

Affinity Groups: What, Why, and How to Support Them

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Agenda

- **Basic Definitions**
- **Identifying the Value of Affinity Groups**
- **Success (or Not) of Affinity Groups**
- **Supporting Affinity Groups**
- **Strengthening Communities**

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Basic Definitions

The term ***affinity group*** is used as a bringing together of people who have an identifier in common, e.g. race, gender, religion, family status, etc. Affinity groups are for individuals who identify as members of the group and can speak to the experience of being a member of the group from the “I” perspective.

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Basic Definitions

The term ***alliance group*** is used as a bringing together of people who have a common commitment to an identifier group, e.g. race, gender, religion, family status, etc. Alliance groups are for individuals who identify as members of the group and/or as people who support and stand in solidarity with that group.

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Basic Definitions

The term ***interest group*** is used as a bringing together of people who want to learn about, share, and engage in a special interest, e.g. hobby, skill, topic, etc. Interest groups are for individuals who want to gather to teach, learn, and share. Membership can be fluid and changing.

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Why Affinity Groups Are Great




- Safety and Comfort to be Authentic
- Affirmation
- Critical Mass
- Identity Socialization
- Building Resilience
- Preparing to Engage Deeply with Other Groups
- Empowerment Toward Action


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A (VISUAL) FRAMEWORK FOR FACILITATING AFFINITY GROUPS



AFFINITY GROUP SPACES

2019.00

 — COMMUNITY —

PRIDE	PROTECT	PREPARE	PRACTICE
PRIDE and affirmation of identity and experiences	PROTECT from harm and blame to build resilience	PREPARE to engage deeply with other groups	PRACTICE how to take action and feel empowered



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Conversation



What is new, interesting, or thought provoking about what you have heard? Do you participate in affinity, alliance, and interest spaces in your own life, and how do they support you? What questions or concerns do you have?

10:00

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Factors Leading to More Success



- Pride > Struggle
- Deflection of Blame
- Inclusive of Full Spectrum
- Who's in the Room
- Participant Driven Curricula
- Opportunities to Share
- Collective Action

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Factors Leading to Less Success

- Lack of Consistency
- Lack of Budget
- Lack of Curricula
- Reinforcement of Stereotypes
- Chauvinism
- Leader Agenda
- Visitors and Gawkers



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Why Affinity Groups Meet Resistance

- Unacknowledged Fear of Assembly
- Unacknowledged Resistance to Empowerment
- Desire to Stay Ignorant of Issues
- Privilege



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Forms of Resistance



- False Parallels
- Inverting the Injustice
- Outright Dismissal
- Minimization
- Righteousness
- Colorblindness
- Jealousy

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False Parallels (“The same thing happened to me...”) in resistance to initiatives for affinity groups

Inverting the Injustice (“By focusing on affinity groups YOU have offended ME...”) in reacting to plans for affinity groups

Outright Dismissal (“Race has nothing to do with it...”) of the need for affinity group initiatives

Minimization (“It really isn’t a program for them/us here...”) in response to affinity group proposals

Righteousness (“We’re a good school so we can’t be racist/sexist/homophobic/anti-Semitic/etc....”) as a defensive response to the notion of affinity group work

Colorblindness (“People are people – We don’t see color/gender/religious/ability/sexual orientation..”) in a well meaning but misguided and dismissive response to proposing affinity group work

Jealousy (“Why do they get a special group, to be treated to something I/we can’t have”) Remnant of affirmative action’s preferential treatment criticism



“Affinity Groups” We Already Have

- **Gendered Bathrooms**
 - **Faculty Meetings**
 - **Tracked Classes**
- **Financial Aid Allocation Meetings**
 - **Sports Teams**
 - **Divisions and Grades**
- **Casts of School Plays**
- **Faculty/Staff Rooms**

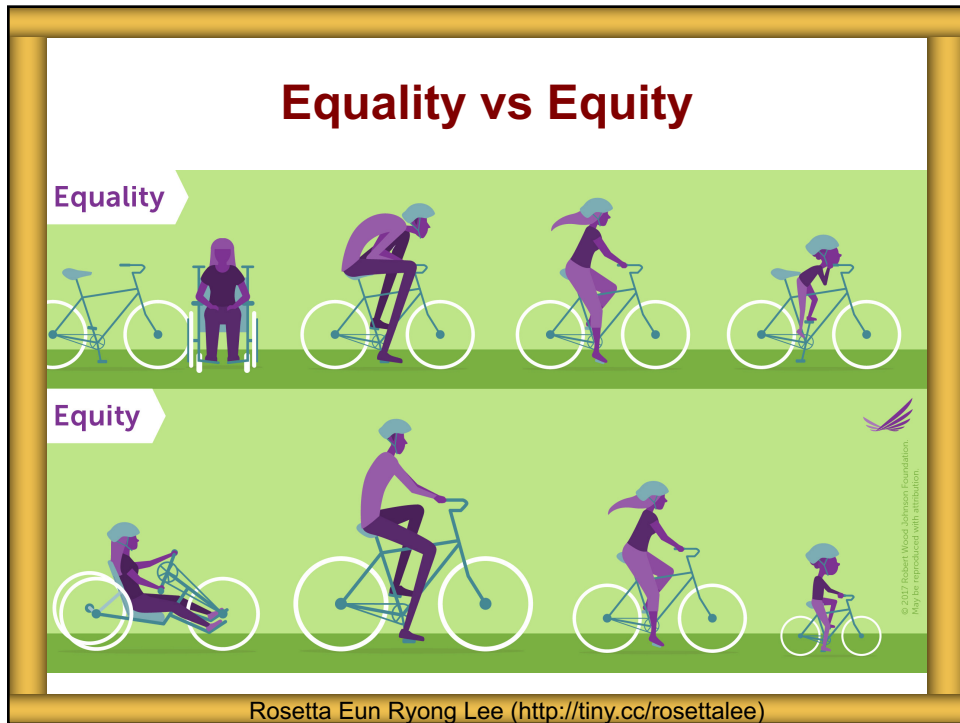
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All of these are versions of "affinity groups" that limit who is in the room and who is not. Why? Folks would say things like "it is for the safety and comfort of the youth in those spaces" or "this is a space that people of like talents, interests, proclivities, etc. gather; we're not forcing them to go to these spaces" or "it is in the best interest of the integrity of the programs to limit who can participate" or "it just wouldn't be fair to have different groups compete on the same playing field". Affinity Groups come under all of these reasons in some form. I am curious as to why Affinity Groups come under fire when all the other practices I mentioned (and more) do not. I also take issue with the focusing the basis to race, religion, or sexual orientation. Why is it that intellectual, physical, musical, dramatic abilities and sex are somehow "more worthy of protection" when it comes to affinity group-like spaces?

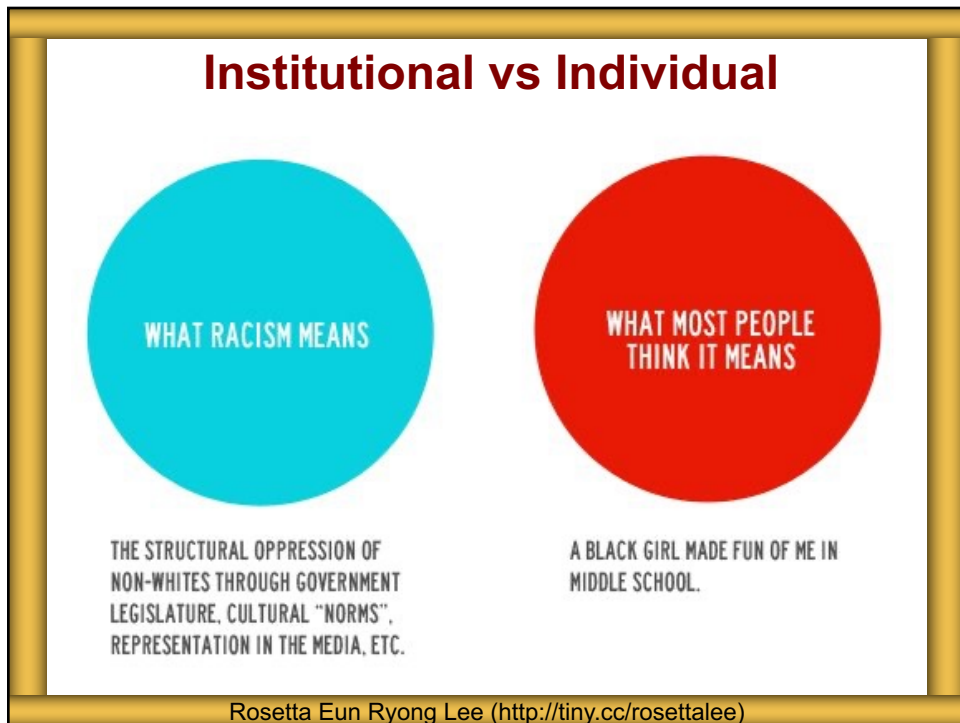
Early Awareness of Difference

Age	Signs
6 months	Can discern racial feature differences
3 years	Awareness of own and others' gender. Beginning awareness of gender roles
5 years	Desire to categorize – self, others Curiosity about meaning of differences Aware of biases
7 years	Can regulate biases versus behaviors Starting to parrot adult messages
3 rd grade	Are aware of societal stereotypes cross group play can increase
5 th grade	Have internalized stereotypical messages cross group play can decrease

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Privilege vs Situational Advantage

Privilege

- Many buildings incorporate multilevel floor designs and stairs
- Many doorways are narrow
- Most sidewalks have curb edges, not inclines
- Many outdoor walking paths are gravel or dirt
- Many restaurants place tables closely together

Situational Advantage

- There are prime parking spots designated for people with disabilities
- People with disabilities are first to board planes, trains, and rides
- Performance venues will often have seating in the front row or ground level for patrons with disabilities

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Strengthening Communities



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Resources

**Full resources, web links,
downloadable documents,
considerations, and more:**

tiny.cc/affinitygroups

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Presenter Information



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