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REQUEST INFO

# Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power and Privilege

October 16, 2016 by Jeremy Goldbach



## Contents

## Introduction

This toolkit is meant for anyone who feels there is a lack of productive discourse around issues of diversity and the role of identity in social relationships, both on a micro (individual) and macro (communal) level. Perhaps you are a teacher, youth group facilitator, student affairs personnel or manage a team that works with an underserved population. Training of this kind can serve as the first of several workshops to provide historical context around the politics of identity and the dynamics of power and privilege, or to help build greater self-awareness.

The following activities are intended for groups as small as 10 to groups as big as 60. For groups any larger than 60, it is recommended to break out into multiple sessions with additional facilitators to ensure the conversations and activities remain focused. The Diversity Toolkit outlined here may be used as a guideline and can be modified to better fit your group's unique needs.

A note on facilitators: Facilitators should be well versed in the topics and themes we will be discussing, but they do not need to be experts. This workshop is organized as a popular education activity where the majority of the outcomes are learned from the experiences and knowledge of the individuals participating rather than a teacher/student relationship.

## Facilitator Sensitivity

Facilitators will be experiencing and addressing the feelings that come with confronting participants' notions of identity, privilege, race and sexuality. Some participants may be required to attend this workshop (through work or school, etc.), so facilitators should be clear that participants are there because these are issues that affect everyone and that there will not be personal judgment of anyone's feelings about a particular issue. Facilitators should remind participants that:

- They will not be lectured or told what to believe.
- This is not an indoctrination.
- This is a participatory workshop that is intended to help guide all participants to better understanding and to address difficult issues.

## Privacy

Facilitators should emphasize that what is shared during the workshop is private and confidential. Participants can talk about how the workshop affected them personally and what they learned generally, but they should respect the privacy of the personal information of the other participants.

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# What is Social Justice? Setting a Stage for Discussion

Before beginning, it's important that everyone have a basic understanding of two core concepts related to privilege and identity. This will allow everyone to start the conversations on the same page and ensure that the participants have a foundation upon which to build future knowledge.

The first core concept is culture, which is:

- The integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations.
- A set of shared attitudes, values, goals and practices that characterizes a group of individuals or an institution or organization.

The second core concept is identity, which is:

- Distinguishing characteristics.
- The condition of being the same with something described or asserted.

## Everyone Has Many Identities
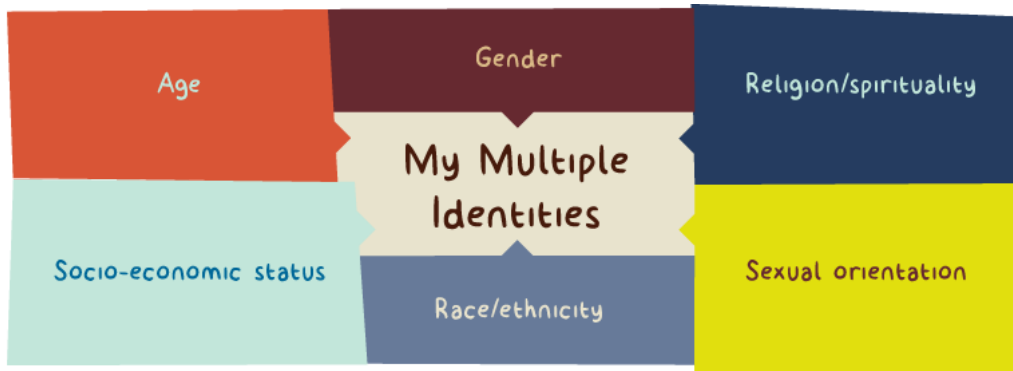
Age, gender, religious or spiritual affiliation, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity and socio-economic status are all identities. Some identities are things people can see easily (things like race or assumed gender), while other identities are internalized and are not always easy to see (things like a disability, socioeconomic status or education level). There are two types of identities that need to be defined in order to spark a discussion on social justice. The first type deals with identities that are part of a majority status — or "agent" — while the second includes identities that are part of the minority status — or "target."



**Agent:** Members of dominant social groups privileged by birth or acquisition who knowingly or unknowingly exploit and reap unfair advantage over members of the target groups.

**Target:** Members of social identity groups who are discriminated against, marginalized, disenfranchised, oppressed, exploited by an oppressor and oppressor's system of institutions without identity apart from the target group, and compartmentalized in defined roles.

After participants understand the difference between agent and target groups, the facilitator can begin a discussion on oppression. The key features of oppression are:

- An agent group has the power to define and name reality, and determine what is normal, real and correct.
- Differential and unequal treatment is institutionalized and systematic.
- Psychological colonization of the target group occurs through socializing the oppressed to internalize their oppressed condition.
- The target group's culture, language and history is misrepresented, discounted or eradicated, and the dominant group culture is imposed.
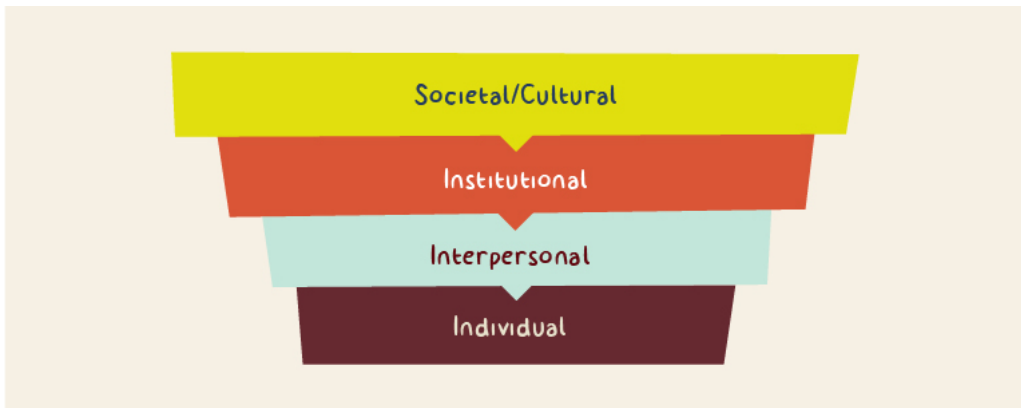
- **Oppression (the "ism's") happens at all levels, reinforced by societal norms, institutional biases, interpersonal interactions, and individual beliefs.**
    - Individual — feelings, beliefs, values.
    - Interpersonal — actions, behaviors and language.
    - Institutional — legal system, education system, public policy, hiring practices, media images.
    - Societal/Cultural — collective ideas about what is "right."



But remember:

- Most individuals are both a target and an agent of oppression, due to:
    - Internalized subordination.
    - Internalized domination.
- Because of these internalized factors, individuals have "unearned privilege."

| Type of Oppression | Target Group | Non-Target Group |
|---|---|---|
| Racial | People of color | White people |
| Class | Poor; working class | Middle, owning class |
| Gender | Women | Men |
| Sexual orientation | Lesbian, gay, transgender, bisexual | Heterosexual people |
| Ability | People with disabilities | People without disabilites |
| Religion | Non-Christian | Christian |
| Age | People over 40 | Young people |
| Youth | Children and young adults | Older adults |
| Rank/status | People without college degree | People with college degree |
| Military service | Vietnam veterans | Veterans of other wars |
| Immigrant status | Immigrant | U.S.-born |
| Language | Non-English | English |

View text-only version of Actors in Oppression chart

When the facilitator talks about these concepts with the group, it is helpful to start with an understanding that everyone experienced being target or agent at some point in their lives. This helps create a dialogue of understanding. This is not to say that some target statuses are more salient (for example, people can see I am a woman, or a black woman, before they even speak with me) and others may be easier to conceal (for example, if I am lesbian). But each creates burden on the individual, and each has its own set of challenges to overcome.

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## Communal Agreements

Before initiating any activity, it is of critical importance that the group builds communal agreements. Rather than naming these "rules" that are then placed upon the group, we will call these "agreements" because these are the guidelines built by the group that all members agree to follow during the course of the workshop. Once an agreement has been put forward, the facilitator should then ask for a definition of what that agreement means to ensure that there is a communal language. Below are several suggested agreements.
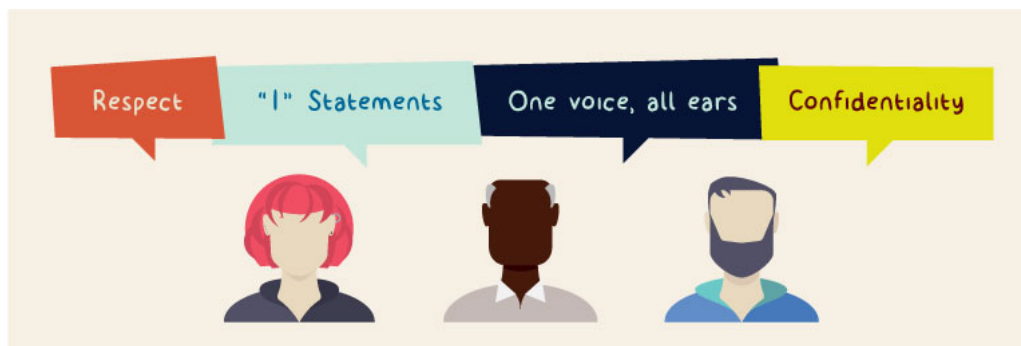


- **Respect.** Though this term is used widely, "respect" means different things to different people. Facilitators should ask their team what respect means to them.

- **"I" Statements.** ⧉  It is critical to draw a line between individual experience and communal experience to prevent alienating someone whose experience may be different. When a member of the community speaks of personal experience or feelings, it is of utmost importance that he/she uses the "I" statement. Facilitators should encourage the participant to take responsibility for his/her own experience rather than projecting it onto fellow participants.
- **One voice, all ears.** When one person speaks, everyone else listens.
- **Confidentiality.** Each participant within the community needs to feel that he/she can trust that what is shared with peers will not be shared outside of the group. Though participants are encouraged to discuss what they have learned and share reflections on conversations, it is important to keep names and individual experiences private.

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## Icebreaker



## Respect Activity

Source: Critical Multicultural Pavilion ⧉

Ask participants to find someone in the room they don't know and make an introduction. Talk for five to 10 minutes about respect. What does it mean to you to "show respect?" How do you show respect to others? After the allotted time, ask all participants to sit and open the discussion. How did people define respect? What were some of the core concepts discussed?

Common responses will likely include:

- The "Golden Rule"
- Looking people in the eyes
- Honesty
- Accepting/appreciating someone's ideas, even when you don't agree with them.

All responses are worthy of reflection in terms of their cultural and hegemonic influences. Ask participants where their ideas of respect come from and whom they are meant to protect. If the group raises any of the common responses above, challenge them to answer the following questions:

- Does everyone really wanted to be treated the same way you want to be treated?
- Is eye contact during conversation respectful in every culture?
- If someone's ideas are oppressive, should we still respect them?

The point of the discussion is to reflect critically on assumptions and socializations regarding respect. The point is to not agree and to learn from each other's differences.

This activity helps to establish a basis of respect within the group, helping the participants take the first steps toward creating and maintaining a constructive discussion of social justice and equity. At the very least, participants meet someone new and exchange ideas with that person. The group also gets its first look at the similarities and differences between participants, potentially in ways that reflect privilege and power.

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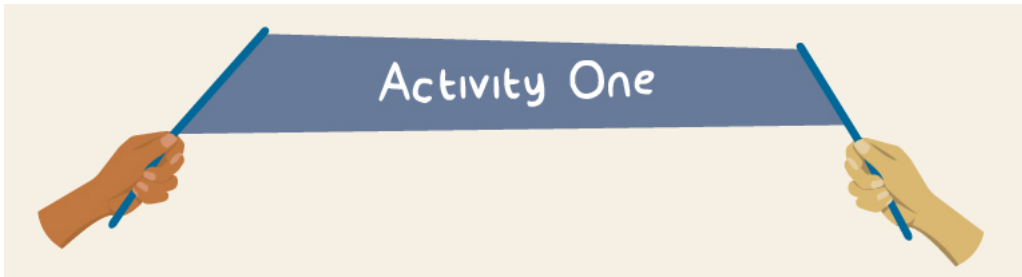
# Activity One: Introduction Identity

## Definition

Everyone has a personal and social identity. Personal identities include an individual's name, unique characteristics, history, personality and other traits that make one different from others. Social identity includes affinities one has with other people, values and norms that one accepts, and the ways one has learned to behave in social settings.

## Activity

"My Fullest Name" Source: Critical Multicultural Pavilion ⧉

## Objective

The following activity is particularly useful when working with participants who don't know one another very well. The goal of this activity is to warm up participants to sharing about themselves and start revealing a bit about each participant's background.

## Materials

Markers and 8-by-10-inch sheets of paper folded horizontally.

## Instructions

Write out your fullest name and tell your story. On the back of the piece of paper write the top three identities you feel closest to. The facilitator encourages participants to go around the circle to share any meanings, significance, culture, significant ancestors and the top three identities they hold dearest. Everyone will have a chance to share and be heard by the group

Suggested questions if participants need help getting started:

- Who gave you your name? Why that name?
- Do you know the ethnic origin of your name?
- Do you have any nicknames? If so, how did you get them?
- What is your preferred name?

Facilitators should encourage students to be creative. Make it clear that it is acceptable to write poetry, list adjectives that describe them, include humor, etc.

If your group is large, break into diverse small groups of five or six to make sure everyone has an opportunity to share her or his story. Ask for volunteers to get the group started and tell participants they can share their stories from memory, or read them.

## Facilitator **Notes**

- Some individuals will include personal information in their stories and may be reticent to read them. Sometimes it is most effective for facilitators to share their stories first — making yourself vulnerable will make others more comfortable doing the same.
- Allow time for every participant to share (whether it be with the whole group or with their small group).

## Discussion

When everyone has shared, ask participants how it felt to share their stories. Why is this activity important? What did you learn?

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# Activity Two: Systems of Power and Privilege

## Definition

[Privilege](#) ⧉ is a right or exemption from liability or duty granted as a special benefit or advantage. Oppression is the result of the use of institutional privilege and power, wherein one person or group benefits at the expense of another.

## Activity

"Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack"

## Objective

The objective of this activity is to confront entrenched systems of power and privilege, and identify common situations when privilege is not acknowledged, to the detriment of the disadvantaged and oppressed.

## Read

[Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack](#) ⧉ by Peggy McIntosh

Check off all of the statements that apply to you. Consider whether or not this would apply should your race be different.
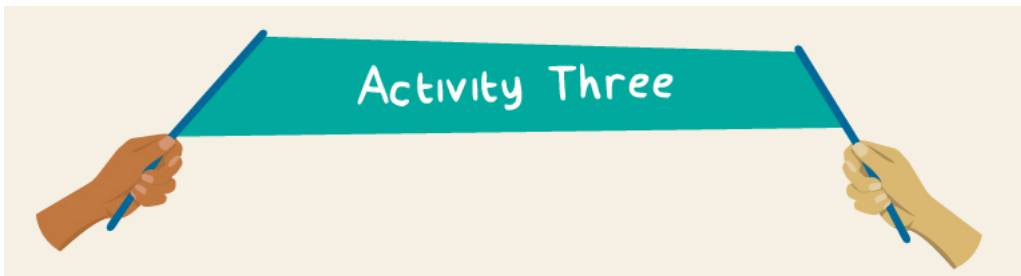
## Watch and Listen

YouTube clip: [Tim Wise: On White Privilege](#) ⧉

## Discussion

What is privilege? We all have privileges. What are yours? Were you surprised by any of the privileges you found in your invisible knapsack?

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# Activity Three: Gender and Sexuality

## Definition

Gender ⧉ is a socially constructed concept of "appropriate" qualities and expectations surrounding masculinity and femininity. This should not be confused with the biological male and female sexes.

## Group Definition

Have the group describe what they believe to be the definition of the terms "gender" and "sexuality."

## Activity

"Creating Gender-Free Nouns" Source: Teaching Tolerance ⧉

## Objective

The objective of this activity is to reconsider male-gendered nouns that we consider "generic." Generating gender-free nouns and pronouns will help participants incorporate more inclusive language in their daily speech and writing.

## Instructions

Break participants into small groups and give them a printout of the chart below. Instruct participants to convert the suffixes of the nouns into gender-free, inclusive terms by changing the noun root word or substituting a non-gender-specific root word from another language. Tell participants that since male endings are so pervasive, it is OK to invent new words by replacing the endings of existing words with something non-gendered.

| NOUN + MALE SUFFIX | VERB + "-ER" SUFFIX | NOUN + MALE SUFFIX | VERB + "-ER" SUFFIX |
|---|---|---|---|
| Ex: Airmen | Fliers, pilots | Ex: Statesman | Orator, speaker |
| Sportsman | | Craftsman | |
| Stableboy | | Mailman | |
| Policemen | | Layman | |

| Lineman | | Foreman | |
| Workmen | | Salesman | |
| Repairman | | Crewmen | |
| Lumbermen | | Chairman | |
| Spokesman | | Busboy | |



## Discussion Questions

- How do the changes in the words' structures change the connotation?
- How does familiarity affect our perception of a word's correctness? For example, do we think the words "teachman" or "runman" are more correct than "teacher" or "runner"?

The facilitator should ask the following questions of the group while also encouraging them to share personal experiences that speak to their point. What are characteristics of what society believes a [woman/man/girl/boy] should be? What are the norms for appearance/behavior? What happens when someone falls outside of this norm? How do the words we use influence the way we think about certain professions?

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# Activity Four: Race and Ethnicity

## Definition

Race is a social construction that has real consequences and effects. Race is colloquially used to refer to a person's skin color, religion or area of origin (e.g., black, Jewish or African). Technically, however, race is based on national origin, socio-cultural groups and self-identification. The U.S. government, including the Census Bureau and Centers for Disease Control, does not attempt to identify race according to biology, anthropology or genetics. Religious belief is not considered a race, but can be a factor in identifying one's socio-cultural group. (For a full explanation of how each racial category is defined, refer to the U.S. Census About Race page ☒ ). In a historical context, race has played a large part in how our society has evolved, and it shapes the way we see others and how we experience our lives. (For more on race from a historical perspective, read "A Different Mirror: A History of Multicultural America," by Ronald Takaki.) ☒

## Activity

"Diversity Profile" Source: College Committee for Diversity, Equity and Affirmative Action ☒

## Objective

The objective of this activity is to help participants take stock of the multicultural diversity in their lives. It should help participants get a clear image of how diverse or homogenous their surroundings are and identify ways to improve their exposure to multiculturalism on a daily basis.

## Instructions

Fill in the appropriate boxes:

| IN MY ENVIRONMENT | GENDER | RACE | ETHNICITY | SEXUALITY | ABILITY | RELIGION | VETERAN STATUS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| I am | | | | | | | |
| My Co-workers are | | | | | | | |
| My supervisor is | | | | | | | |
| My elementary school was predominantly | | | | | | | |
| My teachers were mostly | | | | | | | |
| Most of my close friends are | | | | | | | |
| My dentist is | | | | | | | |
| My doctor is | | | | | | | |
| Other people who live in my home are | | | | | | | |
| People who regularly visit my home are | | | | | | | |
| My neighbors are | | | | | | | |

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# Activity Five: Class and Historical Disadvantage

## Activity

Crossing The Line

## Objective

The purpose of this activity is to explore the diversity among the members of our community. How a person identifies can affect many facets of his or her life. We will use this activity to get to know one another on a deeper level. What are our values, backgrounds, and visible and invisible labels? This activity requires everyone to step outside of his or her comfort zone. Participants being vulnerable can help the group learn more about the identities they do not share.

## Instructions

Have all participants line up in a straight line facing the facilitator. If the room is too small to have each participant standing shoulder to shoulder, an alternative is to have the group stand in a circle and step into the circle. The facilitator should explain that he or she will read a statement. If the statement describes you, then silently step across the line. Everyone should quietly notice who stepped across the line and who did not. After a moment, the facilitator will thank those who stepped forward and will then have everyone step back in line.

1. I am a woman.
2. I am a man.
3. I identity as transsexual or transgender.

4. I am close with most of my family.
5. I identify myself as Jewish.
6. I identify myself as Buddhist.
7. I identify myself as Christian.
8. I identify myself as Muslim.
9. I identify myself as Hindu, Sikh.
10. I identify myself as Mormon.
11. I identify myself as Baha'i'.
12. I identify myself as agnostic or atheist.
13. I identify myself as spiritual, but not religious.
14. I have attended a religious or spiritual service that is not of my own religious and spiritual identity.
15. I identify as a citizen.
16. I identify as an immigrant.
17. I identify as undocumented or have a close family member who is.
18. I had "enough" growing up as a child (however you define "enough").
19. I had "more than enough" growing up as a child (however you define "enough").
20. I had "less than enough" growing up as a child (however you define "enough").
21. I have felt guilty by the amount of money my family has or by the size of my house or by what resources or belongings my family has (either too much or too little).
22. I have experienced the death of a close family member or close friend.
23. I have or someone in my family has a physical disability.
24. I have a hidden disability (physical or learning).
25. I am comfortable with my body.
26. I have felt ashamed of myself because of my body, my intellect or education, or my family.
27. I identify myself as black or African American.
28. I identify myself as Asian or Asian American.
29. I identify myself as white or European.
30. I identify myself as Pacific Islander.
31. I identify myself as biracial, triracial, mixed-race or of combined heritage.
32. I have had to check "other" on forms that ask my race or ethnicity.
33. I have a close friend who is a person of color.
34. I feel comfortable talking about race and ethnicity with people who are not of my race.
35. Someone in my extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles, cousins) lives in my house with my family.
36. I or someone in my family is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
37. I know someone who is lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender.
38. I am an ally to lesbian, gay, bisexual or transgender people.
39. I or someone in my family has had a problem with alcoholism or drug abuse.
40. I have felt discriminated against on the basis of my gender; race or ethnicity; religion; ability or disability; sexual orientation; or socio-economic status.
41. I have felt guilt because of my gender; race or ethnicity; religion; ability or disability; sexual orientation; or socio-economic status.



## Discussion

- What was your reaction to this exercise? How did you feel afterwards?
- What did it feel like to step into the circle? What was it like not to be in the circle?
- What did you discover about those around you?
- Were you surprised about anything? Did anyone break a stereotype for you?
- Were there questions you were hoping would not be asked? Any you wish had been asked?
- How might such issues/factors affect your relationships?

- What did you learn about yourself or what did you think about that you've never thought about before?
- What role does privilege play in this? What role do pride and shame play?

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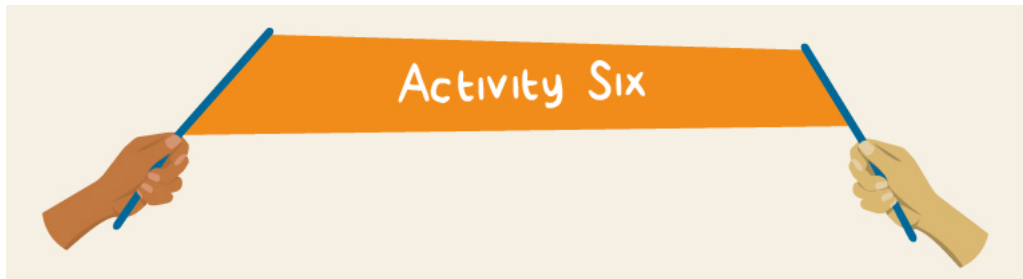


## Activity Six: Recap and Closing Activity

This toolkit was designed to address human issues that everyone faces and help participants recognize how they can better understand and work toward solving, or at least improving, these issues. Participants were often forced to confront socialized and entrenched notions of privilege, identity and social justice. Anything that was difficult to confront during the training will be even more difficult to confront in practice, but if these were easily solvable issues, they wouldn't be issues for long. Participants should feel better equipped with newfound knowledge and empathy, and prepared to apply the lessons they learned in their own lives and communities.

### Activity

Affirmation Mingle Source: 350.org ↗

### Objective

To practice giving positive feedback and to have participants leave the workshop feeling energized.

### Instructions

Have participants mingle randomly in a large group and then instruct them to stop and share with the person in front of them one way in which that person "shined" during the workshop. Repeat several times so that each person gets feedback and support from different people in the group. If there are an odd number of participants, the facilitator should address the odd person out each time.

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### Closing

Completing this training is not the end, but merely the beginning. Hopefully, this toolkit has helped to create new understanding among your participants. Individuals should have learned about their own identity and of those around them, as well as the implications of socially constructed labels and stereotypes of an individual's experience. Those interested in this type of work may be interested in a career in social work, facilitation, advocacy or sociology. At the end of the training, facilitators should be prepared to provide additional resources for participants who want to learn more about issues of identity, power and privilege. Below we cite several resources to help you get started.

## Interested in enacting change in your community as a social worker? USC now allows you to earn a top ranked MSW without relocating.

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## Recommended Resources

- WorldTrust Workshop Formats
- "When the Rules are Fair, but the Game Isn't," ↗ by Muktha Jost, Edward L. Whitfield and Mark Jost
- "Black Males and Racism: Improving the Schooling and Life Chances of African Americans," ↗ by University of Southern California School of Social Work Professor Terence Fitzgerald
- "Uncommon Common Ground: Race and America's Future," ↗ by USC Professor Manuel Pastor

- "Diversity and Social Justice: A Glossary of Working Definitions" ⬈
- Grand Challenge: Achieve Equal Opportunities and Justice ⬈
- Peculiar Benefits ⬈

# Resources for Additional Activities

- A Booklet of Interactive Exercises to Explore Our Differences ⬈
- Training for Change ⬈
- Valuing Ethnic Diversity ⬈
- Potential activities for topics around difference, power and discrimination ⬈

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