

Mainstream/margin Tool

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In small groups individuals share a time in their life when they felt marginalized. Earlier in life is better (pre-adult generally most productive, but don't be rigid about this.) After each has shared, ask the small groups to talk about how the mainstream appeared to them to be at the time they were on the margin: "What were the characteristics of the mainstream?" This is a good time for facilitator precision: go around to the each group and remind them of the task: "List the characteristics of the mainstream as you experienced it when you were on the margin." This step in the design doesn't work by going after feelings or vague impressions or analogies - insist on characteristics of the mainstream.

Harvest the work of the small groups: first a brief sampling of the marginalized identities ("I was a jock in a college prep high school," "I was a male student of ballet") and then go for the priority material, which is the list (charted) of characteristics of the mainstream. This is a lovely time to let your facilitator humor show, be relaxed, give lots of expansive energy. Get as close as you can energetically to the group, love them because the next steps can be hard. In this relaxed mode, underline the characteristics of mainstream that are most germane, especially "clueless," "arrogant," "rigid," "ignorant," "disrespectful," "not open to other points of view."

Next, have them return to their small group and share what the mainstream could have done to have made their experience as a margin better. Look for concrete, but generalized, solutions. Underscore "listening" because it is key. Harvest this from the group and write it up. Be open and honest to the fact that some things may work sometimes and not other times. There can be contradictions on the list. Emphasize, however, an underlying spirit of honesty, responsiveness and listening for the mainstream.

With these two lists, keep connecting and giving some humor to the group. Now is the hard point. Tell them you have good news and bad news (with a little bit of humor). Bad news first. The bad news is that at some other time in their life they have been the characteristics on the first list when they have been the mainstream (clueless, rigid, etc.). The good news is that they have the opportunities to use the practices on the second list to respond to margins.

Give them a chance for that to sink in. Then have them go back into small groups and think of possible places where they may be on the mainstream at Earlham. People can get side-tracked into thinking where they are on the margin – emphasize that being on the mainstream is not wrong, much of the time we have no choice in the matter. Then, give the small groups a challenge to think of some situations they have been in already at Earlham or recently where they could have acted different and how. Finally, close by encouraging people to, during their time at Earlham, practice and hone those skills. Realizing when we are on the mainstream or margin can help us play our "roles" more effectively.

Possible addition:

- Have people at the end come up with a time or a place they were mainstream and something positive that they did.
- After looking at characteristics of the mainstream, get a list of some of the benefits of being in the mainstream. This gives a chance to look at structures and privileges bestowed on the mainstream.