

THE POWER HOUSE ACTIVITY

This is one way to explore privilege and power structures that show up on your trip in a way that doesn't create feelings of resentment and empowers people to be allies.

Say: "In any group we have systems of power—dominant and non-dominant groups. We sometimes call these power structures "isms." For example, in sexism, the dominant group is men and the non-dominant group is women. Let's explore the power structures present in our environment here by looking at a bunch of different dimensions of diversity and identifying the dominant and non-dominant groups in each dimension."

Now draw the framework of the image below and have the group volunteer the information for each row. Add rows for any additional dimension of diversity that you think is relevant in your group (for example, if there are conflicts related to geographic origin add a row)

THE POWER HOUSE

Dimension of Diversity	"ism"	Dominant Group	Non-dominant group
Gender	Sexism	Men, gender conforming	Women, non-gender conforming
Race	Racism	Caucasian/White American	People of color
Sexual Orientation	Heterosexism	Heterosexuals	Homosexual, LGBTQ
Religion	Religious oppression	Christian faiths	Non-Christian faiths (particularly Muslim)
Ability	Ableism	Able-bodied people	People who are differently abled or disabled
Age	Ageism	Younger (on participant courses)	Older (30+)
Education	Elitism	Formally educated	Informally educated
National Origin	Ethnocentrism	U.S./Americans	Non-US/American

Once you have a full list up, ask folks to go through and visually identify for themselves whether they belong to the dominant or non-dominant group in each of these structures.

Now ask: "Raise your hand if you are in a dominant group in at least one category? Ok, those of you who are in a dominant group, what can you do about the power structure that makes you dominant?" **Conclude:** "Those who are in dominant groups are in the best position to be effective allies. What is an ally? It's someone who can stand up for someone else who either cannot or will not stand up for themselves. As the person with power and privilege, you are in the best position to influence change. And as the person who isn't directly affected by the behavior, you are more grounded and able to respond effectively."

Explore how this plays out in the following situation: you have a participant group where the boys are making comments that are sexist. In situation one, the female instructor is the only one to bring the issue up over and over. What do you think happens? She gets pigeonholed as the “whiny” woman who always complains, and loses credibility. Now in situation two, the whole instructor team, including two men and one woman, speaks out against these statements. Now the male participants see male role models telling them that what they are doing is unacceptable. The likelihood of creating change is much better when there are allies.

Being an ally in a dominant group helps you dismantle these power systems by transferring some of your power and privilege to the non-dominant group. If enough folks in the dominant groups are allies, then the entire system can hopefully one day be dismantled.

How to be a better ally:

1. Ask questions, and urge reflection (“Where did you get that information?” “What do you mean by that?” “Have you ever thought of it this way?” “I hear what you’re saying, but let me give you my thoughts on that.” “I’m really shocked by that statement. I need to think about that” “OUCH!” or “Excuse me?”)
2. Avoid humiliation. Don’t ask people to admit wrongdoing.
3. Educate yourself on communities outside your own.
4. Welcome people outside the “norm” of your community.
5. Examine your own biases.
6. Seek out experiences that make you feel like an outsider so you can develop empathy.
7. Raise issues and concerns within your sphere of influence.
8. Seek help! You’re not alone.

