STICKER ACTIVITY: SOCIAL GROUPINGS

by Warren J. Blumenfeld

Materials: sheets of self-adhesive dots of different colors (3–4 colors) of a size large enough to see easily across a fairly large room.

PROCEDURE

Announce that you will be going around the room placing a sticker (do not use the words "color, " "colored sticker," "dot," or "colored dot") on each person's forehead. (Some people would rather not be touched, so give them the option of extending their finger, you placing the sticker on their finger, and the person places the sticker on their own forehead.)

Announce to the group that when you stand before each individual to give each the sticker, have them shut their eyes so they do not see their sticker. They then will open their eyes after you place the sticker on their forehead.

Place one stickers on the individual's foreheads. Rotate varying colors on participants' foreheads. On ONE person, use a colored sticker that no one else has. I usually use white.

After each person has a sticker on their forehead, give the following directions, which you will repeat one time.

1.   No talking whatsoever.
2.   Find your group.
3.   When you have found your group, raise your hand.

Participants will divide into groups.

After most people have raised their hands, ask people to remain standing (if they are able) in their groups, and you facilitate the processing of the exercise with them. Questions I ask in the processing include:

•   What were the strategies you used to find your group? (some responses might include: People directed me where to go. I directed people where to go. I matched my shirt color to the person's dot, which was my way of notifying the person what was their color. Etc.)
•   What did it feel like to be pushed into a group or told by someone else to go into a group? What did it feel like to direct people to go into a group or not go into another group?
•   What was the criteria you used for grouping? (most people say "the color of the sticker.")
•   Why did you use color as the criteria? (some say, you told us to divide by color. Or, we assumed you wanted us to divide by color. Or, that was the most obvious thing we had in common.) I continue, "I never told you to divide by color. That was your assumptions? You have other things in common, for example, all the stickers are round. Why didn't you form into one group using roundness as the common denominator? Why did you regard the stickers at all? You could have divided by gender, or common interests, or anything else.
•   Did you like the group you were in? Would you rather have been in another group?
•   What about the person who is not in a group? Why didn't anyone accept that person into their group? What did it feel like for the person who wasn't accepted into the group?
•   How is this exercise replicated in the larger society? What does it say about group formation or the group process? What does it say about the concept of "ingroup" and "outgroup"?

- What does it say about the choices we have in some social groups or identities that we are ascribed?
- What does this say about the SOCIAL CONSTRUCTION of group identity?
- What does it say about the assumptions we carry?
- Why didn't anyone speak during the exercise? ("You told us not to." So, why did you not disobey my direction and talk anyway? What does that say about the way we consent to social directions, even if we don't agree with those directions? What does it say about us conceding power over to those we consider to be in authority positions?
- How does this exercise relate to our socialization generally and specifically?
- The final question I would like to ask you is—and this is just speculation, for we are not going to actually do it—"If I had not put a sticker on your forehead, and I had given you the direction to 'find your group,' how would you have divided into a group? What criteria would you have used? What assumptions would you have had? What considerations would have gone into your decision?" Discuss.