

FAST FACTS



10-20
People



20-30
Minutes



\$0



Low Risk
Level

Institutional and Cultural “Web” of Religious Oppression

Adapted from *Teaching for Diversity and Social Justice*

Purpose of Activity: The purpose of this activity is to consider the institutional and cultural means of religious oppression in the United States. Participants will create a physical representation of the inter-relationships of institutional religious oppression and discuss its significance.

Objectives/Learning Outcomes: After participating in this activity, participants will be able to describe examples of systemic oppression of religious groups. Although the intent of the activity is to help participants consider the ways in which hegemonic oppression exists in the United States, oppression of Christians may also come up. Through the discussion and processing, participants will come to understand that religious oppression exists and is a web-like set of inter-related issues.

Note: This activity should be the second part of a larger conversation about oppression based on one’s religion or spiritual beliefs. If the session is a standalone activity, examples of religious oppression should be listed on cards, and each participant that is able should read the example on a card before throwing the ball of yarn to another individual in the circle.

Materials Needed:

- Large ball of yarn
- Newsprint pads
- Newsprint pages with examples of social institutions
- Markers

Ground Rules:

- Be fully present and participate at your own comfort level – challenge by choice.
 - Follow up - What does it mean to be “fully present”?
 - Follow up - What does “challenge by choice” mean?
- Push yourself outside of your comfort zone – the most learning happens when we are a little bit uncomfortable.
- Listen respectfully, share air time, and encourage others to participate.
- It’s ok for us all to be at different places with the things we discuss today.
- Show respect for one another’s beliefs, values, and experiences.
- Respect and maintain privacy.

Disclaimer:

- If as facilitators you are not a member of the subordinated groups (non-Christian) focused on in this program, be sure to acknowledge that. Frame the conversation that you do not understand what it means to be in a subordinated faith community from personal experience, nor are you an expert because this is the topic of the

FAST FACTS



10-20
People



20-30
Minutes



\$0



Low Risk
Level

program. You are simply trying to be an ally to the religious community by doing education on the topic.

- If someone DOES attend the program who is of the subordinated group, be sure not to single them out for the “[specific religion] perspective,” stare at them to judge their reaction, or basically put them on the spot. They should be treated like every other student, and invite everyone to share/participate as much as she/he/ze is comfortable.

Facilitation Guide:

- The facilitator should invite participants to count off by an appropriate number and gather into small groups.
- Facilitators should ask participants to think of social institutions involved in everyday society (such as a summer camp, schools, hospitals, law enforcement agencies, courts, human service agencies, housing corporations, advocacy groups, the media, park bureaus, the military, etc.) The facilitator(s) should create the sheets with the institutions and post them around the room before the exercise begins.
- The facilitator should invite participants to position themselves in the center of a room and form an inward-facing circle. (Note: These instructions assume all participants are sighted and are able to throw and catch a ball of yarn across the circle.) One facilitator should stand outside the circle to write on the newspaper pages.
- Newspaper pages should be placed on the wall in a prominent, visible location in the room.
- Facilitators should ask one participant to volunteer to go first. The participant should give an example of a social institution, and the facilitator should write the example on one of the sheets of newspaper.
- The participant holding the yarn should identify an individual on the opposite side of the circle by stating the person’s name. The participant should hold onto a piece of the yarn and throw the rest of the yarn across the room to the next participant.
- The second participant should provide an example of oppression based on religion for the example the first participant stated, and the facilitator should write the example on the second newspaper sheet.
- The second participant then provides another example of an institution involved in everyday society and holds onto a piece of the yarn.
- The participant holding the yarn should identify an individual on the opposite side of the circle by stating the person’s name. The participant should hold onto a piece of the yarn and throw the rest of the yarn across the room to the next participant. This cycle should continue until all participants have provided an example and are holding a piece of the yarn. The last person to receive the ball of yarn should name the first participant and throw the ball of yarn back to the starting point. The first person should provide an example of the institution named by the last person.

FAST FACTS



10-20
People



20-30
Minutes



\$0



Low Risk
Level

Processing Questions:

- The facilitator should ask the participants to consider the web they created. A few questions that are important to include in the discussion are:
- What were you thinking while you were creating the web?
- What trends do you notice by the list created by even this small group?
- Why do you think a web was involved in this activity? What does that mean? What are the characteristics of a web, and how do they relate to what you have observed today?
- We are all supporting the web. What do you think this means in terms of systemic religious oppression?
- How could the web we are holding be destroyed? How could the figurative web we are all holding be destroyed?
- Can you think of examples in your own life or the lives of those you know of what we've discussed today?
- How could we begin to destroy the web? What are specific actions we can take? What is a specific action that stands out to you?
- How might this activity relate to other forms of oppression?
- How can we continue to educate ourselves and be sure we are as aware as possible of the experience of others around us?

Discussion Questions:

- How did this activity make you feel?
- What did you observe as you were doing the activity?
- Did anything surprise you?
- What have you learned from this activity?
- Has this activity changed your perspective of others?