OVERVIEW
As social justice seekers, it is critical that we establish a common understanding of power in our group so we can be clear in our relationships and our work. It is also critical that we share power, fight power, or contend with unjust power relationships as they affect our economy, climate, and society. These session will help groups establish a baseline around power, resistance, and the different forms of oppression: interpersonal, internalized, and institutional. This then allows us to be more precise at diagnosing how power is playing out and what to do about it.

GOALS
• To create shared language and frameworks inside the group
• To develop a shared understanding of different forms of power and oppression
• To establish a baseline from which to better discern and organize for transformation and against oppression

TIME NEEDED
Two hours, or two 1-hour sessions without Family Feud, which can take 20 to 45 minutes depending on the group. There’s a good natural break after Family Feud and defining key terms.

MATERIALS NEEDED
• Flip charts, markers, and tape, or easel. Optional items for Family Feud: buzzers, ‘prize’ for winning team, Facilitator copy of the Glossary (p. 137) or put the terms on a PowerPoint and project them.
• Handouts: 3 Pillars of White Supremacy (p. 22), 3 I’s of Oppression & Resistance (p. 25), Glossary (after Family Feud)

READINGS/RESOURCES
• ‘3 Pillars of White Supremacy,’ by Andrea Smith

FRAMING
As feminists, we understand that an intersectional power analysis - an understanding of how forms of oppression connect - provides the critical set of lenses through which we view the systems and issues that shape our world. Intersectional power analysis also reminds us that no one issue is more important than any other in our work, and that oppression and domination affect all of us, not just one group, though the consequences vary enormously. A robust, shared understanding of how power works is central to how we think about the world and how we will create justice and transformation through shared struggle.

We have already talked a lot about power and the oppressive forces that shape our reality, but we must also remind ourselves and each other that oppressive systems do not fully define who we are, determine how we live our lives, or constrain what is possible for us.
NAMING POWER
Ask the full group to discuss (or to think quietly about before we get started):

• What do you think about when you hear the word power?
• Why is it important to have an intersectional power analysis?

Next, read together the following definition of POWER, from Charlene Carruthers’ *Unapologetic*:

“The word [power] has many meanings. **Power is the ability to act and get what you want.** Power is built and maintained through organized people and organized resources. Power is not inherently good or bad. For people from marginalized groups, experiences with power are often negative. We are used to people having power over us. The amount of power other people and institutions have over our lives, our children, our mobility, our access to basic needs (food, water and shelter) and even our desire is immeasurable ... Power relationships are based on individuals, but they are intrinsically connected to the systems of power maintained by capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy and anti-Blackness.... What type of power do we want? Creating changes requires building and harnessing power. Anyone committed to transformative change must also be committed to building transformative power.” -Charlene Carruthers, *Unapologetic* (p105)

FAMILY FEUD
Language matters, and is constantly also being co-opted by our opposition, capitalists, or liberals. As Charlene Carruthers further explains in *Unapologetic* (p.60):

“The words ‘intersectionality’ ‘queer’ ‘anti-racist’ and ‘anti-capitalist’ roll off the tongues of so many radical Black activists. No one learns those words and what they mean on their own. Black feminists, Ballroom legends, queer folks and folks who fit no binaries have done the groundwork but are taken for granted in far too many movement spaces today. What is common terminology and practice in social justice circles today was theorized, written about, organized around, and fought for by people whose names we may never know.”

This activity is a great energizer, and could easily be sprinkled elsewhere (such as before or after lunch), depending on how you are using the curriculum. Here, the goal is also to relax and laugh at ourselves a bit, while landing on some clear shared vocabulary that will inform the rest of the session.

Break the group into four teams total; each should pick a team name. Each group should be physically together. During each round you will read out the definition of a term from the Glossary (p.137) without revealing what the term is. For each round, a different team member should step up as the contestant. The contestant who has the answer first can raise their hand (or use a bell or buzzer if you have one). Otherwise, give people 15 seconds to come up with an answer; all contestants should be invited to share before the answer is revealed. For each correct answer, a contestant earns their team 1 point. Potential extra credit: Include a ‘Fast Money’ Round for finalists!
We DON'T WANT to be STARS
For clarity and shared vocabulary, briefly name together the specific systems of power we’re talking about:

• white supremacy
• capitalism
• colonialism
• heteropatriarchy

**KEY TALKING POINTS**

• Each of these systems were built by people, and they are maintained, reproduced, and developed by people, too. Whereas we (as individuals or as groups and formations) often accommodate or replicate power systems through our participation in them, we can also transform and resist them. The good news is, we are responsible. The bad news is, we are responsible.

• If we can understand power and control, then we can understand why domestic violence and rape occur, why one country colonizes another, and why white supremacy survives. Power, whether wielded over others or shared, affects how we move in the world: our wellness, freedom, life or death, and all of our choices.

• **People debate the root cause of unjust power.** Some say it’s capitalism, some say patriarchy, some say white supremacy. There may not be a clear chicken-or-egg answer here. All these systems are intertwined, and all are destructive to the mind, body, and spirit. **All these systems are lethal.** Our goal is to learn how to create shared power – power with instead of power over.

**IF YOU ARE DOING THIS IN TWO SESSIONS, THIS IS A GOOD PLACE TO PAUSE.**

Use this space to record insights from this session. What is on top? Where is there shared understanding brewing in the group, and where is more discussion needed? What do you want to make sure to return to (or hold space for) when you reconvene?
**3 I's of Oppression & Resistance**

- **Draw a large triangle** on a board or flip chart, with each of the three points labeled “Interpersonal,” “Internalized,” and “Institutional.” Pass out a handout with the same drawing on it (see opposite).
- **Frame for the group:** Power and oppression function in multiple ways. Three of the most common are **Interpersonal, Internalized,** and **Institutional** oppression (the 3 I’s!).
- **Most mainstream conversations about injustice or oppression focus exclusively on the interpersonal (for example, one bad teacher or one bad cop) rather than on the generations of policies, practices, and laws that literally weave oppression and bias into the DNA of institutions and the law of the land.**
- **This focus on the interpersonal is intentional.** It serves to keep us divided and focusing on symptoms not root causes. It also oversimplifies things, making us believe that we can fix things by removing that one bad teacher or one bad cop. It is a kind of scapegoating, and it protects and shields the oppressive system.
- **Next, workshop examples in the full group:**
  - Provide at least one example for each corner “I” of the triangle that’s relevant to your group.
  - Then, solicit examples from the group for each corner. People will commonly mistake one for the other, and it’s good and ok to gently correct them. The purpose is to gain clarity together.
- **Invite people to do their worksheet in pairs, small groups, or alone with any number of instructions:**
  - Give everyone one type of oppression and have people come up with examples for all 3 corners.
  - As a full group, brainstorm further examples in society. This is the simplest option.
  - Focus specifically on local examples.
  - Ask people to first brainstorm two examples for each type of oppression and write them on the outside corners of the triangle. Then have people write examples of interpersonal, internalized, institutional resistance inside the triangle.

**Key Talking Points**

- **Tokenism works to obscure real power dynamics and who the decision-makers are.** **Tokenism and multiculturalism maintain power in the hands of dominators.**
- **Horizontal hostility,** aka shooting the messenger, also obscures power. For example, the DMV employees denying undocumented people licenses are Black women; they are the front people for the state’s horrific and oppressive policies.
- **Internalized superiority and inferiority:** Domination corrupts the soul and humanity of those who receive benefits and unearned advantages in society at the expense of others. It’s good to spend some time here, too, naming some examples of those manifestations, especially when in a multi-racial and/or cross-class group so focus isn’t only on oppression.

**Closing**

To transform power and oppression, we need to move all three sides of the triangle, not just one side. Our strategies need to take on all three. **How will our work do that? What are times our work has or hasn’t taken on all three?** **Where do you find yourself spending the most time? Where does your work currently live? Why?**

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**WE DON’T WANT TO BE STARS**
WRITE EXAMPLES OF EACH “I” OF OPPRESSION OUTSIDE THE TRIANGLE.

YOU CAN USE A SPECIFIC LENS TO FOCUS ON, LIKE LOCAL EXAMPLES, OR ONE TYPE OF OPPRESSION, LIKE WHITE SUPREMACY AND RACISM.

YOU CAN ALSO ADD EXAMPLES OF RESISTANCE FOR EACH “I” INSIDE THE TRIANGLE.