

Power and Privilege

Drawing from anti-oppressions workshops, this group activity allows participants to leave their footprints at the end of a collaborative performance meant to visually highlight how power and privilege, whether chosen or not, impacts our ability to succeed in society and helps maintain inequity.

Instructions

Facilitator Choose a quiet space, i.e. a classroom or space outdoors where students have enough room to line up horizontally and move back and forth several feet. If outside, use chalk to draw a line and label with “We are all equal here.” Inside, use a jump rope or other prop that can be used to divide the space with the same label on paper.

Instruct participants to:

- 1 — Line up along the line and hold hands.
- 2 — Take one step back or forth according to the following prompts and try to hold hands as long as possible.
- 3 — When the activity is complete, look around and see where you are in relation to others.
- 4 — Place your footprints at your feet.

The footprints are intended to remain installed on the floor for the duration of the class while a facilitated discussion will follow using some of the questions from the prompts.

Prompts (20-30 min)

- 01 — If you feel that your primary identity is “American,” take one step forward.
- 02 — If you have immediate family members who are doctors, lawyers, or other professionals, one step forward.
- 03 — If one of your parents was ever laid off, unemployed or underemployed not by choice, one step backward.
- 04 — If you studied the history and culture of your ethnic ancestors in elementary/secondary school, one step forward.
- 05 — If some part of your ethnic ancestry was studied during historical and cultural studies in elementary/secondary school, one step back.
- 06 — If you were ever called names or ridiculed because of your race, ethnicity, class background sexual orientation, or gender presentation take one step back.
- 07 — If you ever tried to change your physical appearance, mannerisms, language or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, take one step backward.
- 08 — If your family had more than 50 books and/or the newspaper was read daily in the house where you were growing up, take one step forward.
- 09 — If you ever attended a private school or summer camp, take one step forward.
- 10 — If you generally think of police as people you can call on for help in times of emergency, one step forward.
- 11 — All those whose ancestors lost a war with the U.S. and whose land was made part of the U.S., one step back.
- 12 — If you ever got a good paying job or a promotion because of a friend or family member, one step forward.
- 13 — Those who have ever been harassed by police because of their ethnicity/race, take one step back.
- 14 — Those who have been taken to art galleries or museums by their parents, take one step forward.

WORKBOOK

- 15 — If you received less encouragement in academics or sports from your family or from teachers because of your gender, take one step backward.
- 16 — If the following is true for you, take one step forward: “I can criticize our government and talk about how I fear its policies without being seen as a cultural outsider and/or a terrorist.”
- 17 — If the following is true for you, take one step forward: I can go on vacation as a foreigner in another country and expect to be treated as an honored guest.
- 18 — All those who were raised in a community where the vast majority of police, politicians and government workers were not of their ethnic or racial group, take one step back.
- 19 — All those who can walk into a store without having clerks assume by your appearance that you are going to steal something, take one step forward.
- 20 — All those whose parents spoke English as a first language, take one step forward.
- 21 — All those whose parent or parents have completed college, take one step forward.
- 22 — All those who have never been told that someone hated them because of their race, ethnic group, religion, sexual orientation or gender presentation take one step forward.
- 23 — If due to a disability, whether mental or physical, your livelihood was threatened, take one step back.
- 24 — If the following is true for you, take one step forward: “I am never asked to, or feel the pressure, to speak for all the people of my race or ethnicity.”
- 25 — If your parents encouraged you to go to college, take one step forward.
- 26 — If you have a parent who did not complete high school, take one step back.
- 27 — If your parent(s) owned their own house, take one step forward.

PSU ART AND SOCIAL PRACTICE REFERENCE POINTS

- 28 — All those who went to or currently attend a school where the majority of the teachers are of your same race or ethnicity, take one step forward.
 - 29 — If you were ever denied a job because of your race or ethnicity, take one step backward.
 - 30 — If, as a white person, you ever worked in a job where people of color held more menial jobs, were paid less or otherwise harassed or discriminated against, take one step forward. If you were ever paid less, treated less fairly, or given harder work than a white person in a similar position because of your race or ethnicity, take one step backward.
 - 31 — If, as a man, you ever worked in a job where women held more menial jobs, were paid less or otherwise harassed or discriminated against, take one step forward.
 - 32 — If you were ever paid less, treated less fairly, or given harder work than a man in a similar position because of your gender, take one step backward.
 - 33 — If you primarily use public transportation to get where you need to go, take one step backward.
 - 34 — If the following statement is true for you, take one step forward: I do not have to educate my children to be aware of systemic racism for their own daily physical protection.
 - 35 — All those who commonly see people of their race or ethnicity as heroes/heroines on television programs or movies, take one step forward. All those who commonly see people of their race or ethnicity on television or movies in roles you consider degrading, take one step back.
 - 36 — If the following is true for you, take one step forward: I can choose to participate in environmentally friendly sustainable practices without financially jeopardizing my family.
 - 37 — If you ever inherited money or property, take one step forward.
- Thank you. Everyone place your footprints down where you are and go back to your seats in the big circle.

WORKBOOK

Discussion questions (20-30 min)

How did that feel? Comments/reflections?

How did it feel to release hands? Anything that surprised you?

How do you think it would have been different with people from other backgrounds?

What forms of privilege were missing?

What was the focus? (Race/ethnicity/class).

Why was this the focus? (How are questions of race or ethnicity linked to questions of class and wealth inequity globally?)

Did the activity help you reflect on how your identity and privilege influence how you experience and interact with others in this field? In what ways?

How might these relations and recognitions help us navigate our relationships with each other and in the work we do?

This discussion is meant to be a starting conversation and will hopefully elicit ongoing conversation throughout the duration of the class.