

vineyardjustice

Circle of Privilege

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Objectives

- To gather people in a participatory learning activity who are interested in exploring experiences of privilege and under-privilege in both their lives and the lives of others
- To facilitate listening and depth in awareness regarding experiences of privilege and under-privilege
- To enhance compassion, solidarity, kindness, and justice

Definitions

- Privilege
 - A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available to a particular person or group of people that benefits the person or group of people
 - It is *unearned*
 - Often unacknowledged or “invisible”
 - “An invisible package of unearned assets” - Peggy McIntosh
 - It is not your fault if you have a certain privilege
 - Related to *identity* (being) – who you are
- Examples
 - Religious privilege: in the U.S.A, Canada, and most Western European countries, Christian holidays (Christmas, Easter etc.) are usually *public* holidays as well
 - White privilege: most band-aids are “nude” in color, which matches the color of white people’s skin

Steps

- Preparation
 - Identify a relevant topic/issue you would like to explore in which some people experience privilege and some people experience under-privilege (e.g. race, gender, socio-economic status, education, etc.).

- Invite people to participate, taking time to envision the circle of privilege by clearly communicating the objectives and definitions above.
- You'll need at least ten people, with at least four people who will participate as those who are under-privileged.
- Choose a facilitator. This person needs to:
 - Have some knowledge of privilege at work in their own lives;
 - Clearly understand and communicate the purpose and method of the circle of privilege
 - Have a non-anxious presence
 - Be able to facilitate an unhurried group environment marked by good listening
 - Be able to facilitate a debrief of the activity afterwards with an invitational posture that gently draws participants' experiences out
 - Be able to intervene if participants step outside the bounds of the activity and its intentions
- Find a space that's quiet and big enough for your participants to form two con-centric circles of people - an "inside" circle and an "outside" circle.
- The Circle
 - Gathering
 - Once everyone gathers, the facilitator can thank everyone for coming and review the objectives and definitions above with a view to contextualizing and envisioning the circle of privilege.
 - Leave some time for questions and clarification, though remember that experiencing the circle of privilege will define privilege better than simply telling people what privilege is.
 - In other words, it's okay if people aren't totally clear about what privilege is etc. before the activity - just make sure they understand enough in order to participate.
 - It's often helpful to stress that as we explore privilege, we aren't pointing fingers or suggesting culpability (e.g. white people are bad). Privilege is "unearned" and often acknowledge and invisible - the

purpose of the activity is to enhance awareness, not to suggest that some people are in the wrong and that others aren't.

- Forming
 - The facilitator then asks those who experience privilege relative to the topic/issue chosen to form a circle in the centre of the space. These folks represent the “inner circle.”
 - For example, “Would those who are white/men/college-graduated/etc. please form a circle.”
 - After this, the facilitator asks those remaining, who don't experience privilege relative to the topic/issue chosen, to form a circle around the “inner circle.” These folks represent the “outer circle.”
- Sharing
 - The facilitator asks participants in the “inner circle” to identify and verbalize, one by one, the benefits/assets/privileges associated with being in the “inner circle.”
 - For example, “As a white person, when I go to the store to buy band-aids, I don't have to worry about finding a band-aid that will match the color of my skin.”
 - After everyone has shared, the facilitator can ask participants in the “inner circle” if there are any other benefits/assets/privileges that they can think of to share. Try to exhaust the benefits/assets/privileges if you can.
 - After this, the facilitator then asks participants in the “outer circle” to identify and verbalize, one by one, the benefits/assets/privileges they would have if they were in the “inner circle.” In other words, ask the “outer circle” to identify and verbalize the detriments, disadvantages, under-privileges associated with being in the “outer circle.”
 - For example, “As a person of color, when I go to the store and buy band-aids, there is never a band-aid that matches the color of my skin - it's obvious to everyone that I'm wearing a band-aid and that I got injured.”

- Note: people in both the “inner circle” and the “outer circle” and especially in the “outer circle” will experience a degree of vulnerability in sharing; this may manifest in tears, shaky voices, etc. depending on what is shared and the topic/issue in question. It honors vulnerability and communicates listening if the facilitator says a simple “Thank you” after each person shares.
 - There may be some people in the “inner circle” who may feel the temptation to comment on, interact with, or even negate what is shared by people in the “outer circle.” The facilitator should curtail this quickly and remind the “inner circle” to listen to the “outer circle.”
 - After everyone has shared, the facilitator can ask participants in the “outer circle” if there are any other benefits/assets/privileges that they can think of to share. Try to exhaust the benefits/assets/privileges if you can.
- Debriefing
 - Have everyone sit in a circle together.
 - Invite everyone - for a minute at least - to hold the experience that they’ve just had in silence and in prayer.
 - Invite people to, one by one, share. The purpose of the sharing is not to instruct or teach people but to give them a place to notice, name, understand, and perhaps even respond to what they experienced. Feel free to use the following questions:
 - What was that experience like for you?
 - How did you feel?
 - What thoughts/emotions/bodily responses did you notice as you shared and/or listened to others sharing?
 - What new realization or awareness came to you?
 - How did this effect or change you going forward personally (theologically, personally, relationally, politically etc.)?
 - What was your experience of God like during the circle of privilege as you shared and listened and even now as we debrief?
- Concluding

- Once the facilitator senses that the group has debriefed thoroughly and sufficiently enough, they can draw the circle of privilege to a close.
- Thank everyone for coming again.
- Pray - for example, that whatever God has done in people through the activity would bear fruit.
- Dismiss everyone. Some people may wish to remain in order to converse more etc.