A Step Above

In this exercise, have participants line up in a straight line, with room for them to move forward and backward. Have them move forward or backward, as instructed below, until the end of the exercise. In the end, people should be in various positions to each other, the most privileged in front.

Instructions to participants: In each case, take one step to move forward or backward each time. When in doubt, remain in place. Childhood is considered until you are 18.

1. Move forward if you are male; move backward if you are female.

2. Move forward if you are white or Asian. Move backward if you are of another race.

3. Move forward if you are able bodied; move back if you have a disability.

4. Move forward if you had two living parents through childhood. Move back if you had one or no parent through childhood.

5. Move forward one step if you parents were married and remained married while you were a child; take a step back if they got divorced.

6. Move forward if they are still together; take a step back if they are now separated, divorced or widowed. (If both parents are deceased and were still married at the time of the first parent’s death, take a step forward.)

7. Move forward if your family could always provide enough food growing up; take a step back if you didn’t always have enough food.

8. Move forward if your entire family had health care insurance throughout your childhood; move back a step if at times some of your family didn’t.

9. Move forward if your parents were always employed; take a step back if at times your parents were unemployed. (This could mean either or both, depending on what was the norm).

10. Move forward if your family owned their house; move back if you rented.

11. Move forward if you never had to move because of housing/living costs; move backward if you ever had to move for housing living costs.

12. Move forward if you lived in what you felt was a safe neighborhood; move back if you didn’t feel safe in your neighborhood.

13. Move forward if you only moved once or not at all growing up; move back if you had to move several times.

14. Move forward if you were able to travel out of the US as a child; move back if you never left the country.
15. Move forward if your family could afford what you wanted for holidays and birthday; move back if they couldn’t’ always afford what you wanted.

16. Move forward if you needed braces and could afford them; move back if you needed braces and couldn’t afford them (Stay still if you didn’t need braces)

17. Move forward if one of your parents living with you had a college degree. Move back if neither parent had a degree.

18. Move forward if both your parents had college degrees. Move forward if one or more has an advanced degree—MA or PhD.

19. Move forward if your parents spoke more than one language.

20. Move forward if a parent helped you regularly with homework; move back if neither helped you regularly.

21. Move forward if your parents could pay for most or all of your college. Move back if they could pay only little or none.

**Additional instructions:**
1. If you ever tried to change your appearance, mannerisms, or behavior to avoid being judged or ridiculed, take one step back.
2. If you were taken to art galleries, museum, sporting events or plays by your parents, take one step forward.
3. If your school was conducted in a language which was not your first language, take one step back.
4. If there were more than 50 books in your house when you grew up, take one step forward.
5. If you attended private school or summer camp, take one step forward.
6. If you studied the culture of your ancestors in elementary school, take one step forward.
7. If you were told that you were beautiful, smart and capable by your parents, take one step forward.
8. If you saw members of your race, ethnic group, gender or sexual orientation portrayed on television in degrading roles, take one step back.
9. If you move through the world without people being afraid of you, or thinking of you as a potential threat to their safety, take one step forward.
10. If your parents told you could be anything you wanted to be, take one step forward.
11. If you were ever uncomfortable about a joke related to your race, ethnicity, ability, gender or sexual orientation but felt unsafe to confront the situation, take one step back.
12. If you were ever the victim of violence related to your race, ethnicity, ability, gender or sexual orientation, take one step back.
Discussion questions for A Step Above:
1. What do you see around the room? Who do you see in the front, middle and back?
2. In what ways do the people near you reflect or not reflect your community?
3. How do you feel about where you are relative to the others in the room? How do you feel about where others are in relation to you?
4. What went through your mind as you moved forward and backward?
5. Which of the statements did you find most meaningful or eye opening? Why?
6. Which of the statements, if any, hurt? Why?
7. What does your position in the room say about societal messages about your worth and the worth of people with similar privilege levels?
8. How has privilege affected you, your family and your community, in terms of opportunity and access?
9. How are social class and privilege tied to prejudice?