

# Oppression: psychological abuse and nonviolent resistance

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Oppression Oppression is the mistreatment of an individual or group in society by another individual or group in society. Webster's New World Dictionary defines "oppression" as physical or mental distress. Oppression is the physical or mental abuse of a person or peoples by an individual or group who considers themselves to be superior. It is often socially condoned by the majority or "elite" within society. It restricts the oppressed from having control over their own lives. Oppressed people are usually considered weak or inferior to a dominant group in society. Anyone can be a victim of oppression in one way or another, whether it is a person who is discriminated against because of his race, a woman who is treated as if she is inferior to men, or even the "geek" in school who is teased by his peers. Oppression can be experienced in all walks of life. The oppressed often feel degraded or ashamed. While speaking about an experience she had as a young girl when a classmate called her a derogatory name Naylor writes, "But I didn't "hear" it until it was said by a small pair of lips that had already learned it could be a way to humiliate me." (106). Naylor realized the pain and hatefulness that a word she knew well could bring when used in a hurtful context. Hate must have already been instilled in her classmate even at such a young age. Adults and society had already begun manipulating this child into an oppressor role. The hate and pain of oppression can be passed down through generations. The use of and context of the hurtful word used by that young child was a product of oppression and its purpose to persecute. Oppression creates a feeling of powerlessness in the oppressed. Oppressors try to diminish their dignity and make them submissive. In Gates essay "What's in a name?" he writes about an experience he had as a young boy

when a white man would not give his father enough respect to even call him by his name, because he was colored. Gates reflects, " Even that early, I knew when I was in the presence of " one of those things", one of those things that provided a glimpse through a rent curtain, at another world that we could not affect but that affected us. "(327). He is speaking about Mr. Wilson's blatant disrespect of his fathers' powerlessness to do anything about it. Because Gates and his family are members of an oppressed society they feel they must just look the other way to avoid conflict, when mistreated because they do not have the proper defenses. This is one way people meet oppression called, acquiescence. Oppressed people deal with oppression in many ways. In his essay " Ways of Meeting Oppression. " King speaks of three main ways people face their oppression. The first way described is acquiescence, this is where the oppressed adjust to and become somewhat comfortable with their oppression. In some cases people become so comfortable they prefer oppression to freedom. The second way discussed is physical violence, when oppressed people take up arms or resort to violence against their oppressors. This sort of violence brings immediate and sometimes satisfying results but never permanent solutions. The third and final way King describes is nonviolent resistance. Nonviolent resistance allows the oppressed to fight for their freedoms and the truth, without resorting to the immoralities of acquiescence or physical violence. King supports advises the practice of nonviolent resistance. (412-415). Nonviolent resistance is the only way the oppressed can express their need for and fight for their freedoms without losing their dignity. Oppression should be addressed on a wide scale. There are still numerous groups in our

great nation who still face discrimination and are still oppressed even today. There are many types of oppression still being practiced such as sexism, racism, and heterosexism. There needs to be a rising of awareness on this issue. It is hard for people to become tolerant of something they do not understand. People should be aware of these injustices that affect today's world. Knowledge and understanding may help soften the hearts of some.

Works Cited Gates, Henry L. " What's in a Name? " Rosa and Eschholz 325-327. King Jr., Martin L. " Ways of Meeting Oppression. " Rosa and Eschholz 412-415. Naylor, Gloria. " The Meanings of a Word. " Rosa and Eschholz 103-106. " Oppression. " Webster's New World Dictionary. 2003. Rosa, Alfred and Paul Eschholz eds. Models for Writers 9th ed. Boston: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 2007.