

## APPENDIX M: A SOCIOLOGY OF OPPRESSIONS

Used with the permission of Susan Diane RN, BA, MA

Grades: 10-12

Time: 30 to 60 minutes

### Learning Outcomes:

- to introduce the concepts of privilege and oppression and that all individuals are affected by them;
- to develop a better understanding of the complexity of individuals within our society;
- to increase awareness and understanding of the meanings of power and control;
- to gain a better understanding of how and why our culture maintains the status quo; and
- to develop empathy for others.

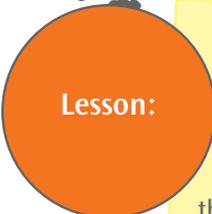
### Context:

The basic premise for this experiential educational exercise came from Logan et al. (1996) who were educating social work students about heterosexual privilege. Although this educational tool still includes sexual orientation/identity, it has been expanded to include gender, race/ethnicity, age, class, occupation, ability, and religion. It is expanded here to give a sense of the interconnections and complexity of identity within the multiple structures of oppression in a hierarchical, capitalist, patriarchal society. Although the activity is complex, students can gain a sense of these issues through role play and assuming other identities.



### Preparation:

- Photocopy and cut identity cards.
- If necessary, photocopy the Sociometry of Oppressions Question Sheets to read out to the group.
- A fairly large open space is needed which often necessitates moving furniture or using a gym or hall instead of a classroom.
- A class of about 15-20 participants seems ideal, but it can be used with smaller or larger numbers.
- About half an hour is needed to complete the exercise, although this will vary depending on the amount of time it takes for debriefing each participant.



### Lesson:

Explain that participants will be given an identity card and asked to move forward one step (or its equivalent if there are wheelchair participants) when answering affirmatively to a series of questions. It is helpful to explain that everyone will be taking the same amount of risk in playing the game. If it seems the students may be reluctant, try using a “fish bowl” technique, where some students do the activity and others watch. (All the students report on what they learned from the activity. It does not work as well, but is one way to adapt this for shy students.)

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Hand out cards to each participant. Instruct them not to show their cards to other participants. You may need to help some participants individually if they have questions about their identity card. If you have a small number of participants, try to pick identities so that you have a mix of sexual orientations, genders, ethnic origins, religious denominations, and abilities.

Have participants line up against a wall. Start with all participants facing towards the wall. Ask those who can be open about their sexual orientation to turn around and face forward—you may choose to broaden this by asking all those who can be open about their own sexual orientation and gender identity as well as the sexual orientations and gender identities of their loved ones to turn around and face forward.

Read out the questions regarding social and economic privileges which are worded so that those who can participate in the activity (e.g., take out a loan) can take a step forward. Those who would not be able to do that in our society must remain where they are. After reading out all the questions, and allowing participants to move forward to various degrees, have participants stay in their resulting positions of privilege when the questions are finished.

Ask each one in turn to read out their identity and discuss what the experience was like for her or him. You are actually debriefing each participant, but others will usually join in the discussion as this process continues. Be sure to have each and every student discuss what the experience was like for her or him in order to ensure they can all make sense of what they experienced. As in any experiential activity, be prepared for the possibility of someone's personal experiences being triggered so that further debriefing may be needed. Participants are asked to take on a pseudo-identity (a type of role-playing) here, which usually does not trigger major personal revelations.

After each student has shared what it was like, discuss how privilege works and how those with it can be successful, while those without it find themselves falling behind in our society. Talk about intersectionality and “double and triple oppressions.” This is when a person has a number of interconnecting factors holding them back (e.g., racism, homophobia, and transphobia). Discuss the reason this happens in our society. Why are groups oppressed? What is the purpose of oppressing a group of people? Whose needs does it serve? Is it acceptable? Legal? Fair? Ethical? What can we do to change this? How can we do it? Who is responsible for what is happening in our society? What did we learn from this discussion?



### Related Activities:

- Have the students write a journal about any of the questions above that they are interested in.
- Share with the students some historical examples of oppression, such as Apartheid, the Holocaust, Black slavery in the USA, the Stonewall Riots, and the continuing oppression of the lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, two-spirited, queer, and questioning (LGBTQ) community. Have them research a group of people (or a specific person) and the oppression they have suffered and present their findings to the class.



Share your thoughts about this exercise on the [MyGSA.ca](https://www.mygsa.ca) discussion forums!



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### Pseudo-Identities:

19 year-old gay male who has a girlfriend and secretly has sex with guys. His girlfriend thinks they should get married.

16 year-old white female who had sex for the first time last year. She has just found out she is HIV+.

17 year-old First Nations female. She is talented at basketball and wants to play, but she's usually late for practice because she has to look after her siblings.

17 year-old white heterosexual female whose father is rich. She skis in Whistler and stays in their cottage during the summer.

16 year-old Cambodian female who is an ESL student. Her family ignores her and she is behind at school by 2 years. She is always by herself and looks lonely.

Indo-Canadian female who is dating a white male. Her family is against the relationship. She is thinking of getting pregnant.

White male Goth student who is in a relationship with a black female. His family lives in poverty.

Grade 8 white male student, skateboarder. He has a close group of friends, both male and female.

Grade 8 student with learning difficulties, thinking of dropping out of school. Parents don't really expect him to graduate.

Grade 12 student who is an out lesbian. Her friends are trying to find a sponsor teacher to start a GSA in their high school.

17 year-old white depressed female who uses a wheelchair and is questioning her sexuality. She has attempted suicide four times.

15 year-old white female student who is in a violent relationship with an older man. She is scared to tell anyone.

16 year-old straight male hippy who smokes pot openly and was home-schooled.

Grade 12 trans M2F (male-to-female) student. Wants to wear dresses and make-up to school and use the female washroom.

Grade 10 female student who cares about the environment and educates others about food choices.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>15 year-old white male who skips school most days and hangs out at the mall. He is starting to do drugs.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17 year-old white lesbian stay-at-home-mom of two small children living on welfare. She is studying by distance education.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19 year-old, vegetarian female rock musician in a relationship with another woman. She identifies as bisexual.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17 year-old female with a one year-old baby, living with her parents. She is trying to finish her last year of high school.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17 year-old Caucasian female who is living on the street. She is addicted to crack.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19 year-old lesbian female, who is a practising Wiccan.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>19 year-old white heterosexual female who is in a relationship with an older Jamaican-Canadian man.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16 year-old white male who lives with his mom. She is addicted to heroin. He was recently beaten up by her boyfriend.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16 year-old gay male who is in the closet. He dates girls and plays sports. He recently met a guy he likes.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16 year-old lesbian high school student who uses sign language to communicate.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16 year-old First Nations female student going out with a white male. She practices traditional native spirituality.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>16 year-old female who works at the bakery to help her family that has recently immigrated. Her mom speaks very little English.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>17 year-old student who identifies as queer and is a practicing Muslim.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grade 9 student going to a Catholic school and who believes strongly in her religion. Her best friend since kindergarten just came out to her as gay.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Attractive and popular athlete with 2 dads. Nobody knows.</li> </ul>

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### Sociometry of Oppressions Questions:

These questions are asked once individuals have their pseudo-identity cards (which they are instructed not to show to others) and are lined up, facing a wall.

1. If you are comfortable being open about your sexual orientation and gender identity with those close to you (i.e., “out” in most situations), please turn around and face the centre of the room. Optional: If you are not free to be open about the sexual orientation and/or gender identity of each of your friends and family members, please turn around again and face the wall.

2. Can you expect to speak openly and easily about your sexual orientation and/or gender identity at school or at work without fear of harassment or negative consequences?

3. Do you feel safe walking alone on the streets after dark?

4. Do you expect to be treated fairly by the police?

5. Do you expect that you and your body will be treated with respect and dignity at school or work, without fear of harassment?

6. Can you go to the corner store on foot quickly and easily?

7. Can you walk by a group of teenagers without fear of insults or harassment?

8. Do you expect your children to attend school without discrimination or harassment?

9. Can you legally marry?

10. Do you expect to be financially well off and be able to travel during your retirement?

11. You are being considered for a promotion. Are you secure your personal life or identity will not hinder you?

12. You are in a new social situation and you are asked if you are married. Are you comfortable answering truthfully?

13. Are you comfortable bringing your partner to the school dance?

14. Do you expect to be able to get a large loan from the bank easily?

15. Would it be easy for you to introduce your partner to your family?

16. Do you think that your chances are good when you are interviewed by a social worker to adopt a child?

17. Are you comfortable holding hands with your partner in public?

18. If you became sick with AIDS, would some people say you were an innocent victim rather than you deserved it?

19. Can you expect to be a religious leader in your community?

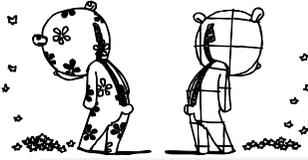
20. Can you discuss your religious practices and holidays openly at work or school without fear of harassment?

21. Can you communicate easily with others you have just met?

22. If your partner died, would you be automatically recognized as the next-of-kin?

## Sociometry of Oppression for Teenagers: revised list of questions for lesson plan

1. Going to school every day is something I look forward to.
2. I am confident that I will do well in most of my school subjects.
3. I look forward to seeing my friends at school.
4. I have plans for post-secondary education.
5. I plan to go to the school dance with my favourite friends.
6. I usually meet my friends for lunch.
7. I usually buy my lunch in the cafeteria.
8. I get along well with the teachers at the school.
9. I feel comfortable walking down the hallway at school.
10. I feel comfortable in the change room before and after Phys. Ed.
11. I am well regarded by other students.
12. I am considered to be a leader at school.
13. My parents listen to my plans and support them most of the time.
14. My parents are happy to have my friends visit me in our home.
15. My parents approve of the person (or people) I date.
16. I am able to be open with my friends about my sexuality.
17. I am able to be open with my parents about my sexuality.
18. I feel comfortable visiting my friends at their home and meeting their parents.
19. I am able to speak up in class and know I will be heard.
20. The teachers at my school are good role models for me.



21. I feel comfortable letting others know my religious beliefs.
22. I am able to speak freely with others about what is important to me in life.

### Debriefing Questions (for feedback from individual participants)

[Feedback may be verbal—especially for a, b, c, d, and e—or students may write/discuss/reflect.]

- a. What holds people back?
- b. What gives people privilege?
- c. Are there inherent assumptions in our school system?
- d. Are there assumptions in our school system? (about roles, aspirations, abilities, interests of students)
- e. Are there assumptions in homes?
- f. How can we support other people to be themselves and to achieve their potential?
- g. What insights have you gained through this exercise?
- h. What would you like to tell others about identity?
- i. How important is a person's identity in achieving goals or having a happy life?