Privilege doesn’t exist because [insert marginalized group here] has rights

• Ex: Male privilege doesn’t exist because women can vote

• The acquisition of rights for specific marginalized groups does not erase the multitude of ways in which oppression operates

• For example, voting does not eliminate the oppression faced by people of colour or women, through tactics such as gerrymandering

Privilege doesn’t exist because [privileged group] still experiences hardships

• Privilege is not to say that a specific group does not experience hardships - hardships are universal, regardless of race/class/ability/gender

• There are some experiences privileged groups will not face because they do not experience a certain strain of oppression

• For example, poor white men will not have violence inflicted on them the way poor black women will

  • While both are affected by issues of gender and class, the black women also faces additional barriers as a result of her race. As well, poor white women can also perpetuate racism while still facing oppression themselves

  • Ie: Black women are seen as indestructible, they are seen as ‘welfare queens’, they are often encouraged more than other people to refrain from having children, they are targeted more by the police as well as face more severe punishment at their hands, etc.

Marginalized groups have privilege because they get special treatment (ie: in a university context, scholarships for women, people of colour, indigenous folks etc.)

• Since common spaces are often dominated by the privileged, there needs to be spaces set aside for marginalized communities to be with people that they relate to and will not actively face discrimination

• Safe spaces are necessary for solidarity and community-building

• There are not spaces for white people/straight people/cis people/men/able bodied people because they do not face discrimination as a result of said traits, and society/government was formed with their needs in mind. Society at large is a safe space for white/straight/cis people as their experience are considered the default.
I, a marginalized person, do not experience any privilege

- There are ways in which all of us are privileged - we may be straight, white, socioeconomically privileged, cisgendered, able bodied, etc.

- Privilege and oppression are both very complex concepts that must not be looked at in a black/white way which assumes that oppression is something that is piled onto an identity - rather, oppression and privilege are interconnected and are integral to identity

- Intersectionality as a lens through which to examine individual identity is integral here, as this allows for you to recognize the ways in which you face oppression, but also ways in which you benefit from systems that actively oppress other communities. There are many ways to experience privilege and oppression simultaneously.

**Intersectionality**

“The idea that your politics boil down to some identities being angels and other identities being devils”

- Intersectionality considers the ways in which identities and oppressions are interconnected and integral to the lived experiences of people.

- If you belong to more than one marginalized community (ie: black, trans, woman), then you experience oppression differently than someone who has one or two of those identities, but this is not to say every black trans woman will experience oppression in the same way. It is about understanding how these different systems of oppression operate inseparably to create a unique experience of oppression for certain people.

- This is about not making generalizations about the experiences of “black women” - black women can experience homophobia, transphobia, ableism, etc.

- Intersectionality is about how these identities and oppressions are integral to a person’s experience and these factors cannot be separated and looked at as if they are entities that operate in different spheres - they all affect each other!

“intersectionality is just a way to exclude people. Feminism, all women. Intersectional feminism, no white women.”

- Intersectionality is not about exclusion of white women, although looking at white women’s’ experiences highlights that they do not experience discrimination on a racial basis, given that they are white.

- White women can experience more than one type of oppression - if they are trans, queer, disabled, poor, etc.

- Feminism is not a singular movement or framework - there are many different types of feminism, with differing focuses and many are often specific to localities and communities in order to zero in on the ways in which oppressive systems operate in these cases.
1 Send The Right Message (sendtherightmessage.ca)


3 Ibid.

4 Cisgender is defined as a person whose sense of gender identity and personal identity corresponds with the sex they were assigned at birth.

5 “130+ Examples of Cis Privilege in All Areas of Life for You to Reflect On and Address” Everyday Feminism. (http://everydayfeminism.com/2016/02/130-examples-cis-privilege/)

6 “Institutionalized Oppression Definitions” (https://www.pcc.edu/resources/illumination/documents/institutionalized-oppression-definitions.pdf)

7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 The Politics of Race: Canada, Australia, and the United States by Edward Osei-Kwadwo


11 Ibid.

12 “200 Years a Slave: The Dark History of Captivity in Canada”

13 In Search of our Mothers’ Gardens by Alice Walker (1983)


15 This is a term coined by queer Black feminist Moya Bailey to describe misogyny directed towards Black women. While misogynoir does not affect darker skinned women exclusively, it affects them in different ways than it does light skinned women. Others have augmented the term to describe other kinds of oppression, such as “transmisogynoir” to describe the experiences of oppression that Black transwomen face.


17 An Indigenous individual with “status” is recognized as Indigenous by the government and is treated with that recognition in mind. This means that their healthcare is controlled federally, rather than provincially, among other things.
18 “How Some People are Missing the Point in Cultural Appropriation” by Andray Domise (http://www.macleans.ca/opinion/how-some-people-are-missing-the-point-on-cultural-appropriation/)

19 Jelani Cobb, a professor of Africana Studies at Rutgers University, quoted in “We’re a Culture, Not a Costume This Halloween” by Emanuela Grinberg (http://www.cnn.com/2011/10/26/living/halloween-ethnic-costumes/index.html)


23 Political theorists who have theorized about the consequences of free speech and the regulation of speech are often invoked. (E.g. John Locke)

24 “The Case Against Free Speech” by Brian Leiter in Sydney Law review (2016)

25 Ibid, 417

26 Leiter argues that there are several times throughout history that speech directly contributed to violence by normalizing bigoted attitudes and violence towards certain social groups. For example, journalists in Rwanda contributed to the genocide of the Tutsi by exhorting guerrilla fighters to continue and escalate their attacks.

27 Send The Right Message. (sendtherightmessage.ca)

28 The Critical Media Project (http://www.criticalmediaproject.org/about/key-concepts/)

29 Ibid.

30 Garland-Thomson qtd. in “But You Don’t Look sick” by Samantha Bassler in Dismodernism, Disability Studies and Music Therapy on Invisible Illness and the Unstable Body.


33 Ibid, 7.

34 Ibid.


36 Being employed or being of a particular economic class can also be classified as forms of, or part of one’s, identity.
37 “But You Don’t Look sick” by Samantha Bassler in Dismodernism, Disability Studies and Music Therapy on Invisible Illness and the Unstable Body.

38 “Audism: A Theory and Practice of Audiocentric Privilege” by Richard Clark Eckert and Any June Rowley

39 Ibid.

40 “Toward Epistemic Justice: A Critically Reflexive Examination of ‘Sanism’ and Implications for Knowledge Generation” by Stephanie Lebanc and Elizabeth Anne Kinsella

41 Ibid, 60.

42 Ibid, 61.

43 “There Must be Some Way Out of Here: Why the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is Potentially the Best Weapon in the Fight Against Sanism” by Michael L. Perlin


45 “6 Examples of How You Can Benefit from Citizen Privilege.” By Alan Pelaez Lopez in Everyday Feminism

46 “Caged by Canada.” By Brendan Kennedy in the Toronto Star (http://projects.thestar.com/caged-by-canada-immigration-detention/part-1/)

47 “Canada’s Uncomfortable Reliance on Migrant Workers” by Michael Friscolanti in Macleans (http://www.macleans.ca/culture/canadas-uncomfortable-reliance-on-migrant-workers/)

48 “Migrant Farm Workers Deserve Better from Canada” by Denise Balkissoon (https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/migrant-farm-workers-deserve-better/article31936582/)

49 “The Seasonal Agricultural Workers Program” by Justicia 4 Migrant Workers (http://www.justicia4migrantworkers.org/bc/pdf/sawp.pdf)

50 “Migrant Farm Workers Deserve Better from Canada” by Denise Balkissoon (https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/migrant-farm-workers-deserve-better/article31936582/)

51 “Caitlyn Jenner, Social Media and Violence ‘Solidarity’: Why Calling Out Abusive Material by Sharing IT is Harmful” by Princess Harmony Rodriguez (http://www.bgdblog.org/2015/06/caitlyn-jenner-social-media-and-violent-solidarity-calling-out-abusive-material-sharing-it/)

52 “Allyship” by The Anti-Oppression Network (https://theantioppressionnetwork.com/allyship/)


54 Ibid.
