

Pyramid *of* Power

The *Jyot* Curriculum

Pyramid of Power

Learning Objectives

- Define & identify power as well as institutions of power
- Define & identify systems of oppression
- Demonstrate imbalance of power and its effects
- Analyze the relationship between power and systems of change

Materials Needed

- Easel with chart paper or white board
- Markers
- Post-it notes
- Projector
- Laptop for powerpoint

Prerequisite?

What is Privilege?

Skills to Learn

- Leadership
- Community Bridging
- Critical and Analytical Thinking
- Self-development

Facilitator's Key



Say out loud



Video



Conversation/Debrief



Reference Powerpoint

Workshop Timeline

What is Power	10 mins
Institutional Power vs. Power of the People	10 mins
Understanding Power Structures	20 mins
Break	10 mins
Pyramid of Power	15 mins
Debrief	5 mins
Total Time	1 hour 10 minutes

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What is Power?

10 mins



What do you think of when you hear the word “power”?

[Take responses.]

How would you define power?

[Take responses.]

The definition we can loosely agree on is:



Power = the capacity to control circumstances in your favor





How do the examples you all shared illustrate this definition of power?

(i.e. money – people with money can control the media)

Write out responses on
chart paper or a
whiteboard

Institutional Power vs. Power of the People


10 mins

- What are examples of institutions in our society?
 - [Take examples of institutions. Ex.: education system/colleges, banks, corporations, etc.]
- Based on our examples, how can we define institution then?
 - [Take responses.] The definition we can loosely agree on is:
-  Institution = an influential organization or structure that helps to establish and maintain the norms and rules of society
- What do we think institutional power means then?
 - [Take responses.] The definition we can loosely agree on is:
-  Institutional Power = the control that institutions have over the way society is constructed and maintained
- So how do the people fit in to this system of power?
 - [Take responses. Guide participants to the term **power of the people** and have them define.]
-  Show political cartoon on next slide in the powerpoint as a hint
-  We call this the **Power of the People** = the power that all of us have as everyday people to collectively make change in the world


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Understanding Power Structures

20 mins

 We are going to fill out a chart based on groups with institutional power and the groups that don't have such power in society, as we were just discussing.

- Split butcher paper into four columns, titled **Power Group**, **Oppressed Group**, **Target Group**, **Examples**, and **Power Structure**.

 As we were doing before, let's discuss what are some groups with power, and what are the corresponding groups without the power?
[Complete the chart accordingly.]

[If helpful, use questions like "Who do you usually see in positions of power? Who has more power in society, ___ or ___? How do you know? What groups face discrimination?"]

Use Powerpoint to aid in filling out this chart. Ask prompt questions to get them to think, and pull up powerpoint to start the conversation.

Sample Table/Some Examples

Power Group	Oppressed Group	Examples	Power Structure
The wealthy	The working class	Healthcare is not accessible to all. Minimum wage is not a livable wage in many states	Capitalism
Cisgendered Males	All other genders (Women; non-binary, trans, gender non-conforming, intersex, two-spirit folx)	The wage-gap, men earn more money doing the same job with either the same or lesser qualifications than a colleague of another gender.	The Patriarchy
White People	People of color	Preference in hiring, likeliness to not have obstacles that are because of their skin color, white privilege.	White Privilege

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Understanding Power Structures (continued)

20 mins



Use the powerpoint to get participants to guess power structures and aid them in filling out the chart

- Show cartoon, have them discuss who has the power and who is oppressed and fill these in on the “Power Structure” chart. Guide them to the name of the power structure. The term will appear upon click, and then the next slide gives a definition.
- **Power structures and definitions from the powerpoint:**
 - **White privilege** = the system that gives white people power and privileges at the expense of people of color and minorities.
 - **Capitalism** = the economic system we live under where rich people gain profit and power from the exploitation and oppression of poor and working class people.
 - **Male privilege** = the system we live under where men gain profit and power at the expense of women and other genders.
 - **Ableism** = the system that gives power and privilege to able-bodied people (people who are not differently-abled) at the expense of people who are differently-abled.
 - **Heterosexism** = the system we live under where heterosexuals gain power and privilege at the expense of LGBTQ people.
 - **Institutional Racism** = The system that give power to white people at the expense of people of color on an institutional level. This type of racism is wide-spread and affects masses of people rather than racism targeted against individuals. This power is created and backed by institutions and even the law.



There are other target groups that also face systematic, institutional oppression, such as immigrants, non-English speakers, etc. Does anyone have questions before we continue?



*It is important to remember that not all members of power groups are “bad people” – not all white people are bad, not all men are bad, etc. It is the groups as a whole that lead to historically imbalanced institutional power structures – not individual power structures. In fact, many of us are different sides of the chart, including the power groups. Being able to recognize our power and roots of oppression is the critical first step. This allows us to leverage our privileges under these systems of oppression to help the targeted groups. This is called **allyship**. Can anyone name some ways we can be good allies?*

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Break to Process Definitions...

10 mins

Pyramid of Power

15 mins

- Draw out a pyramid on chart paper or a whiteboard. Split into three levels.
- Hand out post-it notes to every participant. Have each participant write some identity groups (power group, oppressed group, cultural group, etc).
- Have participants place post-its where they think the group would be in the pyramid, the top being the most powerful and the bottom being the least.
 - The top portion would be the most powerful (white, able-bodied, heterosexual, male, etc.), and the bottom would be the least powerful (people of color, disabled, LGBTQ, female, immigrants, non-US citizens, undocumented folks, etc.).



If the top of the pyramid is so small, how do they hold the most power?

- Allow participants to respond, probing them to include the mentioned systems of oppression in their answers to demonstrate the imbalance of power and thus their understanding of institutional power versus people power, and systems of oppression (i.e. the top of the pyramid has the smallest group of people, but their power is significant due to white supremacy, capitalism.etc.).

Debrief

5 mins

- Ask participants for their reactions. What did they learn through this workshop? What is something that surprised them? What is something they want to research more?



Do you feel this pyramid is fair, a world that you want to live in? If not, how would you want to see this changed? [Take responses of ideal situations.]



*The important thing to remember from this pyramid is the **Power of the People**. People truly have great power – we are the masses, and there is power in numbers with the right organizing. We need to shift power away from the top and dismantle the systems of oppression.*

Sources

Building Power, Sharpening Minds!: Political Education Workshop Manual, The School of Unity & Liberation (SOUL), Second Edition, 2007

"Pyramid of Power: What is power?" pages 41-42

"Pyramid of Power: Power Chart" pages 45-48

"Pyramid of Power: Pyramid of Power" pages 49-50