

# Anti Oppression

We live in a world full of inequalities and injustices. As a youth organizer, not only will you join the struggle to battle these injustices, but you will find yourself trapped within them as they affect the way you relate to others, how your group works, and the way you approach different issues. Remember that your struggle is never isolated from the other injustices of the world – they are all embedded within one another, and fighting for one cause means fighting for the other causes as well.

This is why it's important to have an anti-oppression framework in all your organizing efforts.

For each issue...

Think about the issue at hand and your own experiences with it. Try to define it for yourself, based on what YOU know.

Think about your own position and identity, and how this affects how you think, act and behave in the group.

Remember that it does not make sense to address any injustice without also recognizing the connections to other injustices and oppressions.

**Special Note:** I have included some suggestions on actions you can take to be anti-oppressive in your organizing. Taking these actions will not make you anti-oppressive!! Anti-oppression is an ongoing struggle for all of us. The suggestions listed are really only meant to help you get start thinking about different issues and ideas.





## Putting Things into Perspective...

# colonialism

**When?** Colonialism began about 500 years ago

**Where?** In parts of Asia, North and South America, Africa, and Australia

**By who?** Europeans – mainly English, French, Spanish, Portuguese and Dutch who called themselves explorers that were supposedly discovering the world & its riches (but it was already discovered by the people living there!?)

### What Did They Do?

- Eventually took control of land & resources in these areas
- Wiped out many indigenous peoples in North & South America and Australia by bringing over diseases like smallpox
- Reduced many people in these areas to 3<sup>rd</sup> class citizens
- Enforced European culture, political, economic and education systems, beliefs, and values
- Invented the idea that there were different 'races', with the white race being the most superior

### Today: Still Colonialism? A New Colonialism (Neo-Colonialism)? Past Colonialism (Post-Colonialism)?

- Very few official colonies exist anywhere anymore
- First Nations peoples around the world continue deal with the aftermath of colonialism as they are marginalized in their own land and are struggling to retain their rights to access land, resources, cultural traditions, belief systems and services
- There is a distinct division between the so-called First World (Europe, Australia & North America) and the Third World (everyone else), with the First World consuming most of the world's resources and enjoying a luxurious lifestyle while relying on low-wage workers & poor conditions in the Third World to maintain this standard of living
- Immigrants from the Third World (mainly people of colour) and people of colour in the First World often live in the poorest conditions with least access to jobs, services and safe & healthy environments
- People of colour around the world constantly deal with many forms of racism, which have their roots in European colonial classifications
- People (mainly white) in the First World travel to the Third World as their colonial ancestors did hoping to 'help' but ultimately re-enforcing their own privilege and supposed superiority

# sexism and Feminism

## What is Sexism?

- Norms, values, beliefs, structures and systems that marginalize and subordinate women while granting power, privilege and superiority to men (patriarchy).
- Exists in many different forms in many different societies.

## What do Feminists Do?

- Aim to challenge and eliminate sexism.
- However, exactly how they go about doing this varies among different groups of feminists.
- For example, many feminists of colour have disagreed with mainstream, white feminists' version of feminism because it often excludes women of colour and does not address racism within feminist circles, and does not always take into consideration the connections between race, class, ability, sexuality, gender and other oppressions.

## Feminist Organizing:

- Organize meetings and events in a safe, well-lit area.
- Provide child care for young/single mothers.
- Decide how you will deal with sexual tensions within the group.
- Guys: don't objectify/sexualize women in the group.
- Recognize the diversity of women's experiences and the many oppressions facing each woman.
- Make sure that domestic (cleaning, cooking etc) and secretarial-type work is not just left to women.





# Racism & AntiRacism

## What is racism?

- Racism is not just about the way people think or talk about people from different backgrounds, or about hate crimes and other negative actions – although these are all part of racism.
- It is also embedded in our language, behaviours, institutions, and structures; virtually every aspect of our lives.
- Because racism is ingrained in societal structures that it continues to mould unequal power relations and dynamics.
- Racism isn't natural – it isn't natural for us to hold stereotypes about certain groups of people.
- Racism only grew out of the last few hundred years – that was when people with different skin colours began to be associated with certain characteristics.
- Those with white skin are still thought to be the most superior and hold many advantages (privilege), often without even realizing it.

## What is Anti-Racism?

- A way of thinking and acting against this racism and white privilege.
- Means confronting the inequalities and injustices produced as result of racism, and the privilege and domination of whiteness that is a part of racism.
- Means not just promoting the representation or inclusion of First Nations and people of colour within processes, structures and systems, but questioning and challenging the structures that exclude us in the first place.

## Anti-Racism Organizing:

- Avoid tokenism – including people in a process just because they're First Nations or a person of colour, and not really allowing them to participate in a meaningful way.
- Don't refer to racial stereotypes.
- Use clear and simple language for those with English as a Second Language.
- Don't automatically ask someone 'where are you from' just because they are not white or have an accent.
- Don't imitate accents.
- Put safety measures in place when going to protests – First Nations and people of colour are often the first targeted.
- If First Nations and people of colour aren't getting involved in your group/don't seem interested, take a look at yourselves and the way your group works, and how colonial history and white privilege affect your organizing.
- Have meetings/events in a safe space.

# HOMOPHOBIA/ HETEROSEXISM and QUEER ISSUES

## What is Homophobia?

The fear of and discrimination against those who are/who are thought to be lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered, transsexual and intersexed (LGBTI).

## What is Heterosexism?

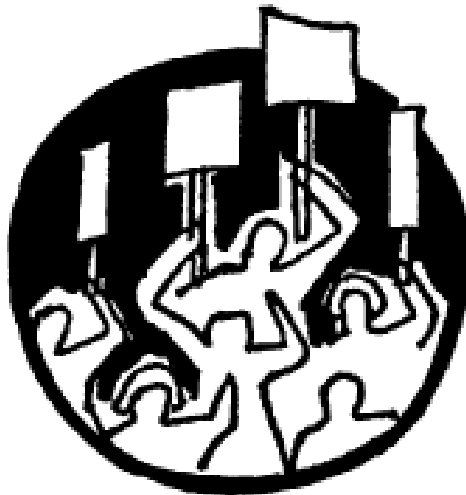
- The belief that heterosexuality is natural/superior
- Is evident in belief systems and societal structures that favour heterosexual actions, behaviour, relationships etc., while marginalizing those that do not seem or identify as being heterosexual.
- North American society still has problems accepting those who are not heterosexual.

## What Does Queer Mean?

- Once a negative term used to describe those who did not meet societal norms of sexual behaviour, *queer* is now used by many LGBTI people to describe themselves.
- Queer organizers challenge the homophobia and heterosexism embedded in language, institutions, laws, policies, regulations and structures.

## Queer Organizing:

- Avoid using gender binaries (i.e. always assuming there are only 2 sexes).
- Don't make rude jokes or use heterosexist/homophobic language (e.g. that's so gay).





# Ableism and Accessibility

## What is Ableism?

- Ableism defines people without a disability (a mental, physical or emotional impairment) as being normal, and in this way marginalizes those with a disability.
- People with disabilities can be marginalized in many ways, for instance, not being able to access public or private spaces, knowledge, services, institutions etc., and being looked at as inferior/incapable or as a burden.
- There is a lot of debate around what defines a disability at all – who is normal and who is not?

## What is Accessibility?

- Accessibility for those with disabilities means challenging ableism
- Some activists challenge ableist norms.
- Others are pushing to eliminate barriers for people with disabilities, for example, advocating for wheelchair accessible buildings, providing sign language interpretation, Braille/large-print resources, and other services.

## Accessibility Organizing:

- Have meetings and events at wheelchair friendly locations.
- Make sure event/meeting locations are safe for everyone.
- Don't assume anything: remember that there are invisible as well as visible disabilities.
- Offer sign language interpretation and Braille resources.
- Use large print.
- Offer extra travel and housing subsidies for those who need it when attending events.



# CLASS ISSUES

## What Does Class Mean in Our Society?

- Class is relative, because it can easily change as we from being student to worker, married to single parent or employed to unemployed.
- Generally, wealthier people have access to better services, living conditions and opportunities and can move around the system because they have connections.
- They are also perceived as being more cultured, less dangerous and refined because of their wealth while poorer people are seen as worthless and as responsible for their poverty.
- In this way, those who are wealthier often dominate the political, education, economic, cultural and even activist scene because of their privilege.
- Often, it is First Nations, immigrants and people of colour who occupy the lowest rungs of society, and even when they gain more wealth they must struggle to constantly prove themselves and deal with suspicion and resentment from wealthy whites.
- Other marginalized groups, including women, disabled people, youth and single parents are also economically disadvantaged in many cases.
- Class privilege can also mean: using academic or activist language that most people do not understand; having access to jobs/education/other opportunities; having the choice to be an activist or take risks (e.g. a white, middle-class student can choose to go to a protest and be ready to get arrested, whereas a middle-class person of colour may risk this every time he/she walks out the door, and is forced to be an activist all the time in order to defend his/her rights)

## Anti-Classist Organizing:

- Provide free or pay-what-you-can/low cost events.
- Subsidize transit, childcare and food at events.
- Have subsidized housing for overnight events.
- Offer free/low-cost membership.
- Use simple language and no slang.

**Some other anti-oppression issues to consider:** rural/urban divisions, English as a Second Language, immigrants, marginalized faiths, single/young parents, youth in custody/welfare/foster care.

