

The Diversity Shuffle (Power Shuffle)

Diversity in the population allows communities to grow and to learn from one another's differences. However, these differences are often used to fragment communities rather than to encourage mutual understanding. One of the ways in which societies have segregated different categories of people has been along lines of power. Individuals who are perceived by the majority population to be "different" often have less power than the majority population. These may be differences in gender, racial or ethnic heritage, sexual orientation, religion, age, physical ability, and many other categories. The power takes the form of access to resources, work, housing, education, physical security, protection by law, and representation in government. Some groups are given more power than others by society, but they are permitted to have this power at the expense of other groups, whose access to resources is correspondingly diminished or denied.

The following exercise helps to encourage discussion about differences and similarities within our communities. This can then be used as a springboard for a dialogue about power differences in our communities and how they can be addressed.

The Diversity Shuffle (a.k.a., Power Shuffle) should be performed in a room which is large enough to comfortably hold the expected number of participants. Prior to the exercise, all furniture, etc., should be moved aside to allow space for people to walk from one side of the room to the other. Everyone stands and gathers at one end of the room. The facilitator stands to the front and side of the group. S/he says the following:

"In this exercise, we will be dealing with some sensitive issues. Before we begin, we ask that everyone agree to the following guidelines:

- Honor confidentiality. Anything shared in this room stays within this group. You may discuss this experience with others at a later time, but you must omit any identifying characteristic when discussing other participants.
- Unconditionally respect yourself and others.
- Speak for yourself only.
- Actively listen: consider other people's words as gifts.
- No put-downs or hostile analysis. Avoid interpreting other people's experience.
- Give caring feedback.
- This exercise will include a dialogue, not a debate. There are no losers or winners in these exercises.
- Agree to disagree.
- Everyone has the right to pass.
- It is okay to express your emotions.
- No "rescuing."
- Take responsibility for you own learning - ask for what you need.

"Are these guidelines acceptable to everyone?"

Source:

Social Justice Advocacy of GLBT Students: Empowering Students Through Campus Initiatives – NACADA Conference – October 2011

Remember that you can participate as much or as little as you feel comfortable with. However, we do encourage you to take some risks with this exercise, because that is the best way for all of us to learn and grow.

I will be giving you a series of instructions during the first portion of this exercise. Please follow the instructions in complete silence, paying attention to who is with you and who is separated from you, noting the feelings that come up while performing this exercise.

You do not have to identify yourself as a member of a group that is called out if you do not wish to, but you should notice any feeling that come up about not identifying yourself. If you are not sure about which group you belong to, decide for yourself where it makes sense for you to go."

For each of the categories below, say the following: "Please step to the other side of the room if you are... [the category]. [Pause.] Notice who's standing with you. Notice who's not. [Pause.] Notice how you feel. [Pause.] Come back together again."

1. You are a woman.
2. You are Asian, East Asian, South Asian/Indian, or Pacific Islander.
3. You are Latino/a, Chicano/a, or mestizo/a.
4. You are of Arabian descent.
5. You are Native American or at least one of your parents is full-blooded Native American.
6. You are African-American or black, or of African descent.
7. You are of multi-heritage, and at least one of your parents or grandparents is a person of color.
8. You are of Jewish heritage.
9. You are 45 or over.
10. You under 21. [or pick another appropriate age for the group.]
11. You were raised poor.
12. You were raised by a single parent or currently are a single parent.
13. One of your parents, or the people who raised you, were or are working-class and did manual labor, skilled or unskilled work, or pink-collar clerical or service work to make a living.
14. You were raised in an isolated or farming community.
15. Neither of your parents, or the people who raised you, attended college (or received a college degree).
16. You were raised Catholic.
17. You have a visible or hidden physical disability or impairment.
18. You have ever been seriously or continually sick.
19. You are an immigrant to this country.
20. Your native language is other than English.
21. You come from a family where alcohol or drugs were or are a problem.
22. You were raised in or are now part of a religious community other than Christian.
23. You are lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender. [Always decide whether it is safe enough to call out this category and don't be overcautious; if no one walks across; you can point out the lack of safety in the group later.]

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24. Someone in your family, or a close friend, is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
25. You are a non-management worker and/or do not supervise anyone on your job.
26. You are now or ever have been unemployed, not by choice.
27. You are a veteran.
28. You or a member of your family has ever been labeled mentally ill or crazy.
29. You or a member of your family have ever been incarcerated or been in the juvenile justice system.
30. You were ever publicly labeled fat, whether or not you ever felt fat.

Other categories may be added as appropriate, and some of these can be deleted depending upon the composition of the group, the issues to be covered, and the amount of time available.

The participants are instructed to walk to the center of the room and, for a few moments, mingle silently, making eye contact and acknowledging each other as people present together in this group. Then...

- If the group is very large (and if you have enough facilitators available), have them split into smaller groups (preferably 12 people or fewer) for discussion. Each small group should have a facilitator. The facilitator should use the discussion questions listed below. Then bring the entire group back together for final discussion and processing. Ask for people to share some of the major issues brought up in small group. If you plan to do multiple groups like this, prepare yourself in advance so that this part runs smoothly; otherwise, you will break up the flow of the exercise (for example, you can assign people to groups as they enter the room at the beginning of the exercise).
- Alternatively, you can ask participants to pair up to discuss the feelings they had during this exercise. After about 5-10 minutes, bring the entire group together for discussion and processing. Use the discussion questions listed below.

As facilitators, it is important to note that, even if no one crosses the line for a particular category, it does not mean that no one in the group actually falls into that category. Do not make statements such as, "since we have no one in this group with any disabilities or impairments..." or "why do you think we have no gay people in this group," etc.

Questions for Discussion Following the Shuffle:

1. How did it feel to be in the group which had to walk across?
2. How did it feel to be in the main group and watch others cross?
3. Did you walk a little or a lot? How do you feel about that?
4. What surprised you during this exercise?
5. What is the significance of what you experienced during this exercise... for your school or community?
6. How would you feel if your doctor belonged to one of the groups mentioned in this exercise (not your own)?
7. How does this activity build community and individual courage?

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8. If you were refraining from crossing the line at first but later started to cross, why was that? (for example, increased confidence, trust, rapport with the group)

General Prejudice and Cultural Awareness Questions:

1. What cultural/racial group(s) do you belong to?
2. When you meet people for the first time, what cultural or racial group do they usually think you belong to?
3. What do you enjoy or appreciate most and least about your group?
4. What incorrect assumptions or stereotypes do people make about your group?
5. How might these assumptions or stereotypes impact you?
6. What makes you feel more comfortable with some groups and less with others? Why?
7. What issues do you have with the members of certain groups that you would be willing to discuss, but don't for fear of being misunderstood or for some other reason?
8. What experiences have you had communicating with individuals from different groups? What important issues did you learn?
9. What do you think you need to be able to communicate with people from different groups?
10. If you've become aware of a prejudice you have, what are some ways you have tried to deal with it?
11. When you hear prejudiced comments or jokes, what are some things you might do or say to interrupt this behavior? Share any successful experiences you have had in stopping this behavior.

*Adapted by the American Medical Student Association
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Based upon "It's About Power" by Allan Creighton & Paul Kivel,
and "Power Shuffle" by Harrison Simms.*