

THE OPPRESSION TREE



This is the Oppression Tree! We developed it because we didn't feel like the iceberg metaphor articulated the complexities of oppression, privilege and power clearly enough.

The image of the oppression tree can be used to illustrate the complexity of oppression & the cyclical nature of the different micro & macro impacts on people.

The leaves are the visible outcomes (racist and homophobic slurs, jokes). They feed the tree by reinforcing the systemic structure overtly. Think of this reinforcement as being akin to photosynthesis.

The trunk is the Practices & beliefs (idea that POC need to be saved). It supports the main structure of oppression and serves as a conduit between the systemic & visible outcomes (roots & leaves).

The roots are systemic (colonialism, white supremacy). Without the roots, the whole tree will die.

If it is winter, and there are no leaves (the visible outcomes), the practices and beliefs still remain. You have to cut down the oppression tree at the roots for it to truly die.

Further, these trees are linked, just like all oppressions and depending on your perspective, you may just be able to see the leaves. You may just not be able to see the forest through the trees.

**** This metaphor was developed for training of staff and floor fellows within the residence structure at McGill University. If you have clarifying questions, please send us a line. Otherwise, feel free to use and disseminate this image. :)*