

# Privilege and Oppression Reflection

...for High School  
and  
College Groups

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## The Level Playing Field - Adapted from Paul Kivel

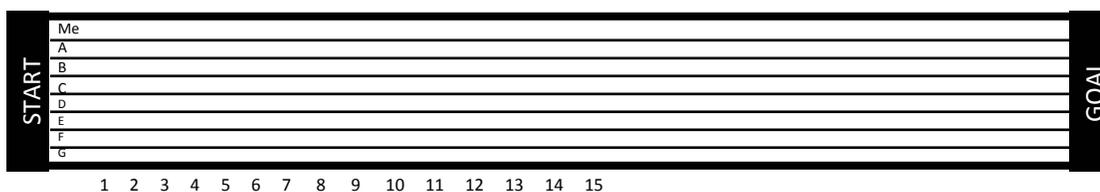
This exercise seeks to raise awareness of our privilege in terms of race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability and gender. It's not aimed at instilling guilt, but at questioning the assumption that our achievement occurs on a level playing field.

### Exercise #1: Check all boxes that are true for you.

- 1. It has always been legal for members of your race to vote, own property, and pass on wealth.
- 2. Your parent(s) have only needed to work one job each (or less) in order to provide for your basic needs (enough food, adequate clothes, stable shelter, safety).
- 3. You've had access to museums, lessons, plays, summer camps, or extra-curricular activities growing up.
- 4. When you watch TV, read your U.S. History textbook, or read a magazine, you can easily find your race and culture reflected.
- 5. You or your parents have never had to use public transportation to run errands, attend school, or get to work.
- 6. You don't have to think about sexism, racism, classism, heterosexism, and ableism every day. You can decide when and where you deal with it.
- 7. You've never been the victim of, or personally witnessed, a violent crime.
- 8. When you start a career, you won't have to worry about balancing your paying job with house-cleaning, cooking, childcare, or other caretaking
- 9. It is expected that you would go to college.
- 10. You don't need to research whether there are ramps, wide enough doorways, or handrails when you go to the movies, the mall or a restaurant.
- 11. You generally feel safe hiking alone in the woods, or when holding hands with someone you are dating.
- 12. When you get sick, your parents could leave work to get you without fear of getting fired.
- 13. You grew up in a two-parent, rather than single-parent household.
- 14. When you develop a health problem, you can have it treated without worrying about paying your other bills.
- 15. You've never experienced skipping a meal, or going away from a meal hungry, because your family didn't have the money to buy enough food.

### Exercise #2:

1. Where do you start on the playing field?
    - Place yourself on the graph below.
  2. How many more barriers do other groups face?
    - Estimate where each person might be (how many "true" boxes this person might check):
- A. John, an African American high school sophomore whose single-parent father earns \$9.50/hour as a cook
- B. Mary, a 35 year old Latina medical researcher with a spinal cord injury who lives in a wealthy suburb.
- C. Beth, a white accountant, who lives in the city, is a lesbian and has chronic severe back pain.
- D. James, a 25 year old African-American businessman who grew up in a middle-class family
- E. Juliana, who recently immigrated from a Somali refugee camp
- F. Angela, a 9 month old whose African American mother lives in North St. Louis City and works full time at a gas station



# Privilege and Oppression Exercise

## I. Ideas on our Privilege – The Level Playing Field Worksheet

1. **(10 min) Section 1:** Have students fill out first section for themselves and discuss any questions or comments.

2. **(10 min) Section 2:** Have individual or small groups of students take one of the people listed through the survey questions, and present highlights to the group.

## II. Connecting Privilege to the Idea of Oppression

1. **(5 min) -ism List:** As a group, go through the list (post it where people can all read it clearly), answering these questions for each one:

- A. What are the oppressed, or target groups for this -ism?
- B. What are the power, or dominant groups for this -ism?

### 2. **(5-10 min) If time: Defining oppression**

a. What ideas do people have for describing, or defining oppression?

b. Some possible definitions:

- Oppression = Power, Control, and Access
- Oppression of one group by another group occurs when there is an unequal distribution of power. The combination of prejudice plus power creates a system of advantage that benefits some groups (often called the “dominant groups”) and discriminates against other groups (often called the “target groups”). This system of advantage enables dominant groups to exert control over target groups by limiting their rights, freedom and access to necessary resources.

3. **(15 min) Daily Life for Target Groups:** Divide students into seven small groups. Give each group one “target group”. Have the small groups present highlights to each other.

- A. Discuss commonalities, or connections between these different forms of oppression.

Dominant Group?

Target Group?

Racism

Sexism

Classism

Ageism

Heterosexism

Ableism

Xenophobia

## 1. People of Color

### **Isolation**

Police abuse us, rarely ever help us. We lose our homes through gentrification. Many neighborhoods are unsafe for us.

### **Emotional Abuse**

We are called lazy and stupid, seen as having low morals, our cultures are made invisible.

### **Economic Abuse**

We are the last to be hired, and the first to be fired. We mostly get poor paying jobs.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Racism tells us we are either sex-crazed or not sexual at all. We are survivors of racist pornography, and sexual objectification.

Police do not protect us from rape. **We are at higher risk for sex trafficking.**

### **Giving Us Less**

We have less access to education, work opportunities, and equal treatment in the court systems.

### **Threats**

We are survivors of police brutality, and hundreds of years of **terrorism** by the white power structure.

### **Intimidation**

Police stops and threats. Targeted disproportionately by police; more arrests.

### **Violence**

Genocide, slavery, lynchings, Trail of Tears, torture, ethnic cleansing

### **Human Rights**

We are seen and treated as less than human.

## 2. Elders and Youth

### **Isolation**

High rises become ghettos for Elders. Youth are separated from each other by race and class.

### **Emotional Abuse**

We are ignored, our ideas are not listened to. We are patronized and made invisible.

### **Economic Abuse**

We are low priorities for government funding.

### **Sexual Abuse**

Youth are at much higher risk for sexual abuse than adults. When we are abused, we are often told we are lying and are not helped. Children are high risk for sex trafficking.

### **Giving Us Less**

We are seen as unimportant because many of us do not bring incomes into the house – our contributions are not appreciated.

### **Threats**

Threats of violence due to our assumed weakness. Complaints not taken seriously.

### **Intimidation**

Many elders fear being out at night, feel that we are easy targets for attacks.

### **Violence**

Mugging, physical abuse, the brunt of our families' anger

### **Human Rights**

We are seen and treated as less than human.

### 3. Low Income People

#### **Isolation**

We can only afford low-income housing – are kept away from everyone else. Lack access to transportation.

#### **Emotional Abuse**

We are called lazy and stupid, seen as having low morals. We are blamed for our poverty.

#### **Economic Abuse**

Welfare regulations keep us strictly controlled.

#### **Sexual Abuse**

We have little or no police protection from sexual violence. We are at higher risk for sex trafficking.

#### **Giving Us Less**

Middle class values are seen as most important and right. We have less access to education, work opportunities, and equality in the court systems.

#### **Human Rights**

We are seen and treated as less than human.

#### **Threats**

The government often threatens to take our benefits, telling us we are unworthy.

#### **Intimidation**

We are not welcome in middle class spaces, threatened if we try to ‘move up’ the class ladder.

#### **Violence**

Death by lack of healthcare, world wide deaths from hunger, poverty, and homelessness.

## 4. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender

<p><b>Isolation</b> Forced to stay closeted at risk of violence. Many neighborhoods are unsafe for us.</p> <p><b>Emotional Abuse</b> We are seen as having low morals, and as being perverted and sick. We are taunted in public.</p> <p><b>Economic Abuse</b> We face discrimination in employment, and a lack of benefits for our families.</p>	<p><b>Sexual Abuse</b> We are assumed to be child molesters and sexually sick. Little or no police protection. Our intimate relationships are not seen as being as real or valid as heterosexual ones. Many trans folks are forced into sex work because of being poor.</p> <p><b>Violence</b> Torture, queer bashing, murder death in concentration camps</p> <p><b>Human Rights</b> We are seen and treated as less than human.</p>	<p><b>Giving Us Less</b> Heterosexual relationships are celebrated and seen as normal, our relationships are seen as sick and unimportant, and we are told we are flaunting them when we are open about them.</p> <p><b>Threats</b> Police brutality, daily threats of violence on the streets.</p> <p><b>Intimidation</b> Homophobia rarely challenged publicly. We are threatened whenever we show pride in who we are.</p>
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## 5. Undocumented Immigrants

### **Isolation**

We are limited in ability to travel, forced to work jobs under the table, and forced to live in partial hiding at all times.

### **Emotional Abuse**

We are seen as less than citizens, people who don't deserve the rights of citizens, as intruders to the U.S.

### **Economic Abuse**

We are forced to work for terrible wages, long hours and in bad conditions under fear of deportation.

### **Sexual Abuse**

We are not protected against sexual violence at work, and police do not protect us from rape because we fear deportation.

We are at high risk for rape, incest, sex trafficking.

### **Giving Us Less**

We pay taxes but we cannot attend many schools, or have access to equal work opportunities or social services. We cannot even fly on a plane without fearing deportation.

### **Threats**

We are threatened with raids by the government and by anti-immigrant vigilante groups.

### **Intimidation**

We are threatened at grocery stores where we can find food from home. We are blamed for U.S. economic problems.

### **Violence**

We die everyday crossing into the U.S., we are murdered & sold out by smugglers and U.S. authorities.

### **Human Rights**

We are seen and treated as less than human.

## 6. Women

### **Isolation**

Dominant culture says women need a man for protection. Women out alone are seen as whores, looked down upon.

### **Emotional Abuse**

We are seen as stupid and treated as sexual objects. We are seen as virgins or as whores.

### **Economic Abuse**

We get paid less for the same work, we often do a lot of work we are not paid for –taking care of people emotionally, and childcare.

### **Sexual Abuse**

We are constantly sexually objectified. We are at much higher risk for sexual abuse than people who do not have disabilities.

### **Giving Us Less**

We are constantly told we are subservient to men, that we exist to serve men. Some religions use their texts to justify our second class status.

### **Human Rights**

We are seen and treated as less than human.

### **Threats**

Threatened with labels like 'lesbian,' 'slut,' and 'bitch' when we do not allow ourselves to be controlled by men, and by a society of sexism

### **Intimidation**

Police will just as likely hurt us as protect us. We are threatened with sexual and physical violence for "acting out."

### **Violence**

Domestic violence, murder by our batterers and rapists. Bear the brunt of men's anger.

## 7. People with Disabilities

### **Isolation**

We are forced into institutions, supposedly separated from other communities for “our own good.”

### **Emotional Abuse**

We are seen as stupid, assumed to be inferior in physical, mental, and emotional ways.

### **Economic Abuse**

We are discriminated against in employment, we are denied services we need. We are among the poorest people in the country.

### **Sexual Abuse**

We are told that we can never have healthy sexual relationships because we have disabilities.

### **Giving Us Less**

We are told that we are not fit to make any decisions about our own lives, and are denied work and educational opportunities – all the while being told it is for our own good.

### **Human Rights**

We are seen and treated as less than human.

### **Threats**

Constantly jeered at and harassed for the way our bodies look or the way we are.

### **Intimidation**

We are threatened with having our services taken away when we act anything less than grateful for our second class status in society.

### **Violence**

Death in concentration camps, torture in institutions, physical abuse.