

College of Liberal Arts
Diversity and Inclusion Resource Module
TOPIC: Affinity Groups

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I. Affinity Group Outline

I. What is an affinity group?

A. **Definition:** Affinity groups, consisting of individuals or employees sharing a common characteristic, trait, or interest, discuss issues of shared identity (Segal, 2013) and provide emotional support or potential resources for employees (Douglas, 2008).

B. **Types:** Affinity groups include *homogeneous* groups, comprising of individuals sharing the same identity characteristic such as an African American affinity group, where all members must identify as African American. *Heterogeneous* groups include individuals with the same identity characteristic in addition to allies. Allies include supporters for equal rights, and gender or racial equality that do not share the unique characteristic of the group.

C. **Purpose:** Affinity group purpose falls into one of two categories: emotional and instrumental.

1. **Emotional:** The emotional purpose of an affinity group allows for an expressive outlet on highly sensitive topics. Race may not be actively discussed in ones' classroom space therefore these groups allow for topics that may be considered taboo or "not appropriate" open for discussion.

2. **Instrumental:** Instrumental affinity groups move beyond emotional outlets to consider the actions needed to accomplish specific goals.

II. Why use affinity groups?

A. "Affinity groups can be an effective tool in anti-oppression and liberatory consciousness work because they allow individuals to

(1) understand power, privilege, and systems of oppression

(2) explore their lived experience with oppression

(3) heal from the harms of oppression, and

(4) work to dismantle oppression, all in the company of others who have a similar relationship to the oppression (as part of a group who has been the target of the oppression or the active/passive agent of it)" (Teach For America, 2017, p. 1).

III. Why use white affinity groups?

A. White affinity groups can be a "resource for white people who seek further knowledge about race, or a space in which to process their thoughts and feelings around race" (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 58).

B. White affinity groups helps "white people approach Tatum's fourth white racial identity path, that of a white anti-racist ally" (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 59).

C. White affinity groups are critical for white educators.

1. As white educators, we must keep in mind the following questions:

a. "How we might examine our participation in these activities thoughtfully as white people? And, more importantly, how might we catch, provoke, and guide one other as we work to align our learning, teaching, and research practices with principles of social justice?" (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 59).

D. White Affinity groups can be “a symbol to people of color at our school that there are white people who want to collaborate to end racism in our institution and in ourselves” (Michael & Conger, 2009, p. 59).

E. Provides an opportunity to explore systemic racism at interpersonal and institutional levels within ones chosen career field.

IV. Why use People of Color Affinity Groups?

A. Provides a space for shared experiences and potential instances of discrimination (highlighting the emotional purpose).

B. Creates a space where one is not expected “to teach” white people about ones’ experiences with race and racism.

C. Creates intergroup solidarity

D. Opportunity to discuss elements of intersectionality and how those differences impact intergroup relations.

V. Affinity groups will be most productive when:

A. When one is assured all information will stay within the affinity group space.

B. When people focus on those in the group, not outside.

C. Use the space to say things they may not state in other contexts such as class, family discussions, work, etc.

D. When resources are provided by the sponsoring organization or institution that support their gathering.

E. When a facilitator takes time to read and research prior to entering the affinity group space.

F. When ground rules/classroom norms are addressed and open for discussion.

G. When people use “I” statements rather than “you.”

H. When individuals are open to critique.

References

Douglas, P. H. (2008). Affinity groups: Catalyst for inclusive organizations. *Employment Relations Today*, 34(4), 11-18.

Michael, A., & Conger, M. C. (2009). Becoming an anti-racist white ally: How a white affinity group can help. *Perspectives on Urban Education*, 1, 56-60.

Segal, J. A. (2013). Affinity group danger zones. *HR Magazine*, 58(9), 75-80. Teach For America. (2017). National Institute Resource. 101-FAQs

II. Annotated Bibliography for Instructors

- Douglas, P. H. (2008). Affinity groups: Catalyst for inclusive organizations. *Employment Relations Today*, 34(4), 11-18.

Use this study as a starting point to learn more about the multi-functions an affinity group serves based on larger organizational diversity efforts. Affinity groups are compared to other diversity campaigns and are shown as a way to propel discussions concerning race.

- Lambertz-Berndt, M. (2016). Communicating identity in the workplace and affinity group spaces. *Studies in Media and Communication*, 4(2), 2325-8071.

This paper will be useful for understanding the creation and purpose of homogeneous affinity groups as well as offer how logistics, resources, facilitation, and intersectionality operate in and outside the affinity group spaces. Participants in the following study extend beyond higher education to include current non-profit organizational employees who have experience attending affinity group sessions.

- Study circles resource center. (2006). Dialogue for affinity groups: Optional discussions to accompany facing racism in a diverse nation. *Intergroup Resources*. Retrieved from: <http://www.intergroupresources.com/dialogue-for-affinity-groups/>

This link includes a variety of resources to help organize, conduct, hold dialogue, and act as a result of both homogeneous and heterogeneous affinity group sessions. The resource offers questions to explore within a variety of racial affinity groups as well as facilitator notes to help guide discussion.

- Welbourne, T. M., Rolf, S., & Schlachter, S. (2015, May). Employee Resource Groups: An Introduction, Review and Research Agenda. In *Academy of Management Proceedings* (Vol. 2015, No. 1, p. 15661). Academy of Management.

This article discusses the literature currently available on affinity groups. This article itself provides similar information to the above references however the reference list within this article provides a great deal of existing research from a variety of fields concerning affinity groups to demonstrate application beyond liberal arts. This article may be particularly useful for furthering ones' research about affinity groups beyond this annotated bibliography.

- Blitz, L. V. & Kohl, B. J. (2012). Addressing racism in the organization: The role of white racial affinity groups in creating change. *Administration in Social Work*, 36(5), 479-498. "This paper describes the formation, implementation, and functioning of a White antiracism caucus, facilitated by the authors, in a large social service agency" (p. 479). The article also addresses institutional racism while providing an alternative for white identity. This article will be a helpful read prior to starting a white affinity group on campus.

III. Annotated Bibliography for Students

- Janai (2013, March 20). What's wrong with the term 'person of color.' *BDG Press*. Retrieved from: <http://www.bgdblog.org/2013/03/2013321whats-wrong-with-the-term-person-of-color/>

The term people of color has been used to reference affinity groups in organizations. The following article discusses the multiple meanings behind the phrase, who it embodies, and whether the phrase remains useful to describe a group of people or an affinity group. Prior to forming a name for a non-white affinity group, this article should be assigned.

- Sen, R. (2014, August 27). "As people of color, we're not all in the same boat: We all have different places in the racial hierarchy. But we can still work together for justice." *The Nation*. Retrieved from <https://www.thenation.com/article/people-color-were-not-all-same-boat/>

The following article will be useful for people of color affinity groups to discuss the many levels of intersectionality evident in traditionally "homogeneous" spaces. The article discusses the importance of balancing the inclusion of all identities under people of color to organizing black individuals specifically. The following article can be useful for people of color affinity groups as a way to further discussion about affinity group goals and strategies for collective action.

IV. Media Resources

Documentaries:

- DuVernay, A. (Director). (2016). *13th* [Motion Picture]. Kandoo Films: USA.
- James, S. (Director). (2011). *The interrupters* [Motion picture]. USA.
- Katz, J. (Director). (2012). *White: A memoir in color* [Motion picture]. USA.
- Morris, S. (Director). (2013). *White like me* [Motion picture]. USA.
- PBS (2003). *Race-the power of an illusion* [Documentary film]. USA

White Savior Movies for Analysis:

The following movies can be useful to analyze as a class for white savior narratives and the harmful nature the storylines have on black and white identities. See James article for a detailed list and rationale for why these movies remain problematic.

- James, J. (2016). "It's time for Hollywood to say goodbye to 'white savior' films: No need to be white to be a hero." Revelist. Retrieved from <http://www.revelist.com/movies/white-savior-movie-trope/5221>
- Caro, N. (Director). (2015). *McFarland, USA* [Motion picture]. USA.
- LaGravenese, R. (Director). (2007). *Freedom writers* [Motion picture]. USA.
- Van Sant, G. (Director). (2000). *Finding forrester* [Motion Picture]. USA.

Video Clips

Demonstration of Allyship:

- (2011, September 20). *Cracking the codes: Joy DeGruy "A trip to the grocery store"* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfgQBnPK6Yg>
- (2011, January 26). *Public Islamophobia, slurring of women who are veiled: What Would You Do?: WWYD* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4rlrTMzhE4o>

People of Color Origin:

- (2011, February 15). *The Origin of the phrase "Women of Color"* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=82vl34mi4lw&feature=youtu.be>

White Privilege:

- (2015, February 26). *Discrimination Against African-Americans in the Workplace - Jordan Goldman on ABC News* [Video file]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RJibPkZ9HeY>
- (2012, October 9). *The Hunted and the Hated: An Inside Look at the NYPD's Stop-and-Frisk Policy* [Video File]. Retrieved from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7rWtDMPaRD8>

V. Classroom Activities

(Please see linked PowerPoint presentations)

- Activity 1: White Affinity Groups
- Activity 2: Homogenous Group Concerns
- Activity 3: **Determining Affinity Group Structure**

VI. Affinity Group Teaching Tips

- 1.) **Perceived (un)importance:** Affinity groups are typically seen as a way to enhance diversity in the workplace for minority college students, yet many who oppose forming an affinity group identify as white. Much of the reasoning behind this thought process is not knowing the intended purpose of a white affinity group. That is why it remains imperative to discuss what a white affinity group is and is not prior to forming or advertising to join one.
- 2.) **Reluctance for homogeneous groups:** There tends to be a reluctance for homogeneous groupings. Students tend to want to be in a space where multiple racial identities are present however heterogeneous grouping can lead to intergroup conflict. Specifically, white students express wanting to “learn” from other minority students rather than exploring how they potentially further white supremacist behaviors.
- 3.) **Classroom norms:** Be sure to highlight the importance of classroom norms prior to each session. Students should feel as though they are stakeholders in the process therefore ask what norms they would like to be true during discussions.
- 4.) **Create an open space:** Reiterate to students that all comments must stay within the affinity group spaces. Ensure there will be no repercussions for saying “the wrong thing” in an effort not to offend someone. As facilitators, we want to know what our students are thinking and therefore cannot ask them to suppress their ideas. Rather, we need to have a discussion about how those ideas developed.
- 5.) **Naming privilege:** It is uncomfortable to name privileged comments however it is necessary that you do so. Do not leave this task to other students as they will not always comprehend or address the comments made by others. Set the tone for challenging one another and yourself (be open to critique as you are asking the same of your students).
- 6.) **Take action:** Be sure action is taken as a result of discussion for white affinity groups. Part of discussion should address ones’ power and privilege therefore determine what steps one can take to help dismantle racist acts.
- 7.) **Logistics:** Be sure to create affinity groups based on the racial identity of your students. Also, be sure the space for each is comfortable, easy to get to, and both white and people of color groups have equal access to resources.
- 8.) **Recognize intersectionality:** Elements of intersecting identities should be named in both white and people of color groups however do not allow students to deflect from their racial privileges by discussing other nonracial disadvantages they may have such as sexual orientation, religious belief, or socioeconomic status.

If you'd like to chat further about the materials included, please do not hesitate to reach out. I am happy to provide an additional insight you may need.

Thanks,

Megan

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