

## **Power Shuffle**

We all have some identities from which we experience privilege and other identities from which we experience oppression. Our next activity is about becoming more aware of how systems of oppression interface with our personal identities.

Power, privilege, and oppression based on race, gender, sexuality, class and other identities play out every day. We are so used to it that often times we don't even notice it or are desensitized to it. This activity will make power, privilege, oppression and their relationship to each one of us visible.

We are going to do an exercise called Power Shuffle in order to make the often imperceptible systems of oppression more present in our group and to relate the systems of oppression to us as individuals. This activity is designed to give us another method of thinking through power and privilege. Keep in mind that each individual experiences power, privilege, and oppression differently and that each experience carries different weight in each person's life.

The activity is not meant to represent the exact degree of privilege and oppression that you possess as an individual. This activity is meant to make systems of oppression (racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, etc.) and their effects visible in the room through this activity, and we mean to bring the discomfort and tension that result from oppression into the space. Note that we are talking about groups and not about individuals. We are exploring how power and privilege is given out to some groups and not others, regardless of whether the individuals in those groups had any power or choice regarding that power or privilege. This is not about us as individuals; it is about groups in society. Privilege is unearned power.

### **Explain the procedure for the activity**

1. We are all going to stand in one horizontal line, holding hands.
2. I will read off statements and you will be asked to take a step forward or take a step backward. Some statements might seem ambiguous or unclear; interpret the statements on your own.
3. Continue holding your neighbors' hands as people begin to move forwards or backwards, until it is no longer possible to stay connected. At that point, break the connection and let go.
4. Notice how you react to the questions, who is stepping forward and who is stepping back. Notice both thoughts as well as body sensations. This is a chance for you to self-reflect. Remember those reactions to share with the larger group when we finish.
5. This is a silent activity.
6. This is a confidential activity and you have the right to not answer something if you don't want to.
7. We'll get you in a line and do an example question in a minute, but does anyone have any questions about what's going to happen?

### **Prepare and check for understanding**

1. Have participants all stand in one horizontal line, holding hand. Make sure there is plenty of room in front of and behind participants.
2. *Conduct a practice question to ensure participants understand the activity* (e.g. If you are wearing red, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.)
3. Again, this is a silent activity. Are there any final questions before we begin?

### **Do the Power Shuffle**

1. If you are enrolled in or graduated from college, take a step forward. If you are not enrolled in or did not graduate from college, take a step backward.
2. If your family automatically expected you to attend college, take a step forward. If your family did not automatically expect you to attend college, take a step backward.
3. If one of your parents/guardians/caregivers did not go to college, take a step backward. If at least one of your parents/guardians/caregivers did go to college, take a step forward.
4. If when you walk into a store, the workers sometimes suspect you are going to steal something because of your race, take a step backward. If when you walk into a store, the workers never suspect you are going to steal something because of your race, take a step forward.
5. If you believe you have ever been paid less because of your race or gender, take a step backward. If you believe you have never been paid less because of your race or gender, take a step forward.
6. If you ever got a good paying job because of a friend or family member, take a step forward. If you never got a good paying job because of a friend or family member, take a step backward.

*Pause. Say, "Take a moment to take note of your physical and emotional reactions." Wait 5 seconds before continuing.*

7. If you can walk down the street holding hands with your partner without fear, take a step forward. If you cannot walk down the street holding hands with your partner without fear, take a step backward.
8. If you have tried to change your speech or mannerisms to gain credibility or fit in, take a step backward. If you have not tried to change your speech or mannerisms to gain credibility or fit in, take a step forward.
9. If you ever had a maid, gardener, or cleaning service, take a step forward. If you never had a maid, gardener, or cleaning service, take a step forward.
10. If you have felt, in a community center or house of worship in your community, that others have seen you as exotic, take a step backward. If you have not felt, in a community center or house of worship in your community, that others have seen you as exotic, take a step forward.
11. If you have never been singled out to speak for or represent one of your identities, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

12. If you have been wished Merry Christmas by someone who forgot or did not know that you do not celebrate Christmas, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

*Pause. Say, "Take a moment to take note of your physical and emotional reactions." Wait 5 seconds before continuing.*

13. If you are able to access information and spaces because mainstream society defines you as fully able (as opposed to disabled or differently-abled), take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

14. If you have been harassed or stopped by the police because of the way you look, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

15. If you or a family member has been arrested, detained, or imprisoned, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

16. If you or your ancestors came to the United States by force or to escape persecution, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

17. If you have ever felt uncomfortable about a joke directed at your gender, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

18. If you have heard a negative slur used in reference to one of your identities, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

*Pause. Say, "Take a moment to take note of your physical and emotional reactions." Wait 5 seconds before continuing.*

19. If you had more than 30 books in your home while growing up, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

20. If you studied the history and culture of your ethnic ancestors in elementary and secondary school, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

21. If you had no choice but to work in high school, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

22. If your family will inherit a home, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

23. If your parent, guardian, or caregiver were renters for most of your childhood, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

24. If you can see a wide range of people from your ethnic or racial group in the media or leadership positions, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

*Pause. Say, "Take a moment to take note of your physical and emotional reactions." Wait 5 seconds before continuing.*

25. If you are male identified, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

26. If you grew up with the care of parents or guardians who were married to each other, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

27. If you grew up middle class or rich, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.
28. If you look white, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.
29. If you are not a U.S. citizen, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.
30. If your first language was not English, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

*Pause. Say, "Take a moment to take note of your physical and emotional reactions." Wait 5 seconds before continuing.*

31. If you, your family, or ancestors had land seized from them, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.
32. If you, your family, or ancestors were excluded from schools, cemeteries, unions, or jobs in the United States due to their ethnic, religious, or racial identity, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.
33. If you regularly hear jokes told about members of one of your identities, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.
34. If at least one of your parents/guardians/caregivers struggled with unemployment, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.
35. If school is not in session during your major religious holidays, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.
36. If you had regular access to food and meals growing up, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

*Pause. Say, "Take a moment to take note of your physical and emotional reactions." Wait 5 seconds before continuing.*

37. If you were given a car by your family, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.
38. If you have attended private school, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.
39. If your family took you to art galleries, museums, or theatre productions as a child, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.
40. If you had negative role models for one of your identities when you were growing up, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.
41. If you or your ancestors have ever been told that because of your race, skin color, or ethnicity that you are ugly or inferior, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.
42. If you have never been told someone disliked or hated you because of your race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

*Pause. Say, "Take a moment to take note of your physical and emotional reactions." Wait 5 seconds before continuing.*

43. If, prior to your 18<sup>th</sup> birthday, you took a vacation outside North America, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.
44. If you have ancestors who, because of their race, religion, or ethnicity, were denied voting rights, citizenship, equal public accommodations, or employment, take a step backward.

Otherwise, take a step forward.

45. If you can go into a supermarket and easily find staple foods that fit into your cultural traditions, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

46. If you can turn on the TV or open the front page of the paper and see people of your ethnicity or sexual orientation widely represented, take a step forward. Otherwise, take a step backward.

47. If you commonly see people of one of your identities on TV or in movies in roles that you consider degrading, take a step backward. Otherwise, take a step forward.

*Pause.* Say, “Take a moment to take note of your physical and emotional reactions.” *Wait 5 seconds before continuing.*

Say, “Take a look around and notice how you feel. Take several deep breaths.”

Say, “Take a moment to get in touch with what you are feeling at this moment.”

*Wait several seconds.*

Say, “Transition in silence back to your seats.”

### **Debrief the Power Shuffle**

Once participants are back at their seats, discuss the activity. Here are some guiding discussion questions:

1. How did it feel to take part in the activity?
2. What did you notice or observe?
3. What surprised you during the activity?
4. How did it feel to step forward?
5. How did it feel to step backward?
6. How did it feel for people to take steps away from you?
7. How did it feel to be in front or back?
8. What did it feel like when you had to let go of someone’s hand?
9. What did you learn?