

Power/Nonpower Chart Benefits and Facilitation Options

Benefits:

The Power/Nonpower Chart exercise allows participants to explore the inequities of power that exist in the U.S. This exercise illustrates the crux of oppression theory.

Time Required: 15-20 minutes

Ideal Group Size: Any

Support Materials: Board or flipchart, markers

Key Instructions:

1. Divide the board or flipchart into two columns. Name one column with the heading “Power” and the other with the heading “Nonpower” at the top of the columns.
2. Ask participants to think about who has power in our society. Write down their responses in the Power column.
3. Then, ask participants to think about who doesn’t have power in our society. Write down their responses in the Nonpower column.
4. You can also ask them to go back and forth between the columns, naming the corresponding groups (i.e., men/women, white people/people of color, GLBTQ/Straight), or asking participants to name the oppression occurring.

Power	Oppression	Non Power
Men	Sexism	Women/Trans
White	Racism	People of Color
Adult	Ageism	Youth/Elderly
Rich	Classism	Poor/Working Class
Heterosexual	Heterosexism	Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual
Able Bodied	Ableism	Trans, Queer
Mentally Abled	“	People with Disabilities
Christian	Anti-Semitism, Islamaphobia, etc.	People with mental illness, developmental disabilities
Acceptable looks	Looksism	Other religions
US Citizen	Xenophobia	“Non-acceptable” looks
English 1 st language	“	Immigrants
Hearing	Audism	Non-native English speakers
		Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Key Points:

- In an oppressive society, people on the “Nonpower” side are most often targeted for violence by the corresponding group on the Power side.
- Nonpower groups undergo systematic, routine, day-to-day discrimination and mistreatment.
- People in the Nonpower side are not intrinsically powerless, especially individually. You may find individual examples of people on the Nonpower side in positions of power, like being a supervisor, company owner, or lead trainer. However, societal laws, values and institutions do not support the Nonpower individuals as a group, as they do for those in the Power group.
- Participants often struggle with this exercise, as it seems to point out that everyone in the Power side is bad, which is, of course, not true. You can address this concern by saying that this is not the “good list” and the “bad list” but rather an exercise to notice where power in our society falls to understand why some groups are oppressed.
- People move back and forth between the power and nonpower side. Hopefully we can remember what it feels like to be on the nonpower side when we find ourselves on the power side and feel empathy and understanding for those on the nonpower side.
- Participants may feel that the exercise is “just creating divisions between the two groups.” You can address this by saying that “we are not creating divisions; they already exist. We are simply describing the divisions to better understand how to break them down.”
- It’s important to try and share specific examples and begin to define and illustrate institutional oppression if this happens. Some examples include:
 - Approved holidays for days off are Christian holidays (vs. other religious holidays)
 - Consequences for men committing domestic violence are still minimal and the behavior is still excused.
 - Providing accessibility for people with disabilities is still somewhat optional and not enforced.
 - Presidents of the US, others in positions of power (either match the Power side of the Chart, or appear to (Franklin Roosevelt had a physical disability but went to great extremes to hide it).