

**ACTIVITIES TO ILLUSTRATE INSTITUTIONAL CLASSISM**  
(ADAPTED FROM TDSJ APPENDIX 13I AND APPENDIX 11T)

# Alternative Options re Institutional Classism

## Option 1: Institutional Manifestations of Classism (60 minutes)

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Post large sheets of newsprint around the room, with the name of a major institution in our society listed at the top of each one. Examples are:

health care religion the political system education the tax system military  
employment/workplaces the judicial system

Break the group into the same number of small groups as the institutions posted, with about four to six people in each group. Give each group newsprint and markers, and ask them to write their responses to the following questions:

- Are any policies, procedures, and norms of this institution classist?
- How does it give privileges to some and limit access to others?
- Do the classist policies and practices of this institution also reflect other forms of oppression?
- What might it look like without classism? How would it be set up to be beneficial for all class groups?

For example, participants might write:

*HEALTH CARE is classist when:*

- Concierge doctors make house calls for the rich; poor go to clinics.
- Medicaid doesn't cover dental for adults.
- More respect for doctors than nurses (also sexism).
- Millions uninsured (also racism — Whites more likely to be insured). Without classism: Health care for all! Based on need not money."

*RELIGION is classist when:*

- Poverty and riches seen as God's will.
- It preaches submission to authority instead of resisting abuse (also sexism).

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### **OPTION 3: INSTITUTIONAL AND CULTURAL “WEB” OF CLASS-BASED OPPRESSION (ADAPTED FROM TDSJ2 APPENDIX 11T)**

#### **SET-UP INSTRUCTIONS FOR THIS ACTIVITY**

Facilitators ask participants to stand in a circle and take turns “calling out” a social institution (such as a summer camp, elementary schools, emergency room at a hospital) followed by a participant’s name, and toss the yarn-ball to that person. It is important that the person “called out” is across the circle from the person doing the calling, so that the yarn-ball is thrown across the circle, and that everyone continues to hold the yarn after it’s been thrown to them. In this way, the yarn-ball can be tossed back and forth across the circle, participants continue to hold their place on the yarn. (Alternatively, the instructor can use the chalkboard to name the institutions and the specific forms of classism, linking them with chalk-lines to indicate the interconnectedness of the web.)

The web can either be used for examples of a specific form of oppression, to illustrate how institutional forms of racism, or sexism, or heterosexism or transgender oppression, or religious oppression, or ableism, or ageism and adultism form a complicated web of advantage or disadvantage. Similarly, it can be used to illustrate the intersections of forms of oppression, so that each participant would “call out” both the institution and the form of oppression they have in mind.

For each turn, the participant whose name is called catches the yarn-ball toss and then names a *specific example of oppression in the institution just “called out”* [or institution and form of oppression, if the activity is organized more generically]. The person receiving the yarn-ball and naming an example of oppression continues the process by calling out another participant’s name (across the circle), naming another social institution, and tossing the yarn-ball. The new recipient catches the ball and names an example of social institution. As participants feel they are running out of names of social institutions, they can do a second turn on institutions named earlier. The process continues until everyone in the circle has caught the yarn-ball, named an example, and tossed it to someone else. Participants continue to hold their end of yarn, and the yarn-ball gets smaller and smaller, but the web becomes more entangled and complicated, with each successive toss.

By the time everyone’s name and numerous social institutions have been “called out,” there is an intricate “web” of yarn linking all of the participants in the circle and representing the “web” of all the instances of religious oppression that have been identified. The web comes to represent the interaction of all of the social institutions named in maintaining the “web” of specific forms of oppression—or of oppression generally.

<b>Names of Social Institutions</b>	<b>Examples of religious oppression</b>
Family	Opposition to dating or marriage “down” or below the family’s class identity.
Schools	Class status is closely related to where one lives—and one’s neighborhood schools can be strong or weak depending on the financial resources and tax base of the neighborhood or town or city.
The media (Tv, magazines, newspapers, radio)	Advertisement throughout the media increases one’s desire for products. The depiction of working-class and poor family or neighborhood life is negative, associated with crime, no emphasis on survival skills or empowerment. Most images of “real people” are middle class, and the attractive people are upper class.
Public health and health care	Healthcare is expensive and associated with one’s full-time employment. Public health is seen as less good, fewer services, longer lines. Advertisements for medications and treatments throughout the media.
Local, state, and federal courts	Legal representation is expensive. Public defenders’ offices are understaffed, with inadequate budgets. Poor and homeless people are considered “outside the law” and are often not protected from harassment by police. Class status can lead to a double standard concerning sexual harassment, where poor women are assumed to be “asking for it.”
Child adoption agencies	May not know or consider it important to place adopted or foster children in same-faith families.
Businesses and workplaces	“dressing for success” is associated with name-brand labels and expensive clothes. Assumptions that successful businesspeople have lots of outfits for every day of the week, with proper accessories. Taboo on “cheap” clothing.
Colleges and universities	“cultural capital” (knowledge about elite culture) and “social capital” (knowledge about to use social influence to move ahead) may help or hinder one’s progress academically. They may influence one’s admission. Financial status has a great influence on what school one can afford. One’s working-class or poor class status may make one feel like an “imposter” in a higher education setting, especially in an elite school.

### **FACILITATOR’S NOTE**

The success of this activity depends largely on the participants having sufficient information to provide examples of institutional oppression—from readings, films and videos, discussions, observation, their own experiences—to generate examples quickly. The facilitator should have examples in mind to help out if participants have no examples, and in order to keep the process going.