



OBJECTIVES

- To illustrate some common group dynamics when social power is unequally distributed
- To illustrate the experiences of being privileged or part of the dominant group, and the experiences of being marginalized
- To inspire reflection on historical social injustices and the limitations of momentary or individual goodwill

IDEAL GROUP

20 – 50 participants, ages 13+

TIME

25 – 60 minutes

METHOD

1. Give a Planets card to each participant.
2. For this game to work properly, participants must follow the instructions on the cards closely. Ask them to read their cards and learn about their characters and not to show it to anyone else. If they have any questions, let them ask you privately.
3. Give a piece of ribbon or a visible prop to those from planet Red Deer.
4. Ask participants to pay attention to their thoughts and feelings throughout the game, and to the number of “dates” they get.
5. Have participants mingle in character with others for 3–5 minutes. Encourage them to circulate the room and meet people.
6. Monitor the group’s interactions. Remind participants to stay in character. Give individual help if needed. Extend the mingling time as appropriate.
7. Debrief the game planet by planet using the following questions in this order: Red Deer, Blooo, Comeer, BrainTap, Camelion.

DEBRIEFING QUESTIONS

General Questions for All Planets

- Who was from the planet [Red Deer]?
- Who has interacted with any [Red Deerites]? What was it like?
- What was it like to be from [Red Deer]? What was it like?
- Can you think of any real life situations and dynamics that these experiences are similar to? Who might the [Red Deerites] represent in real life?

Additional Questions for Planet Camelion

- How many people knew that the Camelions existed?
- For those who did, how did you know?
- For Camelions: Did you know there were others from the same Planet? Did you find them? If so, how?

DEBRIEFING NOTES

Red Deer

The Red Deerites are commonly identified as people with privilege in society. They enjoy social status and unearned privilege, though it can often feel just “normal” or neutral. As a general effect of privilege, they are often oblivious to the experiences of others in the same society, and/or they assume that everyone has a similar experience to them. They also tend to group together, and reinforce each other's power.

Simplistically put, Red Deerites are the rich, powerful, highly educated, white-presenting, able-bodied, male, conventionally attractive, heterosexual, normatively gendered (people who follow gender rules), adult-aged, employed, and so on.

Red Deerites who *are* aware of the experiences of the less privileged often feel guilty for the imbalance, misunderstood (“but I’m actually very nice!”), and may compensate by being especially kind to others (“I felt so bad so I said yes to a date even though they didn’t have red ears”). It can also be a very uncomfortable experience to be consciously privileged. These are all common reactions to being in positions of privilege. Note that guilt doesn’t nothing to change the system. Also note that privilege is not something you can opt out of.

Having privilege does not mean life is always easy. It means that there are experiences one does not have because of their place in the game/society.

Bloo

Bloo People are commonly identified as people who are oppressed and who have internalized their oppression.

Sometimes, people in this position look up to the privileged Red Deerites, seeing their power as a desirable and achievable goal for themselves. They may even look down on and police other Bloo people. At the same time, they continue to suffer social isolation and marginalization.

Other times, Bloo People will resist and fight their unequal access and maltreatment. During the game, they may denounce the rules, or purposely act against them. They may express their anger in many ways: through destructive behaviour, by organizing a group revolt, by “stealing” or fashioning their own red ears, or as refusal to participate in the game.

Comeer

Comeerites are commonly identified as people who do not understand social norms. They do not read social cues as expected and practiced by the dominant group(s). As a result, their behaviours are seen as bizarre, rude, illogical, suspicious, dangerous, and/or anti-social.

During the game, Comeerites often become loud and obnoxious, chasing other participants around and laughing a lot. When asked about their experience, Comeerites will often disclose feeling very rejected, alienated, and feared. These two phenomena are linked: Once labeled as abnormal or threatening, Comeerites will often act these ideas of them out even more intensely. There is often a sense of hopelessness (“I might as well be rude since everyone thinks so already”), or of wanting to retaliate against the disempowerment (“This is the only way I have power around here”).

Comeerites can represent those new to a culture, or those who cannot or choose not to behave “normally”, like drug users, those in conflict with the law, people with mental health diagnoses, or people with cognitive and physical disabilities. Comeerites thus actually represent a wide spectrum of dispossessed and marginalized people.

BrainTap

In the game, BrainTappers struggle with completing a mostly verbal task with limited verbal tools. Some people in this situation will become more exuberant, trying hard to communicate and get involved. Others feel misunderstood, humiliated, and defeated. Often, BrainTappers give up and just keep to themselves.

Participants often draw the link between BrainTappers and newcomers who do not speak the dominant language fluently or with a different accent. Newcomers are often highly educated, highly intelligent people who are perceived as being uneducated, unintelligent, withdrawn, hard to get to know, childish, smilingly complacent, and so on.

BrainTappers also represent populations who do not have access to other kinds of “social capital” besides fluency in the dominant language. In the bigger picture, these can include income, class, race, and social connections. In more specific scenarios, these can include normative gendered behaviour, fashion, (the performance of) class, in-group humour, popular culture, jargon, relationship status, parenting status, and so on.

Camelion

Camelions are very interesting characters. Most of the other participants do not know that they even exist. They are commonly identified as any oppressed group whose safety and quality of life would be threatened if identified, or who have a choice in disclosure.

Real-life Camelions can include queer people, transgender and transsexual people who can “pass” or “blend”, people with disabilities that are not obvious to others, mixed race persons, survivors of abuse, users of illicit drugs, people without status, and people in unconventional relationship structures.

During the game, Camelions usually have limited activity, as they are cautious and watchful. In fact, they are the ones who often know the most about the other characters, while others hardly know about them. They are constantly evaluating safety and threat.

At the end of the game, they are often found in groups with each other, having "somehow" just "found each other", and discretely disclosed to each other.

Generally

Planets can be a powerful exercise to bring people to an understanding of how systems of unequal power work. Through emotionally and mentally engaging participants, there are often shifts in their thinking and values.

For participants who are first coming into consciousness of inequalities, and their roles in propagating them, it can be demoralizing and overwhelming. Include strategies to challenge and cope with the system in your discussions.

Using the game as a metaphor, incorporate historical perspective, as well as justice-seeking actions on individual, community, and systemic levels. Some suggested discussion questions:

- This game *began* at a place of unequal power. In real-life, what are some of the historical factors that led to the current situation?
- Imagine if we played this game constantly for two years, and we weren't just mingling, but building our lives within in. Homes, commerce, agriculture, education, medical systems and health institutions, industry, legislation, economy. Or, even, countries and borders, and with that, trade and immigration and cross-nation conflict. And then, one day, I changed the rules, saying, "Ok, now everyone is equal. We're all just human beings." How might that unfold? How do you think the people and characters in this room would react? How effective would that be? How effective would it be if the Red Deerites declared that everyone was equal, but all the systems were kept in place?
- What are some strategies that would make effective change, both large and small? Think about the wellbeing of each group of Planeteers, but also about the galaxy as a whole.

GAME CARDS

Setting (Common to all Planets)

The year is 2888. You are a guest at the XXVII Annual Galaxy-Wide conference for Desperate Singles Seeking Others. This is the Opening Reception and there are guests from many different planets here. Your goal is to get as many dates as possible.

Red Deer

You are from the planet RED DEER. Everyone on your planet is born with red ears (use the prop provided!). As a rule, Red Deerites find red ears very attractive. In fact, you are only attracted to people with red ears. And when people without red ears dare approach you, you usually just ignore and avoid them.

Don't waste time! Go and set up dates with those cute Red Deerites! Good luck!

Blooo

You are from the planet BLOOO. People from your planet find people with red ears very attractive. In fact, you don't date anyone unless they have red ears. They are so desirable that your social status will be boosted just by being seen with them!

Don't waste time! Go and set up dates with those cute red-eared guests! Good Luck!

Comeer

You are from the planet COMEER. People from your planet value physical closeness. When you speak to others, you show that you are sincere and respectful by walking closer and closer to them. When the other person backs away, it means that they are shy and unsure of your sincerity. To affirm your positive feelings, you will continue to walk closer to them. Otherwise, they will think you are actually uninterested.

Don't waste time! Get those dates! Good Luck!

BrainTap

As a way of life, people from your planet, BRAINTAP, mostly rely on their mind-reading and psychic skills to communicate with others. You know that verbal skills are not valued. In fact, you only know these 6 words: Sexy, Now, You, Good, Bad, and Welcome.

The way you show interest in someone else is to use your psychic powers, through your mind and your eyes, to convey messages of desire. Of course, you can use those 6 words occasionally too. "Good! You! Now!"

Camelion

You are from the planet CAMELION. There is a lot of misunderstanding and hostility about people from your planet. To hide the fact that you are from Camelion, you will imitate the behaviour of anyone you talk to. Acting like others will fool them into thinking that you are from the same planet as they are.

Now try to get as many dates as possible without threatening your safety! Good Luck!