

**Activity**: Power & Privilege

**Instructor:** Leia Duncan & Holly Joyner

**NSE Goal Focus**: Personal Growth & Cultural humility

MATERIALS:

* YouTube videos (links below)
* Privilege Walk instructions
* A large open space where students can stand in a line and have space in front and behind

IN CLASS:

While we think of wealth as being a source of power and privilege in the world, there are other forms of power that can have an even larger impact on an individual’s access to resources and ability to succeed. You are going to be exploring two significant ones: social capital and cultural capital.

Watch: “Social Capital Theory” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sts9upOA9EU>

Lead class in discussion (suggested questions)

o How do you define social capital?

o How does social capital give individuals a type of power?

o How might those with less social capital be impacted in terms of access to education, jobs etc.?

o How might stereotypes affect someone’s social capital?

Have each student think about how much social capital they have by drawing a spider diagram. See below. Encourage them to think about the “breadth and quality” of their social capital.



* How do you feel about how much social capital you have?
* Describe how your social capital developed. What contributed to the amount of social capital that you have? Use specific examples.
* Describe your group of friends and whether you all share the same social capital or if there are differences.
* Invite students to share their reflections with the class. (You may have students who have very little social capital and may not be comfortable sharing this publicly, so avoid any direct invitations.)

**Watch:** “Cultural Capital” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DBEYiBkgp8>

Lead class in discussion (suggested questions)

* What is cultural capital and how is it different from social capital?
* How does cultural capital give individuals a type of power?
* How are those with less cultural capital impacted in terms of access to education, jobs, etc.?

**Class Activity:** **Privilege Walk** (Need 40 minutes to allow for reflection at the end.) The purpose of the Privilege Walk exercise is to learn to recognize how power and privilege can affect our lives even when we are not aware it is happening. The purpose is not to blame anyone for having more power or privilege or for receiving more help in achieving goals, but to have an opportunity to identify both obstacles and benefits experienced in our life. It is important for the individuals participating in this exercise to challenge themselves and understand some of the privileges that have been granted to them because of their race, religion, education, family upbringing, etc. This activity must be done in silence and if any of the participants feel uncomfortable, they should excuse themselves from the exercise.

Instructor note: If instructors have not yet experienced a privilege walk, please view this example from a school in the UK. They use the example of a race to help illustrate the point to the children, but it is extremely helpful to see how the teachers lead the exercise and the reflection. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1I3wJ7pJUjg>

**Important things to keep in mind:** Lead class in reflection. (There are deeper reflection questions at the end of the Privilege Walk, but below are some lighter ones if the group is struggling to reflect.)

It is good for the group to have established some trust and comfort prior to this exercise. Students may feel defensive about their place as they move through the walk. Help all students know from the beginning that there is no blame or shame for where people stand. Everybody is working hard regardless of privilege. Some people may have to work exponentially harder because of their more limited access to resources. Make it clear that students do not HAVE to move if they do not wish to reveal something about themselves. You are not going to be verifying the accuracy of their statements so they should do whatever is comfortable for them. But, the more honest people are, the more impactful the outcome.

* How did you feel throughout this experience? What was your comfort level?
* What surprised you?
* What did you learn about yourself from this experience?
* What did you learn about your peers from this experience?
* How much of this activity was impacted by social capital or cultural capital? Give examples.

*\*Note: This is a very “high risk” activity that requires trust building and safety for participants; introducing this activity too early in the class or before building trust risks creating resentment and hurt that can inhibit further sharing and openness. This exercise can be controversial and should be voluntary. It is very important that all who participate in this workshop remember to keep the things discussed confidential.*

**Requirements/Supplies:**

* List of statements related to privilege or obstacles
* Space large enough for participants to form a straight line with an arm’s length between them and the person on their left**;** there should be space in front of the line to move forward 10 steps or behind to be able to move back 10 steps.

**Directions:**

1. Have participants form a straight line across the room approximately an arm’s length apart, leaving space in front and behind.

2. Facilitator Says: Listen to the following statements, and follow the instructions given. For example, when I read “If you are a white male, take one step forward,” only white males will move and everyone else will stand still. Each step should be an average length step. No one is going to check up on you, so if you feel you qualify to take a step then do so, if not then you may stay where you are. You are the judge of what you should do.

**Instructions**

Participants take a step forward or backward based on what the statement asks and if it applies to them. If a statement is not relevant or they do not wish to respond, they may stand still. Encourage participants to be as honest as possible. However, if they do not feel comfortable, they do not have to move.

1. If your primary ethnic identity is American, take one step forward.

2. If your ancestors came to the United States by force, take one step back.

3. If there were more than 50 books in your house growing up, take one step forward.

4. If you ever felt unsafe because of your sexual orientation, take one step back.

5. If you were ever denied employment because of your race or ethnicity, take one step back

6. If you were ever paid less or treated less fairly because of your gender, please take one step back

7. If you feel as though you currently have the resources necessary to raise a child, take one step forward.

8. If you have ever inherited money or property, take one step forward.

9. If you ever had to rely primarily on public transportation, take one step back. 10. If you were ever stopped or questioned by the police because of your race, take one step back.

11. If you ever felt uncomfortable about a joke about your gender, but felt unsafe confronting the situation, take one step back.

12. If you feel as though you have a safe environment in which to raise a child, please take one step forward.

13. If you ever had to rely on public assistance (i.e. welfare, food stamps), please take one step back.

14. If your family ever had to skip a meal because there was not enough money to buy food when you were growing up, please take one step back.

15. If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, please take one step forward.

16. If your family ever had to move because they could not afford to pay the rent or mortgage, please take one step back.

17. If you were often embarrassed or ashamed of your clothes or house while you were growing up, please take one step back.

18. If your parents or guardians attended college, please take one step forward.

19. If you have ever felt as though members of your community were feared or unwanted members of American society, please take one step back.

20. If you were raised in an area where there was crime, drug activity, gangs, poverty, etc., please take one step back.

21. If you ever felt that you were being discriminated against by a health-care provider, please take one step back.

22. If you ever tried to change your appearance, speech or mannerisms to gain more credibility, please take one step back.

23. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in school, take one step forward.

24. If your native language is not English, please take one step back.

25. If it was assumed from a young age that you would go to college, please take one step forward.

26. If you have been followed or profiled when you entered a store, please take one step back.

27. If anyone in your immediate family has ever been addicted to drugs or alcohol, please take one step back.

28. If you went on regular family vacations, please take one step forward.

29. If you grew up and had a maid and/or a gardener/lawn crew, please take one step forward.

30. If you don’t have to cope with frequent catcalls because of your gender, please take one step forward.

31. If you have ever been discriminated against in automotive (sales, parts, etc.) because of your gender, please take a step back**.**

**Select Process Questions**

1. What do you see around the room? Who do you see in the front, middle and back?

2. In what ways do the people near you reflect or not reflect your community?

3. How do you feel about where you are relative to the others in the room? How do you feel about where others are in relation to you?

4. What went through your mind as you moved forward and backward?

5. Which of the statements did you find most meaningful or eye opening? Why?

6. Which of the statements, if any, hurt? Why?

7. What does your position in the room say about societal messages about your worth and the worth of people with similar privilege levels?

8. How has privilege affected you, your family and your community, in terms of opportunity and access?

9. How are social class and privilege tied to prejudice?