

## **A Sociometry of Oppressions**

Used with permission by Susan Diane RN, BA, MA, and GALE BC

**Grades 10–12**

**Time: 30 to 60 minutes**

### **Learning outcomes**

- to introduce the concept of privilege, oppression, and its affects on all individuals
- to develop a better understanding of the complexity of individuals within our society
- to increase awareness and understanding of the meaning of power and control
- to gain a better understanding of how and why our culture maintains the status quo
- to develop empathy for others.

### **Preparation**

- photocopy and cut identity cards
- photocopy the Sociometry of Oppression question sheet to read out to the group
- a fairly large open space is needed.

### **Lesson**

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.

Have participants line up against a wall. Start with all participants facing towards the wall. Ask those who can be open about their sexuality to turn around and face forward.

Read out the rest of the questions. Students who can answer yes to the questions get to take a step forward. The rest remain where they are. Those with their face to the wall will walk backwards to step ahead and those facing forward will walk forward.

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 him/her. As in any experiential activity, be prepared for the possibility of someone's personal experiences being triggered so that further debriefing may be needed.

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 "double and triple oppressions." This is when a person has a number of interconnecting factors holding them back (e.g., colour, gender, and sexual orientation). 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?

### **Activities**

1. Have the students write a journal about any of the questions above that they are interested in.
2. Share with the students some historical examples of oppression, such as apartheid, the holocaust, black slavery in the USA, Stonewall riots, and the continuing oppression of gays and lesbians. Have them research a group of people (or a specific person) and the oppression they have suffered. Have them present their findings to the class.

### Pseudo-Identities

18-year-old, black disabled female, using a wheel chair and is a practising Anglican.	14-year-old, Japanese Canadian lesbian high school student.	17-year-old white heterosexual student, who is a sports jock and very popular in the school.
16-year-old, high school student who is lesbian and deaf. She uses sign language to communicate.	16-year-old First Nations female student going out with a white male. She practices traditional native spirituality.	16-year-old female who works at the bakery to help her immigrant family. She has been raised Catholic. Her mom speaks very little English.
19-year-old white heterosexual female who is in a relationship with an older Jamaican-Canadian man.	16-year-old white male who lives with his mom. She has drug problems. He was recently beat up by her boyfriend.	16-year-old gay male who is in the closet. He dates girls and plays sports. He recently met a guy he likes.
17-year-old female with a one-year-old baby, living at home. She is trying to finish her last year at high school.	17-year-old Caucasian female who is living on the street. She is addicted to crack.	19-year-old lesbian female, who is a practising Wiccan (witch).
15-year-old white male who skips school most days and hangs out at the mall. He is starting to do drugs.	17-year-old white lesbian stay-at-home-mom of two small children living on welfare. She is studying by distance education.	19-year-old, vegetarian female rock musician, in lesbian relationship. Considers herself bisexual.
16-year-old straight male hippy that smokes dope openly and comes to school from an island. He was home-schooled.	Grade 12 student who is transgendered, male to female. Wants to wear dresses and make-up to school and use the female washroom.	Grade 10 female student who cares about the environment and hassles others about eating meat, etc.
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 is questioning her sexuality and 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.
Gothic-dressed white male student, who is in a relationship with a black female. His family deals with issues of 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.
17-year-old white heterosexual female whose father is rich. She skis in Whistler and stays in their condo in Victoria on	16-year-old Cambodian female, ESL. Her family ignores her and she is behind at school by two years. She is always by herself and looks	Indo-Canadian female, who is dating a white male. Her family is against the relationship. She is thinking of getting pregnant.

weekends.	lonely.	
19-year-old, gay male who has a girlfriend but has sex with guys secretly. 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 positive.	17-year-old First Nations female. She is talented in basketball and wants to play. Often late for practice as she has to look after her siblings.

### **Sociometry of Oppression questions**

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

1. If you are free to be open about your sexuality with those close to you (example out of the closet in most situations) please turn around and face the center of the room?
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?