

Appendix 15J

Common Elements of Oppression

In *Homophobia: A Weapon of Sexism*, Suzanne Pharr (1988) describes a series of elements as common to all manifestations of oppression.

Some of these common elements include:

Defined norm: A standard of rightness and often righteousness wherein all others are judged in relation to it.

Institutional power: Where the institutions of the society provide the advantaged group with the ability to exert power and control over those of the targeted group.

Economic power: Refers to control over access to resources, mobility, and employment options.

Myth of scarcity: Used to pit people against each other, it is the fostering of the belief that resources are limited and the blaming members of the targeted group for using up too much of the limited resources available.

Violence: Is used to keep people in line. This includes institutional violence that is sanctioned through the criminal justice system and the military, as well as the institutional, societal, and cultural toleration of individual violence perpetrated by members of advantaged groups against members of targeted groups.

Threat of violence: The absence of vigorous or even routine prosecution of violence perpetrated against members of targeted groups by advantaged group members, leads targeted group members to live with the constant threat that violence against them can be carried out by advantaged group members with relative impunity.

Lack of prior claim: If you weren't there when the original document (the Constitution for instance) was first created, then you have no right to inclusion. Those who were not there at the "founding" are judged in relationship to those who

were, are found wanting because they were not there at the beginning, and are treated as “other.”

Invisibility: The process through which the existence, everyday lives, and achievements of members of targeted groups are kept unknown. It includes a reinforcement of the idea that the advantaged are the norm and others either do not exist or do not matter.

Distortion: False information, selective presentation or the re-writing of the history of the targeted group, or a presentation of only the negative or the failures of members of the targeted group.

Stereotyping: Distortions and lack of knowledge of members of the targeted group. Results in the denying of individual characteristics and behavior of members of targeted groups; a belief that members of groups outside the norm think and behave in uniform ways.

Blaming the victim: The process of holding victims of oppression responsible for the mistreatment that is directed toward them and diverting attention away from the cause of the oppression.

Isolation: The process through which victims of oppression are separated from others, as individuals and as members of targeted groups, as a way of limiting access to power and control.

Assimilation: When members of targeted groups drop their culture and differences and seek to assume the culture and characteristics of the advantaged group.

Tokenism: The method of limiting access of members of targeted groups to a few who are assimilated into the advantaged culture. A form of co-optation used to give false hope to those left behind and get them to believe that if they could assimilate enough and become enough like the advantaged group, they too would receive the same privileges and access to power.

Using the chart below, list one example of ageism and one example of adultism for each of the common elements of oppression.

	Ageism	Adultism
Defined Norm		
Institutional Power		
Economic Power		
Myth of Scarcity		
Threat of Violence		
Lack of Prior Claim		
Invisibility		
Distortion		
Stereotyping		
Blaming the Victim		
Isolation		
Assimilation		
Tokenism		