

BAG EXERCISE

GOAL: Give participants a quick experience of rank and privilege, especially economic class

TIME: 10 minutes explanation and play. De-brief can take up to an hour, depending on facilitation purposes.

SPECIAL MATERIALS:

Brown paper lunch bags, enough for one for each participant. Packages of small multi-coloured candies (Skittles, M&Ms, Smarties, Goodies, JuJubes, Jelly Beans. 4 larger wrapped chocolates, or mini chocolate bars). Mixed variety of prizes, enough for half the participants (big bag of chips, large chocolate bar, T-shirt from your drawer that you no longer use, can of dog food, book off your shelf that you no longer need, ugly knickknack that someone gave you years ago. It is important that the prizes should *differ* in relative value, so that later prize-winners have less choice and get “worse” prizes.

PREPARATION:

Mark the outside of the bags. For a group of 20, give 2 bags a yellow star, 3 bags *brown squares and the remainder a green triangle*. These markings make it easier to *fill* the bags, and ensure that the facilitator knows who got which type of bag. Fill bags.

Brown bags: Leave one bag empty. Put one small candy in the other bag, making sure that it is
unlike any other candy in the room.

Green bags: Put 3 or 4 candies in each bag, varying in colour and type, but ensuring that there are
other candies of same colour and type in the room.

Yellow bags: Put the four chocolates in one bag.

Put all the extra candies in the other bag, so that it is large and full.

HOW TO DO THE EXERCISE:

Tell the participants that the goal of this exercise is to get four candies of the *same* colour and type (for instance, 4 blue Smarties). They will be able to talk during this exercise. Once they have got the four identical candies, they are to come to the front of the room and choose a prize.

Ostentatiously display the prizes and *show off* each one to the group. Ask if there are questions. Give out the bags, asking people not to look into them. I give out the bags randomly, with one exemption: if there is someone who is really marginalized in the room, I ensure that they do not get one of the brown bags – that just increases their sense of victimization and isolation. Say “Go” – and people start to trade/cooperate/steal to get the



required 4 identical candies. Give out prizes as people come forward, being sure to call out their victory loudly (and so put pressure on others).

Possible de-brief questions:

- How are you feeling?
- What happened in the exercise
- What gave some people more power than others in this game? What gives some people more power than others in life? (de-brief on rank and privilege).
- What links do you see to real life?

Trends to expect:

People with brown bags often “opt out” of exercise. People with yellow bags get theirs first, and then may think about charity. People with less in their bags notice the disparity in bags, people with more in their bags don’t notice the disparity.

Tool designed by Karen Ridd in Winnipeg, Canada 1999

