

Power Sculpture

This exercise demonstrates power structures in personal and social relationships and provides an interactive way to explore actions to empower people and dismantle oppressive structures.

Facilitator Instructions

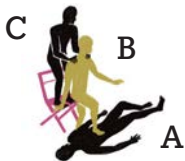
State that we want to set up a power sculpture—that is, a visual arrangement of power in social relationships. Call for three volunteers to be placed in a sculpture with non-speaking roles. Arrange them in the following positions:



Person A lies flat on the floor, face up.



Person B stands beside A, with one foot (with shoe off) resting lightly on stomach of A.



Person C stands on chair behind B, with both hands firmly on the shoulders of B to support and stabilize B.



Have volunteers pose in this sculpture while the rest of the group observes. After a moment of silent observation, ask the group to think about what's happening and situations this might represent:

- » What kinds of situations does this represent in our lives or society?
- » For these situations, what is each part in the power structure?

Ask each person in the sculpture to share what it's like for them in their position:

- » How would you describe your physical experience?
- » What emotions do you feel?
- » What do you see from your vantage point?
- » How do you feel toward other members in this arrangement?
- » What would you like to do?

Ask everyone to consider what can be done to transform this arrangement:

- » How can this power structure be changed? Explain that those around the power sculpture are bystanders and members of the larger social group in which this problem is set.
- » What are options for change? Play out a range of possibilities (violent and nonviolent) for changing this arrangement, and see what happens. Observe typical reactions of trying to change the structure—for example, where those on top (B and C) try to use more power over A to keep them in their place as they try to change the structure. See how others in the larger group can get involved to change the balance of power and transform the structure.

Invite the volunteers to leave the sculpture and return to their seats.

- » As a whole group, share experiences of being in different positions in this sculpture and what happened.
- » Discuss observations from this experience, and reflect on how it illustrates power imbalances and systemic power—that is, the power in cultural patterns and institutions that allows one group to impose its standards, goals, and norms over others.
- » Note that many people in position A do not have a sense of power but struggle with a sense of helplessness. As a result, they feel frustrated, discouraged, and angry. Out of desperation, they may choose desperate actions to change their situation.
- » Reflect on the reality of this sculpture in various situations and what we can do to empower others, change the system, and establish justice.