

# UNPACKING POWER AND PRIVILEGE

## *Seeking Understanding: My Sister, My Responsibility*<sup>®</sup>

Developed by Dr. Suzette Walden Cole

Senior partner and co-founder of Cross Cultural Fraternal Advisors Initiative (CCFAI)

**TIME** | 60 minutes

### **Objectives:**

- Understand how power and privilege can exist both visibly and invisibly.
- Recognize the ways identity impacts access and opportunities.
- Feel equipped to dismantle systems and situations that foster inequity.

### **Group size:**

- The program is best facilitated with a group of fewer than 150 members.
- If your group has more than 150 members, we suggest running two or more sessions (either separately or concurrently) to cultivate a more conducive learning environment.

### **Setup:**

- Choose a space where the group can sit and face the facilitator comfortably.
- Use a room without fixed furniture and with an open space in front.
- It is best to reserve a room where groups of two to three people can work comfortably throughout the workshop.
- You will play a PowerPoint presentation during the workshop, so you will need to connect a laptop to a projector and screen or open the presentation from a web browser.
- Confirm you can amplify sound. You may need a mic depending on the space and your ability to project. Using a mic is the most inclusive option in case of unknown hearing impairments.
- Make a copy of the “Unpacking Power and Privilege” handout for each participant.
- It is preferable to have a remote to change the PowerPoint slides.

### **Preparation:**

- Think about the ways that these concepts show up on campus and in everyday life for members of the chapter.
- Familiarize yourself with the shared language definitions and the concepts in the Personal and Social Identity workshop.
- Consider the areas where you and/or the Executive Committee officers think the chapter has work to do and/or any incidents that may have occurred on campus.
- There are six workshops in the *Seeking Understanding* component of *My Sister, My Responsibility*. We recommend facilitating the workshops in this order: In My Sister’s Shoes, Personal and Social Identity, Genuine Conversations, Cultural Appropriation, Microaggressions, Unpacking Power and Privilege.

### **Materials needed:**

- Projector and screen
- PowerPoint
- “Unpacking Power and Privilege” handout

- Flip chart paper set up around the room and markers

**References:**

- Ayvazian, A. (1995). Interrupting the cycle of oppression: The role of allies as agents of change. *Fellowship*, 61(1-2), 6.
- Juliet Eilperin (2016, September 13) “White House women want to be in the room where it happens.” *The Washington Post*.

## INTRODUCTION | 6 minutes

*The facilitator should introduce him/her/themselves, welcome and thank participants for attending, and share why they are excited to lead this session.*

### FACILITATOR TIP

*Expand on the objectives as a quick preview of what is to come.*

#### Share:

- Let's start with talking about why we're here today.
- As we engage together today, I want you to reflect on how this aligns with our Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom Key Value.
- As we know from our *Creed*, Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom means we are open to new ideas and perspectives, we seek out opportunities to interact with and learn from people of different backgrounds, and we discuss different values and beliefs in a comfortable manner.
- While there may be times today that our conversation feels uncomfortable, remember we are sisters and we are all here to learn and gain a deeper understanding of our values.
- With that, I want to share some of our objectives for this workshop.

*Read the objectives on the PowerPoint.*

#### Ask:

- Why are these objectives important to us as a chapter, as sisters and as a community?

*Thank volunteers who share. Be sure to touch on the following:*

- These objectives ground us in the Seeking Understanding that We Might Gain True Wisdom Key Value. Along with furthering our growth in one of our Nine Key Values, these conversations allow us to further develop Belonging, one of ZTA's Five Areas of Sisterhood.
- For us to grow as a chapter and as sisters, it is important to take the time to understand each other in a deeper way.
- Beyond impacting our sisterhood, having a better understanding of identities strengthens our empathy and compassion for everyone we meet.

#### Share instructions:

- We should set some common expectations for our time together today. We're talking about power and privilege based upon our identities. These can be tough to talk about because we all have different experiences and backgrounds.



- Honesty and vulnerability are important. This workshop is only effective when you participate. The more we share our personal stories, the more experiences we can learn from; but more importantly, this knowledge gives us a greater understanding of each other.
- Even though I am presenting, I will also share my story with honesty and vulnerability.

*Distribute the participant handout.*

**Discuss:**

- What are expectations we have of each other as we navigate the session together?

**FACILITATOR TIP**  
*Give them time to process. Count to at least ten before you fill the potential silence in the space.*

*Be sure to touch on the following that expand beyond honesty and vulnerability:*

- Speak from the first-person (“I”) perspective.
- Listen actively.
- Respect silence.
- Share your thoughts, even if you don’t have the right words.
- Uphold confidentiality. Treat the candor of others as a gift. Assume that personal identities, experiences and perspectives shared in this space are confidential unless you are given permission to share them.
- Lean into discomfort. Learning happens on the edge of our comfort zones. Push yourself to be open to new ideas and experiences, even if they seem uncomfortable.

**Share:**

- Thank you for sharing what you need to feel supported during our session today.
- In an effort to ensure we are all in a position to contribute to the conversation today, let’s be sure we have a common understanding of some terms that may come up as we explore power and privilege in a more focused way.

*Refer to PowerPoint slide with definitions.*

- Now that we have some group definitions, let’s begin exploring power, how it shows up, and the ways it impacts our lives and those around us.



## HOW POWER SHOWS UP | 12 minutes

### Share instructions:

- If we want to empower ourselves and others, we need to understand power and its impacts.
- When you hear the word “power,” maybe images of lights illuminated, money, the government or muscles come to mind. The truth is, we often do not discuss the idea of power.
- Find someone who you haven’t talked to in a while or do not know well. Once you find your partner, identify the top three terms or images that come to mind when you think about how power shows up in your life, on campus, in the world, etc.

Give participants five minutes to discuss and share with each other.

While the pairs are working, use that time to post three sheets of flip chart paper and label them with the following headers:

- Individual (power within)
- Collective (power with)
- Institutional (power over)

### Discuss:

- As we explore the lists you generated, let’s consider the different types of power.

Explain the three categories as described on the slide.

## FACILITATOR TIP

See if someone is interested in helping by writing out the information shared on the flip chart paper. It frees you up to actively engage with the participants.

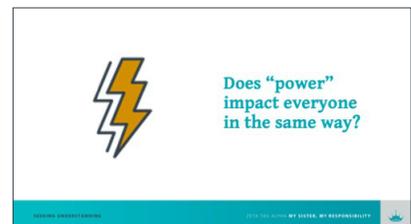
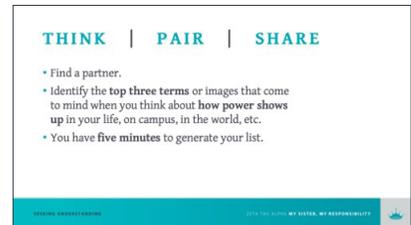
- What were some of the items you identified with your partners? Based on these descriptions, on which list do you think the item(s) belong?

Spend about three to four minutes per type of power to have groups share their reflection.

## DISPROPORTIONATE IMPACTS OF POWER | 8 minutes

### Share instructions:

- Within a social justice lens, power is the ability to decide who will have access to resources and the capacity to direct or influence the behavior of others, oneself and/or the course of events. Now that we can recognize how it shows up and define it at all levels, let’s consider its impacts.



- Is it possible for a person who feels empowered to still have institutions of power impact their access to resources? What causes this to occur? Can we always recognize when these situations happen? These are the questions we're going to tackle as a group.

## FACILITATOR TIP

For groups of 75 or more people, consider asking participants to share with the person they are sitting near. For groups of fewer than 75 people, we recommend mini-group breakouts following the instructions below.

- As you are able, get into groups of four to six people with those in the room who you haven't talked to in a while or do not know well. Once you are with your group, pick one or two questions from the slide to discuss in your group. You do not need to touch upon all of them. We are going for depth, not breadth.
- You will have about five minutes to discuss.

Remind the participants to raise their hand if they are able or call out if they have any questions.

After four minutes, give the participants a one-minute warning.

### Discuss:

- What are you thinking?
- What were some of the causes you identified?
- Do you always recognize when these situations arise?
- Would anyone else like to offer anything up to the group for discussion?

Allow for four to five responses.

## OPPRESSION | 8 minutes

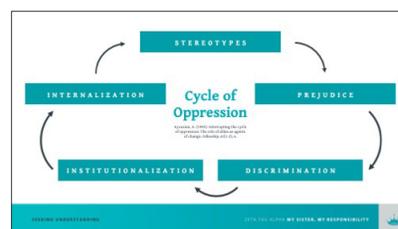
### Share:

- Understanding the impact of power allows us to recognize when and how it can negatively impact or result in the oppression of others.
- Keeping in mind the three levels of power we discussed, we can see the impacts occur on those levels as well. Let's examine the cycle of oppression (Ayvazian, 1995).

Walk through the cycle of oppression using the information below.

### Discuss:

- **Stereotypes:** Beliefs about attributes that are thought to be characteristic of all members of a particular group.



- **Prejudice:** A typically negative attitude or affective response toward a certain social group and its individual members.
- **Discrimination:** Actual negative or positive actions/treatment toward members of a particular social group based on their membership.
- **Institutionalization:** The process of establishing something as part of a structured and usually well-established system.
- **Internalization:** The process of making attitudes and behaviors an integral part of one's nature.
- When we understand power, we can see how this cycle leads to many of the -isms we find in our world as illustrated in the matrix of oppression shown here.

Walk through a few examples from the matrix of oppression using the information on the slide.

- By no means is this a comprehensive listing of the matrix of oppression. We could also explore gender, sex, age, religion, etc. However, this does allow us to see how privilege can manifest. When we understand this layering, it helps us recognize the relationship between privilege and identity or social group membership.

Matrix of Oppression				
Social Identity Categories	Privileged Social Groups	Border Social Groups	Minoritized Social Groups	Ittm
Race	White People	Bi-racial or "White Passing" People	Black, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous	Racism
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual People	Bisexual, Pansexual*	Lesbian, Queer, Pk, and Pk	Heterosexism
Socio-economic	Wealthy, Upper Class	Middle Class	Working Class, Poor	Classism
Ability/ Disability	Temporarily Able-bodied People	People with Temporary Disabilities	People with Disabilities	Ableism

## RECOGNIZING PRIVILEGE | 11 minutes

Read the Dr. Peggy McIntosh quote on the slide. For background, Dr. McIntosh is an American feminist, anti-racism activist, scholar, speaker, and senior research scientist of the Wellesley Centers for Women. She is the founder of the National SEED Project on inclusive curriculum.

### Discuss:

- What do you think about this quote?
- Are there any examples you can think of where you see privilege play out on campus and in the community?
- If we define privilege as “unearned access to resources (social power) only readily available to some people as a result of their advantaged or dominant cultural group membership,” it’s a bit easier to understand how much of the difficulty with privilege is that it is often invisible for those who possess it.
- Why do we think it is easy to fall prey to not seeing privilege?

Allow for three to four responses.

- Part of the reason could be the levels and layers in which it shows up. Let’s spend some time exploring this further.
- Considering the matrix of oppression we discussed earlier we can see similar layers of privilege here.



### Discuss:

- **Societal/Cultural:** Collective, commonly accepted ideas about what is “right” and “normal”
- **Institutional:** Laws, public policy, educational systems and media images uphold hiring practices and promote access
- **Interpersonal:** Actions, behaviors and language choices
- **Individual:** Feelings, beliefs and espoused values
- Most of us are both agents and targets of oppression based on the intersectionality of our identities. No one has just one identity. There are times where we may benefit from privilege and other occasions where we may struggle with oppression depending upon how we identify.

**Levels/Layers of Privilege**

- **Societal/Cultural:** Collective, commonly accepted ideas about what is “right” and “normal”
- **Institutional:** Laws, public policy, educational systems and media images uphold hiring practices and promote access
- **Interpersonal:** Actions, behaviors and language choices
- **Individual:** Feelings, beliefs and espoused values

Who is seen? Who is unseen?

### Share instructions:

- Find someone who you haven’t talked to in a while or do not know well. Once you find your partner, determine who is going to share first. Address the questions on the slide and listen for the “switch” at the halfway point.
- You will each have two minutes to share.

**THINK | PAIR | SHARE**

- Which of your identities do you think comes with privilege? Has there been a time where you benefited from privilege?
- What can be done to provide access to that privilege for someone who doesn’t share that identity or has an intersecting identity that impacts the situation?
- You will each have **two minutes** to share your stories.

*Walk around to different people to check on the progress of participants  
Remind the participants to raise their hand if they are able or call out if they have any questions.*

*At two minutes into sharing, announce that it is time to switch so the other partner can share their responses.*

*After one more minute, give the participants a one-minute warning.*

### Discuss:

- Talking about privilege can be difficult and create feelings of discomfort. We are not saying anyone should feel guilt or shame for having privilege. It’s more about what we do with the privilege from which we benefit.
- Does anyone want to share their story? Specifically, what options were you able to identify for working to grant access to someone who does not share your specific identity?

*Allow for three to four responses.*

- A key takeaway from our time together is recognizing our ability to tackle these complex issues. Let’s talk about the ways we can take action.

## **DISMANTLING SYSTEMS** | 10 minutes

### Share:

- There are ways to utilize our privilege and power to elevate others and take steps to dismantle the systems that foster inequity while being careful not to fall prey to a “savior complex” or helping in a self-serving manner.

- Let's walk through the action steps we can take to use our agency to address inequity.
  - **Start with self.** Our work in the areas of diversity, equity and inclusion should not be about us. If it becomes about us, then we need to step back from the action. When we are in positions of power, we need to ensure we surround ourselves with those who have different lenses than we have to allow us to be inclusion-focused.
  - **Create space for authentic, original voices to speak for themselves whenever possible.** If there is an opportunity for minoritized voices to speak for themselves, foster that space. We should not be speaking over others or telling their stories for them. Fostering equity means that we listen more than we speak. What voices are missing from our decision-making tables?
  - **Stay mindful.** Journaling, practicing self-reflection and practicing cultural curiosity allow us to be mindful about areas for continued development.
  - **Take on issues; do not take them over.** There are times when minoritized groups engage in self-advocacy and our stepping in to try to help only derails their efforts. We can unintentionally take over an issue, which can erase or silence their voices. Our goal should be to ask first, “What do you need?” or “How can I assist you?” as that is part of solid allyship and coalition-building.
  - **Engage in the practice of amplification.** During the Obama administration, women leaders found themselves being silenced, spoken over by their male peers (Eilperin, 2016). They began to practice the process of amplification, where they would name the person who shared the original concept, e.g., “As Christina mentioned,” or “I thought Julie made a great suggestion when she offered...” Regardless of your political ideology, this practice can be helpful in efforts to dismantle privilege and power.

**Dismantling Systems that Foster Inequity**

- Start with self.
- Create space for authentic, original voices to speak for themselves whenever possible.
- Stay mindful.
- Take on issues; don't take them over.
- Engage in the practice of amplification.

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**Discuss:**

- What actions can you take in your current roles on campus and beyond?
- What can you do to address the areas of power and privilege we identified?
- How can you engage others in these conversations?

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*Allow for three to four responses.*

## WRAP UP | 5 minutes

### Share:

- Power and privilege are part of our lives. What we do with them speaks to our character and who we are at our core.
- Take a moment to write down on your handout a commitment you can make today to share the information from our discussion or a key takeaway from our time together.

### Ask:

- Can I get a few volunteers to share what they wrote on their handout?

*Allow for two to three responses.*

- Thank you all for the time and energy everyone brought to our conversations today. Let's not let these discussions and the inspired actions that follow suit be limited to today. Let's continue to move forward so we can make a difference and get better.



# UNPACKING POWER AND PRIVILEGE HANDOUT

Developed by Dr. Suzette Walden Cole

Senior partner and co-founder of Cross Cultural Fraternal Advisors Initiative (CCFAI)

## SHARED LANGUAGE

- **Equity:** The fair treatment, access, opportunity and advancement for all people, which includes striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of some groups.
- **Inclusion:** Creating an environment of open participation from all individuals with different ideas and perspectives where everyone feels they have a voice, are valued and feel validated.
- **Identity:** The collective aspect of the set of characteristics by which a person is definitively recognized or known; the set of behavioral or personal characteristics by which an individual is recognizable as a member of a group.
- **Oppression:** A system that maintains advantage and disadvantage based on social group memberships and operates, intentionally and unintentionally, on individual, institutional and cultural levels.
- **Dominant culture:** A community of people whose access to institutional and structural power has been structurally guaranteed, regardless of the size of the population. As a result, the community routinely disenfranchises and disempowers the most vulnerable communities, known as the minoritized populations.
- **Minoritized culture:** A community of people whose access to institutional and structural power has been severely limited, regardless of the size of the population. As a result, the community is constantly being disenfranchised and disempowered by the dominant population.

## HOW POWER SHOWS UP

With a partner, identify the top three terms or images that come to mind when you think about how power shows up in your life, on campus, in the world, etc.

- 1
- 2
- 3

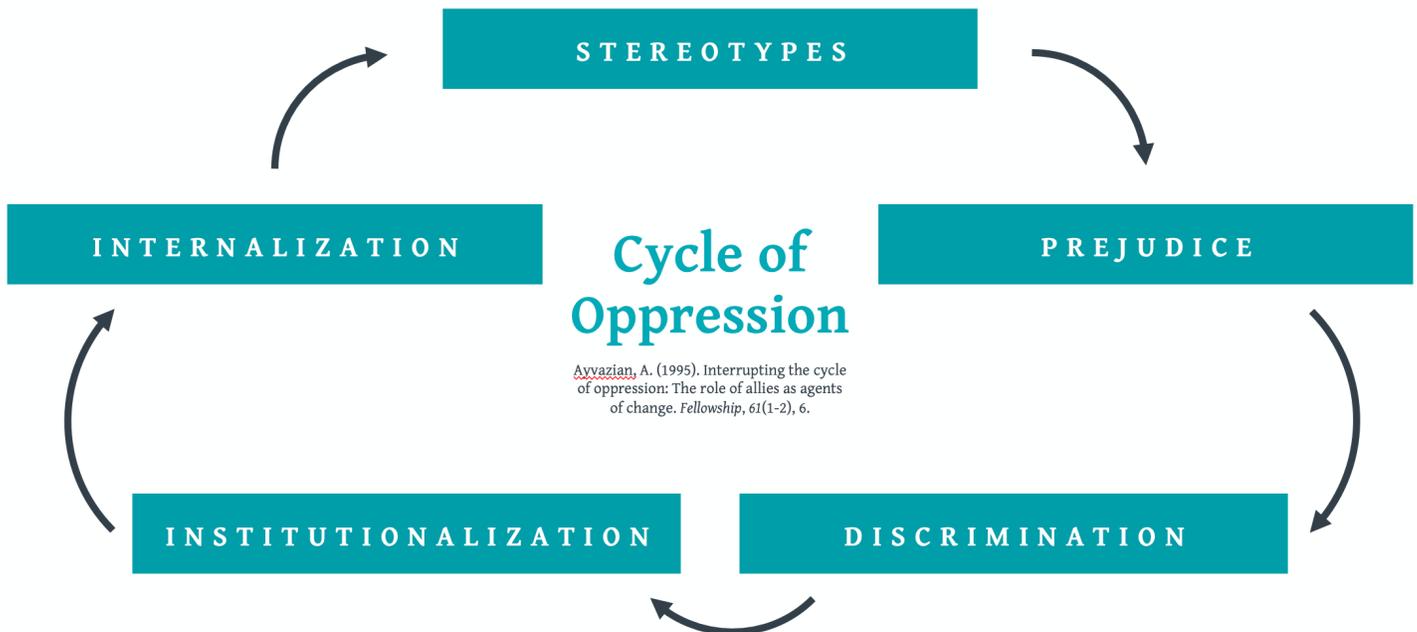
## TYPES OF POWER

- **Individual** (*power within*): Feelings of individual strength, ability and/or expression
- **Collective** (*power with*): Synergy achieved through working in groups, increased ability to achieve outcomes by pooling resources, and/or belief that combined effort yields more than the sum of its parts
- **Institutional** (*power over*): Systemic influence or control over an outcome or others through means of enforcement, e.g., governments, policies

## EVALUATING THE IMPACTS OF POWER

### CYCLE OF OPPRESSION

- **Stereotypes:** Beliefs about attributes that are thought to be characteristic of all members of a particular group.
- **Prejudice:** A typically negative attitude or affective response toward a certain social group and its individual members.
- **Discrimination:** Actual negative or positive actions/treatment towards members of a particular social group based on their membership.
- **Institutionalization:** The process of establishing something as part of a structured and usually well-established system.
- **Internalization:** The process of making attitudes and behaviors an integral part of one's nature.



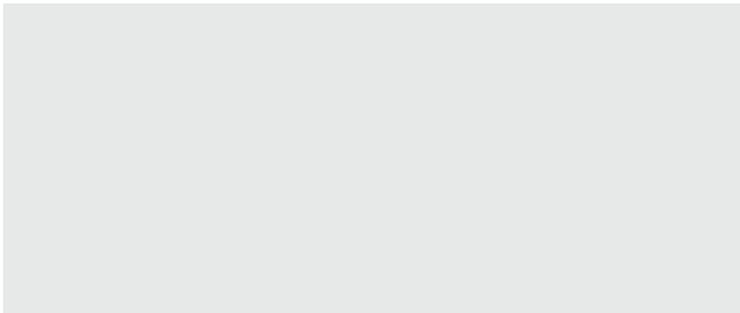
# Matrix of Oppression

Social Identity Categories	Privileged Social Groups	Border Social Groups	Minoritized Social Groups	Ism
Race	White People	Biracial or “White-Passing” People	Black, Asian, Latinx, Indigenous	Racism
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexual People	Bisexual Pansexual*	Lesbians, Queer Folx, Gay Folx	Heterosexism
Socio-economic	Wealthy, Upper Class	Middle Class	Working Class, Poor	Classism
Ability/ Disability	Temporarily Able-bodied People	People with Temporary Disabilities	People with Disabilities	Ableism

## LEVELS/LAYERS OF PRIVILEGE

- **Societal/Cultural:** Collective, commonly accepted ideas about what is “right” and “normal”
- **Institutional:** Laws, public policy, educational systems and media images uphold hiring practices and promote access
- **Interpersonal:** Actions, behaviors and language choices
- **Individual:** Feelings, beliefs and espoused values

## DISMANTLING SYSTEMS



- Start with self.
- Create space for authentic, original voices to speak for themselves whenever possible.
- Stay mindful.
- Take on issues; do not take them over.
- Practice the amplification of others.

## TAKEAWAY AND COMMITMENT

What is your biggest takeaway from our time together and one commitment to furthering the work we started here today in unpacking power and privilege?