

Title: Speak out

Time: 3 hours

Goal or purpose of the exercise:

- To motivate members of a dominant group to process information about injustice.
- To turn some power dynamics upside down so the dominant group can experience what it is like when others have an uninterrupted opportunity to dominate the “air time”.
- To build more solidarity among those who have less power so they can support each other better in an organization or a workshop.
- To create a norm that the dominant group can support each other to change rather than depend those who have less power to have to “teach them”.

How it's done/facilitator's notes:

Explain to the full group that not all gender differences are between women and men, but that there are also power dynamics based on sexual orientation and on how much a person fits the dominant cultural expectations of their gender. While this exercise will include separate discussions of men and women to air experiences and views, sharing of other gender dynamics will be welcomed.

Explain that the women are going to be asked to share from their life experience, in response to a set of questions. The men will have the job of listening as deeply as they can. The men will be asked to give full attention to what they hear, without asking questions.

Following this, gay men and any others who feel that their gender identification has led them to experience a lack of power in their society will also be asked to speak from their life experiences.

To work effectively, this process requires common ground rules.

- Confidentiality – Nobody should repeat outside the session what someone else has said.
- Participants will ask permission if they want to pursue a point made by a Speak Out participant with that person.

The women go to another room with the female facilitator and prepare to speak out. They will first work on their feelings about doing this, being reassured that not everyone needs to talk and that previous experiences with this exercise have ended up building unity. Then they will go over the following questions and telling each other personal stories about their experiences as women. The questions are:

- What are you pleased about or proud of, regarding your gender identity?
- What is difficult and painful about it?
- What do you want the others to know, so that they could work with you better and be more supportive?

The facilitator encourages them to be honest and, if emotions come up, to allow themselves to express them.

At this same time, the men stay in the room and work with the male facilitator. He begins first with their feelings. He asks them what they've found useful in their lives to enable themselves to listen well to something important that they might have difficulty hearing. He tries to get as many men as possible talking .

The facilitator listens for and encourages gay men and others to speak up who feel they have a minority status because of gender issues

When the women are ready, they return. They stand in front of the men, who are seated, and speak as individuals. They speak to each of the three questions, as the facilitator presents them.

Any men who also feel their gender identity has given them a minority status in their culture are invited to stand up and answer the same questions.

When the women are finished, they leave the room. The woman facilitator goes with them, encouraging them to debrief

The facilitator working with the men assists them in processing and digesting what they've heard and learning from it.

The facilitators stay in touch with each other and arrange a common time to bring the two groups together.

A good tool to use is a closing circle, in which everyone gets to share one insight – usually something they've learned about themselves – in a sentence or two. The facilitators might bridge the gap by socializing with participants from the other gender group. Then play – move into dancing or some physical activity in which everyone can participate and relax.

This has been adapted from exercise developed by Training for Change, notes by George Lakey, which can be found at (<http://trainingforchange.org/content/view/282/39/>)

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