

The Level Playing Field - Adapted from Paul Kivel

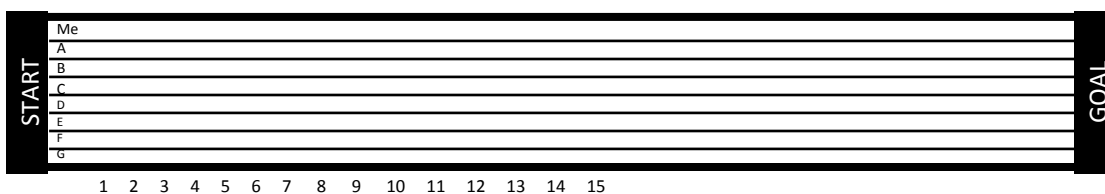
This exercise seeks to raise awareness of our privilege in terms of race, class, sexual orientation, physical ability and gender. It's not aimed at instilling guilt, but at questioning the assumption that our achievement occurs on a level playing field.

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

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 1. It has always been legal for members of your race to vote, own property, and pass on wealth. <input type="checkbox"/> 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). <input type="checkbox"/> 3. You've had access to museums, lessons, plays, summer camps, or extra-curricular activities growing up. <input type="checkbox"/> 4. When you watch TV, read your U.S. History textbook, or read a magazine, you can easily find your race and culture reflected. <input type="checkbox"/> 5. You or your parents have never had to use public transportation to run errands, attend school, or get to work. <input type="checkbox"/> 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. <input type="checkbox"/> 7. You've never been the victim of, or personally witnessed, a violent crime. | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <input type="checkbox"/> 8. When you start a career, you won't have to worry about balancing your paying job with housecleaning, cooking, childcare, or other caretaking <input type="checkbox"/> 9. It is expected that you would go to college. <input type="checkbox"/> 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. <input type="checkbox"/> 11. You generally feel safe hiking alone in the woods, or when holding hands with someone you are dating. <input type="checkbox"/> 12. When you get sick, your parents could leave work to get you without fear of getting fired. <input type="checkbox"/> 13. You grew up in a two-parent, rather than single-parent household. <input type="checkbox"/> 14. When you develop a health problem, you can have it treated without worrying about paying your other bills. <input type="checkbox"/> 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. |
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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):
- | | |
|--|---|
| <p>A. John, a high school sophomore whose father earns \$9.50/hour as a cook</p> <p>B. Mary, a 35 year old medical researcher with a spinal cord injury.</p> | <p>C. Beth, an accountant who is a lesbian</p> <p>D. Caitlyn, a third grader at Jefferson Elementary, a St. Louis public school</p> <p>E. James, a 25 year old African-American businessman living in Webster Groves</p> <p>F. Juliana, a recent immigrant from a Somali refugee camp</p> <p>G. Angela, a 9 month old whose mother lives in North St. Louis City and works full time at a gas station</p> |
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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 Trans-

<p>Isolation Forced to stay closeted at risk of violence. Many neighborhoods are unsafe for us.</p> <p>Emotional Abuse We are seen as having low morals, and as being perverted and sick. We are taunted in public.</p> <p>Economic Abuse We face discrimination in employment, and a lack of benefits for our families.</p>	<p>Sexual Abuse 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>Violence Torture, queer bashing, murder death in concentration camps</p> <p>Human Rights We are seen and treated as less than human.</p>	<p>Giving Us Less 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>Threats Police brutality, daily threats of violence on the streets.</p> <p>Intimidation 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.