

VVAA 2018-2019 Session Two Definitions

- Power: The ability to influence outcomes in order to get what one wants or needs. Power is a key concept because it is the unequal distribution of power in our society that is at the root of oppression. Power can be individual, group (interpersonal, contextual), and societal (institutional, systemic).

- Privilege: A group of unearned cultural, legal, social, and institutional rights extended to a group based on their social group membership. Individuals with privilege are considered to be the normative group, leaving those without access to this privilege invisible, unnatural, deviant, or just plain wrong. Most of the time, these privileges are automatic and most individuals in the privileged group are unaware of them. Some people who can “pass” as members of the privileged group might have access to some levels of privilege (J. Beal 2009).

- Bias: Prejudice; an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

- Oppression: The systemic and pervasive nature of social inequality woven throughout social institutions as well as embedded within individual consciousness. Oppression fuses institutional and systemic discrimination, personal bias, bigotry, and social prejudice in a complex web of relationships and structures that saturate most aspects of life in our society. Oppression denotes structural and material constraints that significantly shape a person’s life chances and sense of possibility. Oppression also signifies a hierarchical relationship in which dominant or privilege groups benefit, often in unconscious ways, from the disempowerment of subordinated or targeted groups. (Adams, Bell, and Griffin, editors. Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice: A Sourcebook. New York: Routledge.)

- Social Justice: A process and a goal. A commitment to a socially just world and the committed actions to make that world a reality. Or, “The goal of social justice is full and equal participation of all groups in a society that is mutually shaped to meet their needs. Social justice includes a vision of society in which the distribution of resources is equitable, and all members are physically and psychologically safe and secure... Social justice involves social actors who have a sense of their own agency as well as a sense of social responsibility toward and with others, their society, and the broader world in which we live.” (Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice)