



Social Justice: When Diversity Isn't Enough

Time Frame: Minimum of 45 minutes

Supplies Needed: A rigged deck of cards

Room Set Up: I prefer a large circle or an arc.

Facilitator Notes: *To rig a deck of cards, what I did was first get a box of “retired decks” from a local casino. Then I took each deck and spread it out on a table. I did this 52 times putting the same cards in the same piles. You will end up with 52 decks of cards that are made up of all the same card. Take a marker or pen and draw on the sides of the full deck so there are markings on the edges. I find that this activity is completely dependent on the conversation participants are willing to have. I say this as a warning: this activity flops, and flops hard, if participants just don't care or don't want to talk. This is no reflection on your facilitation skills. At least that is what makes me keep doing it. Throughout the script are [facilitator notes in brackets like this.]*

The Script: Hello! My name is [insert name] and today we are talking. I say that because the success of this program is very much about your participation.

Raise your hand if you have ever been to diversity trainings. Most folks have been to something. I don't believe in diversity trainings. What I mean by that is that the diversity trainings I have been to tell me not to ever make assumptions or judgments and to just be a better person. The most advanced diversity trainings maybe have me gang up on white straight men for all their privilege. Some the guys in the room may know what I am talking about. I don't do that. I promise there isn't a white guy in the world that is more of an asshole than me, except maybe George Bush, but that is another workshop.

Diversity just isn't enough for me. It is from a place of Social Justice that enough self reflection comes into play where real lived experiences can be different and I can figure out how to really live my life, most of the time.

I made this activity up to start conversations. So, what I am going to do is give you a chance to pick a card. Please don't show your card to anyone. Don't look at anyone's card. Don't drop your card. What I want you to do is select one card and really look at it. Get to know everything about your card. Then I will pick it back up. Sound Good?

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[Walk around the room allowing each person to select one card. Remind them to “become one with your card” and “don’t show or look at another’s card.” When everyone has a card, go back around and have participants put their cards back in the stack.]

Now that you have “become one with your card” what I want you to do is turn to a partner. Now your card isn’t a secret. You can use any colors, numbers, letters, words, etc., and I want you to describe your card to your partner. Then your partner gets a chance to do the same. It is important to use inside voices, just talk with your partner and try not to be overheard by others in the room. *[Give about 3 minutes or so for both people to talk to each other.]*

[There is a tricky thing that happens here is one of three reactions. Try to quiet folks that make louder comments. If they figure out the deck of cards, just ask them to play along.]

Has everyone had a chance to share? Ok, so now what I want you to do is find your partner’s card. *[Spread out the deck of cards in the middle of the room and really listen to what folks say when they see that they are all the “same” card.]*

Some of you may be just grabbing a card; others of you may have really wanted to look at every card. If you haven’t already, check with your partner and see if you got the right card.

OK, so first, I want to talk about what happens when you talk with your partner. I find that one of three reactions tend to happen. *[Allow for comments and questions throughout the conversation. It really is up to their participation for it to go well.]*

- 1) You begin to question your partner. They must be lying – they couldn’t have had the same card.
- 2) You begin to question yourself. Maybe you didn’t see the card right. You couldn’t have the same card as your partner.
- 3) Some of you began to question me and my deck of cards as if you had noticed something broken and needed to fix it.

Because we have a structure in our heads of what a deck of cards is, even if we aren’t big card players, we know four suits, two colors, and Ace, King, Queen, Jack, 10-2 are the only options. Even though it is logically possible that I have rigged the deck very few people assume this.

Of the three reactions to the cards, I find a lot of comparisons to how we interact with “diversity issues.” We tend to disbelieve someone’s claim that goes against what we know to be true. We may turn against ourselves and doubt ourselves; I call this “self hate.” Or, and I know I tend to follow this one the most, we use our experience and privilege to fix someone else’s problem.

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Then, what was your reaction, when I showed all the cards? Some of you were like, see I was right! Others said something about the cards being all the same. Now, clearly the cards have a lot in common, but they aren't the same – there are 52 of them right? *[Gather cards back up.]*

Some of you may have noticed that there is a corner cut off. This is how the casino that gave me the cards “retires” decks. Some of the decks accidentally get more than one corner cut off, but most only have one missing corner. *[Take one card and show the corner.]* It is also interesting to see how few people notice there are marks on the edges of the cards. If you look at the deck as a full deck it is really easy to see them. Sometimes, difference only shows up in groups. It is hard to see only one card at a time.

Noticing these differences may have been important for you to find your partner's card. But some of the things you noticed, maybe you didn't tell your partner, maybe they didn't hear the information, or maybe it wasn't helpful. For example, if I say one of the top corners is missing, that isn't helpful because the card is the same if flipped top to bottom. If I said the left corner is missing that eliminates maybe half of the deck. If I said the top left, then even more get eliminated. What would happen if I said the face value of the card? Your partner or even you may think that is the only relevant information, but in this case it doesn't even matter.

Can you make connections from this metaphor and how our world works?

They are all the same – stereotyping group membership generalizations
Didn't even notice a missing corner – privilege makes us oblivious to what we don't see
Frustrated when looking for the card or when talking to partner – didn't fit your comfort system

The difference between social justice and diversity is simple. The difference is you. I don't think trying to be a better person is realistic and saying you won't ever make an assumption again isn't practical. So, what are you to do?

If we can pay attention to our own actions, behaviors, and the assumptions and judgments that inform how we navigate our world, then we can begin to see what we don't see. Once we begin to see these things, then we can adjust our actions and beliefs to a truer sense of reality. We have to know that we are all part of a larger system of institutionalized oppression. It isn't until we get uncomfortable and start paying attention to things that have been there all along that we can actually begin to make change.

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