



Leadership:

Recognizing Privilege and Marginalization

LINKED COMPETENCIES: Actively counteracting systems of inequality

A Privilege Walk is an experiential activity to highlight how people benefit or are marginalized by systems in our society. There are many iterations of such walks with several focusing on a single issue, such as race, gender, or sexuality. This particular privilege walk activity is designed with questions spanning many different areas of marginalization. People of one shared demographic might move together for one question but end up separating due to other questions as some move forward and others move back. It helps people to open up, literally, in steps instead of difficult to articulate words and relate to each other in a different way.

Outcomes

- Students will recognize and practice discussing the intersections of privilege and marginalization.

Actively counteracting systems of inequality			
Indicate with an ✓ on the line below, where you currently have evidence.			
Exploring			Implementing
Recognizes personal privileges and the ways they interact with systemic inequalities. I am aware of the biases, underlying beliefs and values, assumptions, and stereotypes that inhibit opportunity in work and learning environments.	I have identified areas of personal responsibility to address systems of inequality. I actively seek out diverse perspectives on systemic inequalities.	I consistently bring attention to systemic inequality issues. I have established a plan to address the biases, underlying beliefs and values, assumptions, and stereotypes that inhibit opportunity in work and learning environments.	I have established and am taking a sustainable commitment to counteracting systemic inequalities and influencing others to do the same.

Remind your students to reflect, add, and annotate evidence of competency to their portfolios.

- **Reflect** on their experiences and what they learned through the activities and feedback.
- **Add** evidence of competency to their portfolios.
- **Annotate** the evidence to highlight their specific competency.

This activity is adapted from a University of Washington resource on Student Leadership Competencies compiled by Dulce Diaz. Available here: [STUDENT LEADERSHIP COMPETENCIES For Community Engagement](#)



Time:

55 minutes (can adapt depending on size of group and time allocated to debrief).

Materials:

- Physical space with enough room for participants to stand in a line and walk forward and backward several steps.
- List of privilege walk statements (see below).

Background:

This is an exercise that helps individuals develop awareness of how power and privilege can affect their lives and the lives of others, even when they are not conscious of it. Privilege is a right or benefit that is given to some people and not to others, often based on factors such as race, gender, class, sexuality, ability, religion, and so on. Privilege can influence opportunities, experiences, and perspectives in different ways.

The purpose of this activity is not to make people feel guilty or ashamed of their privilege or lack of privilege, but to help them understand how privilege shapes society and interactions within it. By recognizing their own privileges and challenges, they can also learn how to use their power and influence to create more inclusive and equitable spaces for everyone.

Activity:

Note: During and after the Privilege Walk, participants might experience an array of intense feelings no matter their position in the front or the back.

Step 1: 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.

Note: 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 students into the activity with no such background.

Step 2: Read the following instructions to participants:

I will read statements aloud. Please move if a statement applies to you. If a statement does apply to you but 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.

Step 3: 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. (For statements, see Privilege Statements in this document).

Step 4: When you have finished the statements, ask participants to take note of where they are in the room in relation to others.

Step 5: Have everyone gather into a circle for debriefing and discussion.



Reflection and Summary:

While the point of the Privilege Walk is indeed 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:

- 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.
- 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.

Debriefing questions. (Go through one-by-one, using a think-pair-share approach to encourage discussion with peers, which should be more comfortable than in a large group).

1. What did you feel like being in the front of the group? In the back? In the middle?

At the end of the exercise, students were asked to observe where they were in the room. This is a common question to use to lead into the discussion and allows people to reflect on what happened before starting to work with those idea in possibly more abstract ways. It keeps the activity very experience-near and in the moment.

2. What were some factors related to privilege and marginalization that you have never thought of before?

This asks students to reflect in a broader sense about the experiences they might not think about in the way they were presented in this activity. It opens up a space to begin to discuss their perceptions of aspects of themselves and others that they might have never discussed before.

3. What do you wish people knew about one of the identities, situations, or disadvantages that caused you to take a step back?

This question invites people who would like to share about the ways they experience marginalization. It is a good question to ensure that this part of the conversation is had. It is also important to not expect or push certain students to speak. It is not a marginalized person's job to educate others on their marginality.

4. How can your understanding of your privilege or marginalization improve your existing relationships with yourself and others?

This question is based on the idea that people can always use knowledge and awareness of the self to improve how one lives with oneself and those existing within one's life. It also invites students to think about ways that this understanding can create positive change. This is not only for the most privileged students but also for marginalized students to understand those in their group who may experience other marginalizations.



5. How can you use your power and privilege as a leader to create more inclusive and equitable spaces for others?

This question encourages students to push their reflection further to consider how their power and privilege in leadership roles (both formal and informal) can impact and influence others. Example of ways they could use their power and privilege include:

- *Structuring meetings and discussions in ways that ensure everyone has a voice in the conversation.*
- *Actively seeking out and listening to the voices of those who are underrepresented or marginalized.*
- *Recognizing and celebrating the diversity of identities, backgrounds, and perspectives that enrich their team(s).*
- *Providing feedback that is tailored to the needs and goals of each individual, while holding everyone accountable to high standards of performance and conduct.*
- *Leveraging their networks to open doors and create opportunities for those who are often overlooked or excluded.*



Privilege Walk Statements

1. If you are right-handed, take one step forward.
2. If English is your first language, take one step forward.
3. If one or both of your parents have a college degree, take one step forward.
4. If you can find Band-Aids at mainstream stores designed to blend in with or match your skin tone, take one step forward.
5. If you rely, or have relied, primarily on public transportation, take one step back.
6. If you have attended previous schools with people you felt were like yourself, take one step forward.
7. If you constantly feel unsafe walking alone at night, take one step back.
8. If your household employs help as servants, gardeners, etc., take one step forward.
9. If you are able to move through the world without fear of sexual assault, take one step forward.
10. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.
11. If you often felt that your parents were too busy to spend time with you, take one step back.
12. If you were ever made fun of or bullied for something you could not change or was beyond your control, take one step back.
13. If your family has ever left your homeland or entered another country not of your own free will, take one step back.
14. If you would never think twice about calling the police when trouble occurs, take one step forward.
15. If your family owned a computer, take one step forward.
16. If you have ever been able to play a significant role in a project or activity because of a talent you gained previously, take one step forward.
17. If you can show affection for your romantic partner in public without fear of ridicule or violence, take one step forward.
18. If you ever had to skip a meal or were hungry because there was not enough money to buy food, take one step back.
19. If you feel respected for your academic performance, take one step forward.
20. If you have a physically visible disability, take one step back.
21. If you have an invisible illness or disability, take one step back.
22. If you were ever discouraged from an activity because of race, class, ethnicity, gender, disability, or sexual orientation, take one step back.
23. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to fit in more, take one step back.
24. If you have ever been profiled by someone else using stereotypes, take one step back.
25. If you feel good about how your identities are portrayed by the media, take one step forward.
26. If you were ever accepted for something you applied to because of your association with a friend or family member, take one step forward.
27. If you or your family has health insurance take one step forward.
28. If you have ever been spoken over because you could not articulate your thoughts fast enough, take one step back.
29. If someone has ever spoken for you when you did not want them to do so, take one step back.
30. If there was ever substance abuse in your household, take one step back.
31. If you come from a single-parent household, take one step back.
32. If you live in an area with crime and drug activity, take one step back.
33. If someone in your household suffered or suffers from mental illness, take one step back.
34. 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.



35. If you are never asked to speak on behalf of a group of people who share an identity with you, take one step forward.
36. If you can make mistakes and not have people attribute your behavior to flaws in your racial or gender group, take one step forward.
37. If you always assumed you'd go to university, take one step forward.
38. If you have more than fifty books in your household, take one step forward.
39. If your parents have ever told you that you can be anything you want to be, take one step forward.