

## Internalized Oppression (Racial)

Even those who have heard of white privilege often have not encountered the term “internalized oppression.” The phenomenon of internalized oppression occurs when the victims of oppression begin to internalize or take into themselves, their psyches, and self-identification, the opinions of the oppressor **as if they were true**. There are many kinds of oppression, racial, gender, sexual orientation, etc., and all of these can be internalized by the persons who are the targets of the oppression. The focus of this session is internalized racial oppression.

It is important to understand that what first occurs is the oppression; that is, before the internalization can happen, the **oppression must have happened**. The following are examples of some of the behaviors that are manifestations of internalized oppression:

- Feelings of powerlessness and hopelessness
- Criticism and unrealistic expectations of their own group
- Invalidation of children by parents with excessive fault finding and criticism potentially destroying the child’s self-esteem and confidence
- Instilling patterns of self-hate and low self-esteem
- Overuse of alcohol and drugs and engaging in other self-destructive activities
- Feelings that some members of their group are more legitimate than others due to superficial physical traits
- Perception that certain behaviors are “acting white”
- Over consciousness of skin tones and hair texture resulting in the placing of a higher value on lighter skin and straight hair
- Feeling that “I” must uphold and represent my group at all costs and that a failure on my part will negatively affect all the members of my group
- Negative self-assessment resulting in dysfunctional behavior which has the potential to undermine relationships
- Feeling pressure to adapt to dominant group standards and norms
- Limiting one’s own ability to set or achieve life goals
- Increasingly accelerating angry feelings that may produce violent behavior against one’s own group