



Introduction:

Perceived power and status of ourselves and those around us affect our interactions on multiple levels, impacting conversation topics, breadth and depth of conversations, communication initiation behaviors, nonverbal behaviors, comfort levels, uncertainty avoidance behaviors, and interaction satisfaction levels. We learn different rules about power and status and their roles in interaction situations from our cultural backgrounds. This activity prompts you to consider the roles of power and status in interaction and to critically analyze the communicative impact of perceived power and status differences.

Participant Instructions:

1. When your instructor signals, you will gather as a group in an open space. You will then be instructed to imagine you are an employee of a particular company attending the end of the year company picnic to celebrate the successful business year. You will soon have an opportunity to walk around and chat with your fellow employees (about company news or whatever else you'd like to talk about – this is a social gathering after all!).
2. Before these conversations, however, you will draw a card from the deck your instructor provides. The card you draw will indicate your status in the company. Once drawn, do NOT look at your own card, rather, you should hold it facing out on your forehead, so that others can see it. This will allow everyone else to see your card, but not you. The ace is the highest card (CEO) and face cards (jacks, queens, and kings) indicate top executive positions. Cards with 2s, 3s, and 4s indicate the lowest status jobs in the company (night custodial staff, mailroom worker, etc.).
3. When your instructor signals, walk around holding your card on your forehead facing out and interact with other participants as you think their card indicates they should be treated. Make an effort to remember the other participants' statuses as you interact, but be discreet about the other person's status just as you would in real life situations (for example, most people would not go up to the mailroom guy and say, "So...what is it like down there in the basement year after year??"). You will interact with one another for about 15 minutes.
4. Once the 15 minutes is up, you will line up in the order in which you think you belong (ordered order from low status jobs up to the CEO position) without looking at your own card. You should find your own place in line, without prompting from the others. Once everyone is lined up, you will then look at your cards and beginning with the low end of the line, you will read your card out loud for the group.
5. Finally, you will debrief the activity as a large group:
 - What did you see? Think? Feel?
 - How did you figure out where to stand in line at the end of the picnic/party?
 - How were you treated? How did you treat others? How did not knowing your own status (at least initially) affect your interaction with others? Did discovering your status change your behaviors?



- How does status affect how we communicate with one another, verbally and nonverbally?
- What emotional and behavioral reactions did you experience and observe during the activity?
- Discuss your perceptions of power and power difference and the role of power cross-culturally.
- How does this activity relate to some of your own personal and professional experiences?
- Consider this activity in a more (or less) mono-cultural setting, diverse cultural context, etc.