

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 'air time'.
- To build more solidarity among those who have less power so they can better support each other in an organisation or a workshop.
- To create a norm that the dominant group members can use to support each other to change rather than depending on those who have less power 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 power dynamics are also based on sexual orientation and on how much a person fits the dominant cultural expectations of his or her gender. While this exercise will include separate discussions of men and women to air experiences and views, it welcomes sharing other gender dynamics. Explain that the women will share from their life experiences in response to a set of questions. The men will have the job of listening as deeply as they can, giving 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 of a person if they want to pursue a point made by that Speak Out participant.

Ask the women to go to another room with a 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 built unity. Go over the following questions and ask participants to tell personal stories about their experiences as women.

- 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?

Encourage honesty and expressing the emotions that come up.

At this same time, ask the the men to stay in the room and to work with a male facilitator who first asks about their feelings. Ask what they've found useful in their lives to enable themselves to listen well to something important they may have had difficulty hearing. Try to get as many men as possible talking. Listen for and encourage gay men and others to speak up who may 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 (not as a group). 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 female facilitator goes with them, encouraging them to debrief.

The male facilitator assists the men in processing and digesting what they've heard and what they learnt from it.

Staying in touch, the facilitators 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 socialising with participants from the other gender group. Then play by moving into dancing or some physical activity in which everyone can participate and relax.

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