Immigrant Women and Women of Color:
Understanding the terms
Adapted from:
Catalyst Research and Communications, Valuing our Differences Manual

Facts and Terms
- Racism is the belief in the inherent superiority of one race over all others and therby the right to dominance (Audre Lorde)
- People of Color is a term used by people who do not have white skin and/or whose heritage is not exclusively Caucasian
- “Visible Minority” was a term created by the federal Government
- Immigrants are people who have arrived and settled in Canada in their lifetime
- first Generation Canadian is a person whose parents were immigrants; they are the first generation in their family to be born in Canada
- Multiculturalism has been a state policy since 1971 which urged recognition of non-dominant ethnicity and the opportunity for preservation of certain expressions of those ethnicities. The original definition lacked recognition of the impact of racism.
- One in five Canadians are immigrants. Half of these are women.
- Canadians believe that as a bilingual and multicultural society we have developed multicultural approaches to the questions of ethnicity and race: Regrettable, most of the legislation affecting minorities in Canada over the first 90 years was intended to deny, limit revoke minority rights rather than extend them. Provincial governments, such as those of Manitoba and Ontario, have in the past deprived many children of the opportunity for French or other minority languages schooling, often contrary to promises given at Confederation. East Asians (Chinese) and South Asians (Indians) amongst others were denied entry to Canada, as were many European Jews, even in the midst of Nazi persecution. Most members of visible minorities could find jobs only as low-wage laborers, could afford only slum-style shelter, and were not given the vote until after World War II (the Rights of Minorities, William Sheridan)
- Immigrants are not homogeneous group. Race, class, gender and language are major determinants as to how they live in Canadian Society.
- Not all immigrants are visible minorities and not all visible minorities are immigrants. In 1759, there were more than a thousand slaves in Canada, about half living in and around Montreal. Most were employed as domestic servants.

How do we usually interact with people who are of a different color and ethnic background?

1. Overt racism and hostility: person has obvious gestures, statements and behaviors that indicate deep seated prejudice and are incapable of working with a specific population. These people are often proud and aware of their prejudice.
2. Covert or hidden prejudice: would deny prejudice but in their statements and behaviors relate to a person of color in a different manner than a white person. Makes a lot of assumptions about people of color.
3. Cultural ignorance/ethnocentricity: assumes that all people interact as we do, no matter what their cultural background. If they are new immigrants and don’t behave as we do, we assume that they will soon adapt. Underlying these assumptions is that everyone is alike as long as we all subscribe to white standards of society. “You will be accepted if you act like us” and “You will succeed if you learn to fit in with society”
4. Color-blindness: to see each person in a tunnel vision that represents our relationship to the world as a white person.
5. Glorification: this is especially common in the women’s movement. We are afraid of that which is different so we make it more important than it is. For example, “Black women are so strong” “Aboriginal women are the warriors of the world.”