

Playing with Status

 participants

 30 min



Purpose

Build awareness for how different actions can raise and lower status.

Muscles

 Navigating power

1. **Choose a picture.**
2. **Share any details that jump out at you**, especially those related to the group and its dynamic. No details are too mundane.
3. Discuss **who has status** in the photo, and **why**.
4. You are going to do a role play. Each person should **choose a character in the photo**. Keep in mind: This is meant to be a playful exercise, but it can be intense. If you need to call timeout or take a break, dos.
5. Take turns trying to **raise your own status**. Do this for as long as it feels right and interesting, at least for a few minutes.
6. Now take turns trying to **lower your own status**. Do this for as long as it feels right and interesting, at least for a few minutes.
7. Finally, take turns trying to **raise each other's status**. Do this for as long as it feels right and interesting, at least for a few minutes.
8. **Debrief**. What did you notice? How did it feel? How might what you learned apply to your work?

Keith Johnstone, a pioneer in improv theater, wrote extensively about “status games.” He claimed that everything we do is a status game, whether or not we are conscious of it.

All of our actions either raise or lower our own status in comparison to others, the impact of which depends on the context. For example, in one context, lowering one’s own status might feel disempowering to one self. In a different context, one might lower one’s own status in order to make another person feel included.

The purpose of this exercise is to build greater awareness of how are actions raise or lower status and of what the consequences of those actions might be.

Acknowledgement

I first learned of Keith Johnstone and his status exercises from Kate Wing.