Basic Anti-Oppression Theory

**Continuum of Oppression**

**Benefits and Facilitation**

**Benefits:**
The Continuum of Oppression helps participants understand the both the ways that oppression is carried out and the interconnection between more “acceptable” forms of oppression and “unacceptable” forms. The continuum also illustrates the difference between covert and overt forms of oppression; therefore, be sure to define covert/overt oppression before doing this exercise.

**Time Required:** 15 – 20 minutes

**Ideal Group Size:** Any

**Support Materials:** None

**Recommended Lead-in:** It’s important for us to understand how the ways oppression is carried out are terribly damaging, no matter how innocuous they seem.

**Key Instructions:**
1. Draw a flat line on the board.
2. Ask participants to think about the ways oppression is carried out against any oppressed group.
3. As participants are calling them out, write them along the continuum, placing them in order of covert/overtness, level of violence, etc.
4. If participants haven’t named genocide, ask them what is the worst form of oppression they can imagine, or that they have heard about. You may have to help them get past murder by asking them what happens when murder of a group of oppressed people occurs.

This exercise can also be done using a pyramid shape rather than a line, with the more “acceptable” forms of oppression at the bottom, moving up the pyramid as the oppression gets “worse.”

**Key Points:**
1. Often, the more covert forms of oppression are at the more “acceptable” end of the continuum, while the most overt forms are at the end.
2. Violence against women begins with jokes, ads, and commercials that we all absorb, laugh at, and participate in.
3. People who fight oppression by pointing out the inappropriateness jokes, etc., are often “punished” by society, being told that they are too sensitive, politically correct (negative connotation), or have no sense of humor.
4. The more “acceptable” or “palatable” forms of oppression create the climate for “unacceptable” forms of oppression to occur, or in the case of the pyramid, they are the foundations by which the pyramid is built, and if removed, the pyramid will fall.
5. The Continuum shows that oppression is harmful, no matter how “acceptable” it may seem.

Continuum Example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Jokes, ads</th>
<th>Ignoring</th>
<th>Profiling</th>
<th>Job/Housing Discrimination</th>
<th>Sexual Assault</th>
<th>Murder</th>
<th>Genocide</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

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