

Examining Oppression and Intersectionality

What is oppression?

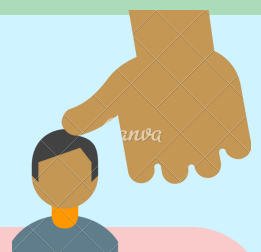
Oppression (noun) - the way that the processes, systems, and institutions in our society are structured to allow for one group to maintain increased access to power, influence¹, and resources at the expense of others¹

How is a society oppressive?

Oppressive (adjective) - describes cruel, unfair, and unjust treatment²

- Built around the idea that some groups are superior and better than others
- “Regularly and severely discriminates against some groups and benefits other groups”³

For example, the terms racism, sexism, and ableism describe how certain racial groups (white), gender identities (male & cisgender), and bodies (abled bodies), can access more opportunities and resources than others



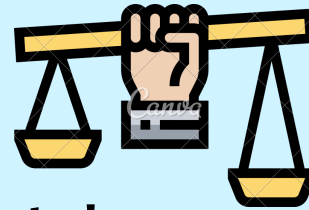
1. The Icarus Project, 2015, p. 6

2. Collins English Dictionary, n.d.

3. National Museum of African American History & Culture, 2021

Through benefits, some groups are able to maintain power and privilege over others

- This translates into economic, social, cultural, and political inequalities, including “limitations, disadvantages, or disapproval”⁴



Even with changes in our society's laws over the years, inequalities continue to persist because of how our society is structured



Oppression is like “being in a river and always swimming against the current, but when I try to describe it to other people they often tell me that not only do they not feel it, they question whether it could be real. It’s invisible and below the surface, but shapes our shorelines and our swimming bodies”⁵

For example, Canada as a state is built on colonialism. Historic attempts at Indigenous genocide and present-day settler colonialism and inequality continue to impact and disadvantage Indigenous peoples and communities.

4. Ibid.

5. The Icarus Project, 2015, p. 8

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What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality (noun) - explains how various social categories or identities, such as race, sexuality, class, gender, etc, overlap and connect to create systems of disadvantage or oppression

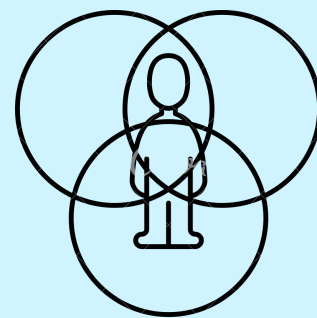
- Explains how all oppression is linked by these social categories that make up parts of our identity⁶

Because our unique identities inform our experiences of oppression, the term intersectionality better captures how complex oppression (and addressing oppression) is

Examples of social categories/identities



- Race
- Class
- Immigration status
- Gender
- Disability
- Sexual Orientation



A person's lived experience is shaped and impacted by multiple aspects of their identity. The Chinese Canadian community is not a monolith



For example, the opportunities and resources that a Chinese Canadian born in Canada, a skilled immigrant, a senior on a grandparent super visa, and a refugee are vastly different

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This term was named by **Kimberlé Crenshaw**, a Black woman and legal scholar, in 1989

- This term described how Black women faced increased struggles in American society because they belonged to multiple oppressed social categories ⁷

Although the term has now come to represent the complexity of social categories and oppressions and is now more widely applied to examine many other struggles, it's important to remember the word's roots and the importance of solidarity when combating injustices

Intersectionality shows how a Chinese student born in Canada and a Black student born in Canada may both face discrimination and oppression because of their race, but recognizes that the struggles and oppressions both students face are unique.

- Instead of fighting for justice alone, it's important for both students to uplift and fight alongside one another

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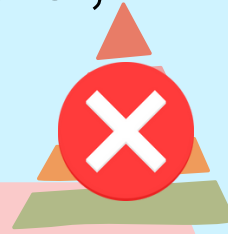


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“There is no hierarchy of oppression”

- Audre Lorde, Black, lesbian, mother, warrior, and poet



The purpose of understanding and examining oppression is not to decide or compare which oppression is worse than others



Instead, we should use intersectionality as a **tool** to make different systems of oppression, such as sexism, racism, and classism, **visible**



- We can do so by applying intersectionality when analyzing policies, budgets, research, etc

For example, when examining various labour law protections it's important to take into consideration how social categories such as race, class, language ability, and immigration status may impact a person's ability to access fair, safe, and liveable employment opportunities

Why is it important to think about these things?

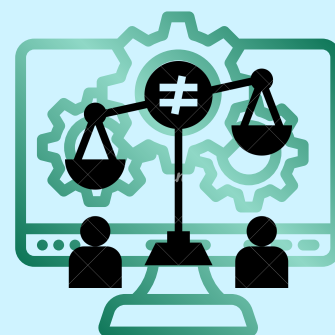
Even if we do not experience oppression from one part of our social identity, such as our gender, it is important to examine how social categories impact others

By recognizing that systems of oppression

- Impact people based on their different identities
- Can overlap and connect, creating more complex webs of oppression

We can better address inequality to create a more just society for everyone

When thinking about how to address inequality, it is necessary to use an intersectional lens



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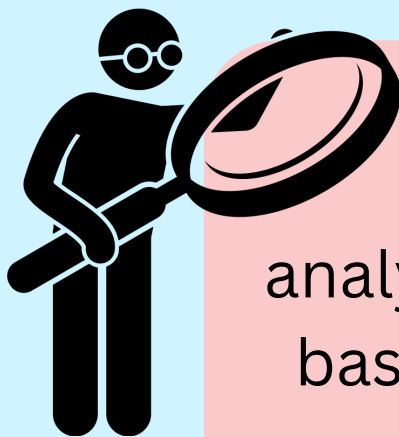


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For example, when examining the wage gap (the difference in the average pay between different groups of people) it becomes clear that difference in pay may vary based on gender but also race (and other social identities)

- "In the US, women earn 83 cents for every dollar a man earns"⁸
- However, when taking race into consideration, it becomes clear that Black women earn "64 cents for every dollar a white man earns"⁹



If we continued to apply an intersectional lens, we could also analyze the difference in pay for folks based on ability, English proficiency, immigration status...



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8. El Gharib, S., 2022

9. Ibid.

Using intersectionality to examine oppressions facing Asian Canadians

Oppressions vary based on our unique identities, as such consider how different identities (such as race, class, immigration status, ability, gender identity, English proficiency, etc) can result in different and complex struggles

For example, many Chinese seniors stay in Canada on parent or grandparent super visas because their family is often working minimum wage or precarious jobs. This means that their family is unable to meet the financial bar to apply for the family reunion sponsorship program.

Unlike folks born in Canada with citizenship, seniors often stay in Canada for many years without access to any of the social safety net and health insurance. These seniors take care of their grandchildren while society continuously shifts childcare responsibilities to individual households or expensive private childcare services. In the meantime, these seniors **can't access basic income or healthcare programs**, due to their lack of immigration status.

To pay for their stay in Canada and the opportunity to remain with their family, some of them work in **exploitative conditions** and encounter wage theft, workplace injuries, and unsafe working conditions while receiving limited access to basic income and healthcare programs.

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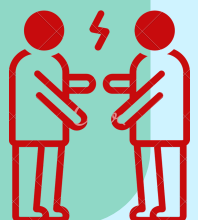
Addressing Oppression in our Communities

By recognizing and admitting that oppression can uphold power and privilege for some while disadvantaging others, we can work towards creating change and justice



It is important to

- Continue educating yourself
 - Think about the privileges and power you have
 - This education process includes listening to and learning from others, while also taking the initiative to learn on your own time
- Join social movements for justice
 - If you are someone with more privilege and power in society, take risks to stand in solidarity with others
- Confront instances of inequality and discrimination in your daily life



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What else can I do?



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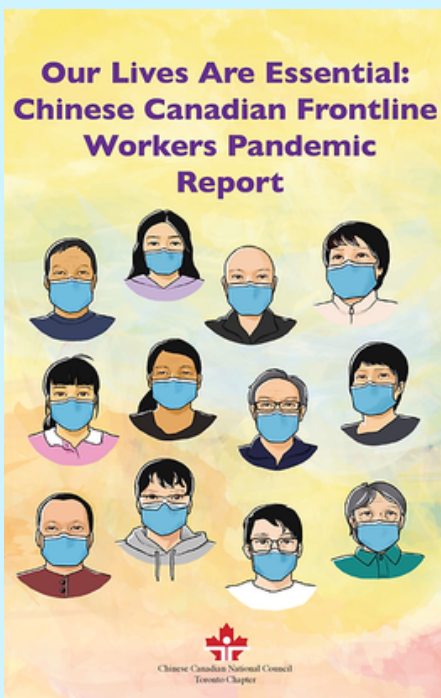


Stay in touch with CCNCTO through **WeChat** or follow us on Instagram @**CCNCTO**

Check out the our most recent [2021 anti-Asian racism report](#) and our [Frontline Workers Pandemic report](#)

Fill in [this form](#) to join our volunteer team and support our various organizing, anti-racism & equity work

- **Talk** to others in your social circles about racism
- **Call out** all levels of racism
- **Share** this information with others
- **Engage** with local community members and organizations to advocate for change



Check out these Ontario-based community organizations that prioritize intersectionality and social justice on Instagram!

- **Agincourt Community Services Association (ACSA)** [@acsatoronto](#) an organization addressing the needs of Scarborough by empowering children, youth, newcomers, homeless & underserved communities
- **(AQUA) Asian Queer Alliance** [@asianqueeralliance](#) an organization serving queer Asians of marginalized genders in Tkaronto
- **The Council of Agencies Serving South Asians (CASSA)** [@cassaonline](#) an umbrella organization supporting and advocating for the needs of the Canadian South Asian community
- **Friends of Chinatown Toronto** [@friendsofchinatownto](#) an organization fighting for housing justice, racial justice, and economic justice in Toronto's downtown
- **Migrant Rights Network** [@migrantrightsca](#) a cross-Canada alliance to combat racism and fight for migrant justice
- **The National Council of Canadian Muslims (NCCM)** [@nccm_community](#) an organization that protects Canadian human rights and civil liberties, challenges discrimination and Islamophobia, builds mutual understanding, and advocates for the public concerns of Canadian Muslims
- **On Canada Project** [@oncanadaproject](#) a community digital media platform that centers marginalized experiences while writing about system inequities and issues facing our country and the world
- **Platform** [@platform_ca](#) an organization focused on civic leadership for young Black, Indigenous, and racialized women and gender-diverse people
- **Tamil Canadian Centre for Civic Action (TCCCA)** [@tamilcivicaction](#) an organization working towards the success of all Tamil Canadians in the social, political, economic and cultural spheres of Canada
- **Urban Alliance on Race Relations** [@uarrcanada](#) an organization that provides educational programs & research, critical in addressing racism in society

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