

THE PRIVILEGE WALK

Taking steps towards greater inclusivity

This exercise helps people become aware of the various privileges they might possess. It's a great way to start a discussion about diversity and inclusion.

PURPOSE OF THE ACTIVITY

The purpose of the Privilege Walk 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. The exercise helps participants develop awareness of themselves, which can improve how they relate to others.

NOTE: *This is a very "high risk" activity that requires trust building and safety for participants; introducing this activity too early in the training or before building trust risks creating resentment and hurt that can inhibit further sharing and openness.*

PROCEDURE

- Have participants line up in a straight line across the middle of the room with plenty of space to move forward and backward as the exercise proceeds.
- To line up you can have participants hold hands or place one hand on the shoulder of the person to their left or right depending on space constraints. Important: Make sure to ask participants if they are comfortable touching and being touched by others. If some are not, do not make them and do not make a big deal out of it. You can just as well draw a line on the floor that marks the starting point.
- You may give an explanation about the activity, how it is intended to educate about privilege, and what exactly is privilege, or you can send participants into the activity with no such background.

DIRECTIONS

Step 1.

Explain to the group that we all have certain privileges others have not had. You might say something like:

"Sometimes we don't notice privileges because they're so ingrained in our culture. We are confronted on a daily basis with cultural and social norms that may be related to a certain groups' privilege. We are also confronted with marginalized communities and perspectives that deserve to have a voice. Understanding and acknowledging privileges is key to understanding why and how we react and perceive our surroundings. In order to objectively reflect on our interactions we need to focus on the intersectionality of privilege. It is an essential framing that can help us understand how every privilege or marginalization exists in a different but related place."

Step 2.

Ask participants to stand in a line at one end of the space. Explain that you will read a series of statements aloud.

Step 3.

Instruct participants to take one step *forward* if a statement applies to them. For example, when you 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.

Tell your participants that if they're uncomfortable admitting that a certain statement applies to them, then they can simply wait for the next statement. No one has to move.

Step 4.

Read each of the statements aloud, and pause between each one to allow participants to take the steps that might pertain to them.

You might say something like: *"I will read statements aloud. Please move if a statement applies to you. If you do not feel comfortable acknowledging a statement that applies to you, simply do not move when it is read. No one else will know whether it applies to you."*

Begin reading statements aloud in a clear voice, pausing slightly after each one. The pause can be as long or as short as desired as appropriate.

Step 5.

When you have finished the statements, ask participants to take note of where they are in the room in relation to others. During the exercise, participants might feel a number of things—particularly if, at the end of the exercise, they realize they've experienced more or less privilege than other participants. Evaluate the activity. Have everyone gather into a circle for debriefing and discussion.

DEBRIEF QUESTIONS

Transition to the reflection phase of the exercise by explaining that both privilege and marginalization are part of who we are. For the reflection round, facilitate a discussion that explores how people are feeling.

Ask questions like:

- What is your “gut reaction” to where you find yourself at the end of this list of privileges?
- Are you surprised at where you are? How does it feel to be in the front? In the middle? In the back? Did you come to any new realizations? If so, which one had the most impact?
- What were some factors influencing your privilege that you have never thought of before?
- If you found yourself getting farther and farther away from someone, how did you feel in that moment?
- What statement made you think most?
- If you could add a statement, what would it be?
- What do you wish people knew about one of the identities, situations, or disadvantages that caused you to take a step back?
- How can your understanding of your privileges or marginalizations improve your existing relationships with yourself and others?

NOTE:

While the point of the Privilege Walk is to promote understanding and acknowledgment of privileges and marginalization, it would be detrimental to end the activity with potentially traumatic or destructive emotions. The point of the debrief session is twofold. First, through the reflection provoking questions, help participants realize what exactly they were feeling and muster the courage to articulate it to each participant’s acceptable level. This process will relieve possible negative emotions, preventing possible damage. Mind that it is not a marginalized person’s job to educate others on their marginality. If they would like to do so, listen. If they would not like to do so, respect their wishes. Second, as negative emotions are relieved, the debrief will help participants realize that either privileges or marginalizations are integral to the person’s being. Instead of casting off either privilege or marginalization, participants can learn how to reconcile with themselves, and through the utilization of newfound knowledge of the self, have a better relationship with themselves and others around them.

STATEMENTS

The statements below have been collected from various sources. We even added some of our own. Select about 30 statements that fit your group, and just delete statements that you think are unfit or unnecessary.

1. If you are right-handed, take one step forward.
2. If you have ever felt unsafe walking alone at night take one step backward.
3. If one or both of your parents have a college degree, take one step forward.
4. If you are a white male take one step forward.
5. If you rely, or have ever relied, primarily on public transportation, take one step back.
6. If you have worked with people you felt were like yourself, take one step forward.
7. If your household employs help as servants, gardeners, etc., take one step forward.
8. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.
9. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.
10. If you were ever made fun of or bullied for something you could not change or was beyond your control, take one step back.
11. If your family ever left your homeland or entered another country not of your own free will, take one step back.
12. If your family owned the house where you grew up, take one step forward.
13. If you have ever been able to play a significant role in a project or activity because of a talent you have, take one step forward.
14. If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, take one step forward.
15. If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food, take one step back.
16. If you were ever discouraged from an activity because of race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability or sexual orientation, take one step back.
17. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to fit in more, take one step back.
18. If you have ever been profiled by someone else using stereotypes, take one step back.
19. If you have completed high school take one step forward.

20. If you were ever accepted for something you applied to because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.
21. If you have health insurance take one step forward.
22. If you have ever thought that you cannot articulate your thoughts fast enough, take one step back.
23. If you come from a single-parent household, take one step back.
24. If you have lived in an area with crime or drug activity, take one step back.
25. If someone in your household suffered or suffers from mental illness, take one step back.
26. If you have always felt that you were a lucky person, take one step forward.
27. If you cannot save money every month, take one step backward.
28. If you hear 'I love you' at least once a week, take one step forward.
29. If one of your parents died during your childhood, take one step backward.
30. If you are in love with someone, take one step forward.
31. If you have at least three close friends, take one step forward.
32. If you cannot afford to go on holiday every year, take one step backward.
33. If you have been a victim of sexual harassment, take one step back.
34. If you were able to complete college take one step forward.
35. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, religion, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.
36. If you went to college, take one step forward.
37. If you have more than fifty books in your household, take one step forward.
38. If your parents told you that you can be anything you want to be, take one step forward.
39. If you have visible or invisible disabilities take one step backward.
40. If you have been the victim of physical violence based on your gender, ethnicity, age or sexual orientation take one step backward.
41. If you have been divorced or impacted by divorce take one step backward.
42. If you came from a supportive family environment take one step forward.

Sources:

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<https://peacelearner.org/2016/03/14/privilege-walk-lesson-plan/>