

20 Questions



Interpersonal

1. Do people in the street nod, say giddyay, wave or smile, and generally make you feel as if you belong around here?
2. Will people sit next to you on public transport without hesitation?
3. Are you welcome as a shopper in most retail premises?
4. If you move house, can you be fairly confident your new neighbours will be neutral or pleasant to you?
5. Are you invited to join casual social activities arranged at the last minute by work colleagues?

Organisational

6. When you apply for a job, if you submit an excellent resume with your birth name on it, can you be quietly confident you'll get an interview?
7. Are you in the clear racial majority in your workplace, including the senior leaders and administrators?
8. Do you blend in well in the staff photo?
9. Can you and your family walk into the workplace buildings like you belong?
10. Can you raise personal issues at work without fear that you'll be labelled "over-sensitive" or "playing the race card"?

Societal

11. Can you operate successfully in public life, knowing only your first language?
12. When you pick up the local paper, can you be sure you'll read a positive story about someone from your cultural background?
13. Do you feel that police are there to protect you and your property?
14. Are models in mainstream advertisements and leading characters in Australian TV shows almost always of your ethnic background?
15. Are your cultural traditions celebrated and expected to be adopted by most newcomers to this country?

Multi-generational

16. Have people of your ethnic background colonised many other countries to acquire land and resources?
17. Were the laws and infrastructure of this state created by and for people of your ethnic background?
18. Were your grandparents counted as human beings in their own country, free to speak their own languages and practise their own cultures?
19. Do people of your ethnic background have a long average lifespan?
20. Were your ancestors able to work, acquire property and leave a legacy for their children?

Instructions

(This exercise is based on Peggy McIntosh's seminal 'Invisible Knapsack' work in 1989)

You as facilitator have the 20 Questions. Explain that we are going to explore the concept of inclusion and discrimination, not just intellectually but reflectively. Also explain that this is a sensitive topic, and stick up the poster of "Possible reactions to watch for" – saying that any or all are normal and ok, and that the more experience and/or education you have in discrimination, the further along the road to acceptance and empowerment you tend to be, though we can slip back into anger or sadness... Any of these reactions is understandable, and will certainly change the more we learn.

Ask everyone to write down the numbers 1-20 on a blank piece of paper, ready to answer YES, NO or ? Questions. Keep the tone light and engaging.

Divide the participants into 3 subgroups. One is to imagine that they are white-skinned and blue-eyed, and English is their only fluent language. The next subgroup is to imagine they are dark-skinned and dark-eyed migrants, perhaps Middle Eastern or African, and speak several languages and English with a non-local accent. The next subgroup is to imagine that they are local indigenous people; some of their ancestors have lived on this land for thousands of generations.

Explain that this is a silent individual exercise at first; just write down your own answer; you can discuss later; and imagine yourself in character, living and working in a large local city.

Read out the questions (include the question # so everyone is keeping up), reminding participants every now and then to stay in character, and to record YES, NO or ? for each. Ask them to put a line under questions 5, 10 and 15 to highlight the different levels of exclusion.

When you've finished, ask them to add up the TOTAL number of YES answers on their sheet of paper, write that number down, and stand up.

You then tell them that you will count down from 20 – 0, and their job is to each sit down when you say the number of YES answers they have on their sheet. Encourage them to look at each other, not at you (they know what you'll say next!) and watch what happens. Remind everyone of the three sub-groups and who's in each.

Count down slowly enough to distinguish who is sitting down when, and watch closely.

Then ask participants to turn back into themselves, and discuss in their groups the following questions, being mindful of how any 'possible reactions' might impact what they say, and encouraging groups to make sure everyone gets a chance to contribute:

- A. What did you notice about the way the groups sat down?
- B. What do the YES answers mean? Agree on words & concepts for all four levels.
- C. How do you think you would YOU feel if you had a low number of YES answers in your life? How would you feel if your ancestors since 1788 had had a low number of YES answers in their lives?

As they discuss, you can provide copies of the 20 Questions for each group for their reference.

Then debrief as a whole group each of the questions A-C in turn. A crucial point to emphasise in A is that there is plenty of diversity WITHIN each group! You might like to note the ironic similarity between First Australians' and Most Recent Australians' scores... With B, elicit words like Safety, Ease, Acceptance, Belonging, Mainstream, Power, Opportunity... Privilege... With C, ask them how often First and Recent Australians are experiencing NO answers (every day) and what happens if they express sadness or anger or despair...

Encourage participants to explore what they can do to give people unexpected YES answers in their lives, to study English worldwide colonial history and to read "Dark Emu" by Bruce Pascoe and "Frontier Wars" by Henry Reynolds if in Australia.