



Power and Privilege: The Power Line

Use this exercise to encourage participants to think about their own privilege and the level of privilege within the group (1 hr)

**This activity requires a big room or a big space outdoors. Depending on the size of the room and the number of participants, you may choose to shorten the list.*

Directions:

Instruct participants to form a line in the middle of the room and to hold the hand of the person next to them.

Indicate that you will read a list. If participants identify with an item read off the list, they will step forward or backward; if the item does not apply to them, they should remain stationary.

Participants should hold hands until it is no longer possible. When a person gets too far away, participants will be forced to let go of each other's hands.

A list of sample items organized under prevalent categories is provided for you on the next page. Choose and highlight the items and categories that would be most useful for your exercise.

Debriefing

Discuss the following questions:

- a. What did this exercise teach you? What is the point of this activity?
- b. What does this have to do with prejudice?
- c. Do we all start off equal in life?
- d. What does holding hands and later to become so far apart that it becomes impossible represent?
- e. Is it possible to be the fastest runner and still lose the race?
- f. If everyone ended up in about the same place in the line, what does that say about your group?



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List of categories:

A. Race and ethnicity

1. If you are of multi-ethnic heritage or one of your parents is a person of color, take a step backward.
2. If you were ever told you didn't act Black/Latino/Asian/Arab/Indian enough, take a step backward.
3. If you were raised in a community where the vast majority of police, politicians, and government workers were not of your ethnic or racial group, take a step backward.
4. If you commonly see people of your race or ethnicity as heroes or heroines on television programs or movies, take a step forward.
5. If you have ever been harassed by the police because of your ethnicity or race, take a step backward.
6. If your ancestors were slaves in the United States, take a step backward.
7. If you have ancestors who, because of their race, religion, or ethnicity, were denied suffrage, citizenship, or the right to buy property, take a step backward.
8. If you can walk into a store without having clerks assume by your appearance that you are going to steal something, take a step forward.
9. If you can do well in a challenging situation without it being called a "credit" to your race, take a step forward.
10. If you are ever asked to, or feel the pressure, to speak for all the people of your race, take a step backward.
11. If you were ever discouraged or prevented from pursuing academic or work goals or were tracked into a lower vocational level because of your race, ethnic identity, or class standing, take a step backward.



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12. If you ever felt conspicuous, uncomfortable, or alone in a group because you were the only representative of your ethnic group, take a step backward.
13. If you are European American, take a step forward.
14. If you have read about the history of your ancestors in history books provided by your K-12 school, take a step forward.
15. If you can wear or dress in second hand clothes without having people attribute these choices to the poverty or bad morals of your "race", take a step forward
16. If you can criticize the U.S. government without being seen as a cultural outsider and/or a terrorist, take a step forward

B. Social Class and Formal Education

1. If one or both of your parents completed college, take a step forward.
2. If one or both of your parents didn't complete high school, take a step backward.
3. If you went to a private school, take a step forward.
4. If you grew up poor, take a step backward.
5. If you were raised in homes with libraries of some children's books and some adult books, take a step forward.
6. If you were raised in homes where the newspaper was read daily, take a step forward.
7. If you have vacationed in a foreign country, take a step forward.
8. If your parents took you to art galleries or museums, take a step forward.



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9. If you have an immediate family member who is a doctor or lawyer, take a step forward.
10. If you grew up with servants, maids, gardeners, or babysitters in your house take a step forward.
11. If you were ever embarrassed or ashamed of your clothes, your house, or your family car when growing up, take a step backward.
12. If pimping, prostitution, drugs, or other illegal activities were a major occupational alternative in the community where you were raised, take a step backward.
13. If one of your parents was ever laid off, unemployed or underemployed, not by choice, take a step backward.
14. If you are able to participate in environmentally friendly and sustainable practices without financially jeopardizing your family, take a step forward
15. If you went to sleep-away camp as a child, take a step forward.

C. Gender, Gender Identity, and Sexual Orientation

1. If you are female, take a step backward.
2. If you are gay, lesbian, bisexual, or queer, take a step backward.
3. If you are transgender or have family members who are, take a step backward.
4. If you have refrained from being affectionate with someone of the same sex because you were afraid people would think you are lesbian, gay, or bisexual, take a step backward.
5. If you ever earned less than a man and/or masculine-identified person for doing equal work, take a step backward.



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6. If you were ever yelled at, commented upon, whistled at, touched or harassed by someone in a public place, take a step backward.
7. If you have ever been called derogatory names due to your gender or gender presentation, take a step backward.
8. If you grew up in an environment where you had to hide your identity or pretend to be someone else for your own safety, take a step backward.
9. If you had to fight against people's preconceived judgments about being LGBTQ when you were growing up, take a step backward.
10. If you are a cisgender male, take a step forward.

D. Place of Birth, immigration status

1. If your ancestors lost a war with the United States, and their land was made part of the United States, take a step backward.
2. If your ancestors were forced to come to this country or forced to flee their country of origin, either temporarily or permanently, take a step backward.
3. If your parents' first language was English, take a step forward.
4. If you are a U.S. citizen, take a step forward.
5. If your first language is not English, take a step backward.
6. If you speak English with a foreign accent, take a step backward.
7. If you cannot vote in your country of residence, take a step backward.
8. If you or your family immigrated from Western Europe or Canada, take a step forward.
9. If you or your family immigrated from Mexico, China, Philippines, or India, take a step backward.



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10. If you or your family has ever experienced difficulties due to language barriers or cultural differences, take a step backward.

E. Body and Age

1. If you ever tried to change your physical appearance, mannerisms, way of talking, or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, take a step backward.
2. If you are under 21 years old or over 60, take a step backward.
3. If you are able-bodied, take a step forward.
4. If you use a wheelchair, crutches, cane, or other mobility aid, take a step backward.
5. If you have a visible or hidden disability, take a step backward.
6. If you or a member of your family has ever been labeled mentally ill, take a step backward.
7. If you have ever changed your diet or exercised to change your body size, shape, or weight, take a step backward.
8. If you have ever been called names because of your body size or the way you look, take a step backwards.
9. If you have no trouble finding clothes that are your size, comfortable, and fashionable, take a step forward.

F. Family and personal relationships

1. If anyone in your family, including yourself, were ever physically or sexually assaulted in any way by a family member take a step backward.
2. If you were raised by a single parent, take a step backward.



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- 3.If you are adopted, take a step backward.
- 4.If you are an adoptive parent, take a step backward.
- 5.If you come from a family where drugs or alcohol are a problem, take a step backward.
6. If you have ever been afraid of a man's anger, take a step backward.
7. If you have ever said "Yes" to a partner because you were afraid to say "No", take a step backward.
8. If an intimate partner has ever hit you, take a step backward.

G. More than one category

1. If you have never been told that someone hates you because of your race, ethnic group, religion, gender identity and/or presentation, or sexual orientation, take a step forward.
2. If you were ever called names or ridiculed because of your race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender presentation and/or identity, or class background take a step backward.

When you are done reading through the list, you may say, "Now from wherever you are in the room, race to the wall you are facing when I say 'go'. GO!"