



Who is the 99%?

GOALS:

To ground participants' lived experiences within the current moment of economic crisis.

To connect the symptoms of the economic crisis to the larger system of capitalism.

To explore participants' relationship to the Occupy/We Are the 99% movements and the potential for building a movement that directly confronts the root causes of economic injustice.

MATERIALS

Butcher paper points for the Bad News, the Good News & the Bottomline

STAND UP, SIT DOWN ACTIVITY 10 minutes

- Explain the activity to participants. The facilitator will read a statement, and ask participants to stand if the statement applies to them or someone they know. Ask them to look around throughout the activity and to notice what they are thinking and feeling.
- Read each statement, pausing for participants to stand if it applies to them. Follow the statement with the accompanying explanatory statistic (if included). Read slowly and repeat the information if necessary. After all the information is given, ask participants who are standing to take a seat, and move on to the next statement. Repeat the process for all statements.

***Notes for facilitators:** Facilitators should use these statements as a guide, adjusting them for particular groups of participants as necessary. The purpose of this activity is not to make participants disclose information they are not ready to disclose, but to create space for a collective experience that connects lived and often isolating experiences of economic crisis to systemic injustices. A variation on this activity is to stand in a circle and ask participants to step forward when a statement applies to them.*

Please stand if you grew up seeing people around you struggling economically.

Please stand if you have seen conditions get worse where you live over the past 3 years.

While the poverty rate increased across racial lines between 2009 and 2010, Blacks and Latinos experienced the highest percentage increase of 27.4% and 26.6% respectively.¹

Please stand if you are a part of the 99%.

Please stand if you or someone you know has lost their job in the past nine months.

In November 2011, the U.S. unemployment rate was at 8.6%.² Long-term unemployment—defined as being out of work for six months or more—has increased dramatically. At the start of the recession, the long-term unemployed accounted for 17 percent of those out of work. Today, they make up 45 percent.³

Please stay standing if that person who lost their job is African American.

Different communities in the U.S. also experience this crisis differently. In 2011, African Americans hit the highest level of unemployment in 27 years, with African American men at a 19.1% unemployment rate and African American women at 14.5%.⁴

Please stand if someone you know lost their home in the last year two years or is currently in danger of losing their home.

Approximately 10.4 million homeowners out of 55 million who currently have mortgages are likely to default and lose their homes in the next few years. That's nearly 1 in 5.⁵

Please stand if you have a bank account at Wells Fargo, Chase or Bank of America.

As families continue to lose their homes to the banks through foreclosure, these same banks sit on the trillions of dollars of bailout money they received from the government when they faced collapse instead of re-investing it to help communities get back on their feet.⁶

Please stand if you or anyone you know has had to rely on credit cards to support basic needs like groceries, electric bills, health care, etc.

As more workers lose their jobs and face rising costs and falling wages, more are turning to consumer debt and credit cards. At the end of 2008, the average balance for card-holding families was nearly \$11,000. Average credit card debt per household with credit card debt in 2011 has gone up to almost \$16,000.⁷

Please stand if you or anyone you know have attended any of the Occupy/We are the 99% protests.

Please stand if the Occupy Movement has made you think differently about the potential for building a movement to demand real change here in the U.S.

- Thank participants for doing the exercise. Acknowledge that it can bring up a wide range of thoughts, memories and feelings.

REFLECTION IN PAIRS 10 minutes

- Ask each participant to pair up with someone and reflect on this exercise. Each person will have 5 minutes to answer these questions:
 - What did you notice during the activity?
 - What thoughts, feelings or memories emerged?
 - Did anything re-confirm something you already knew? Did anything surprise you?

GROUP SHARING 5 minutes

- Bring the group back together and ask if a couple of people would like to share their reflections.

Note for facilitators: *Be prepared for people to share personal stories related to a particular statement (eg: when a parent lost their job) or feelings such as anger and despair. Make room for the validation of experiences, reflections, and sentiments.*

GROUP DISCUSSION: The Bad News, the Good News & the Bottomline

20 minutes

- Post up points on butcher paper for the Bad News, the Good News & the Bottomline.
- Present the points to introduce how the current conditions relate to the system of capitalism to follow with a generative discussion about the potential of the 99%

- **(Written Up)**
The Bad News: Crisis conditions are symptoms of a bigger system.
Capitalism: the economic system we live under that gives power and privilege to the rich, the “1%”, at the expense of the “99%”, the poor and working class.

Facilitator Talking Points: These economic conditions aren't going away anytime soon. People everywhere are feeling the everyday effects of the crisis and many suffer in isolation. These crisis conditions—massive cuts to social services and education, unemployment and housing foreclosures—are symptoms of a bigger problem that doesn't get talked about as much, the system of capitalism—the system we live under that benefits the rich, the “1%”, at the expense of the “99%”, the poor and working class.

- **(Written Up)**
The Bottomline: We can't just fix the symptoms, we need to tear the whole system down to make a better world for the 99%.

Facilitator Talking Points: If we want to change the equation of the 1% controlling the wealth, resources and positions of power in this country for their own benefit at the expense of the rest of us, we can't just keep fighting the symptoms and each other over the crumbs. The very equation of how capitalism works requires that the 1% exploit the rest of us to make their money. They'll just keep doing it until we fight to tear the whole system down and create a world based on a whole different equation that is just and equal.

- **(Written Up)**
The Good News: With crisis comes opportunity. The time is ripe for the 99% to confront the 1% to demand systemic change.

Facilitator Talking Points: At the same time conditions are getting worse for our communities, people have been rising up all over the world to confront the 1% about how unequal this system is. In just the span of a one month in Fall 2011, people in almost 1000 cities in over 80 countries rose up to protest at the banks, in front of Wall Street and other places to stop the 1% from conducting business as usual. More and more of the 99% have had it with this system and are taking action against the 1% to change it.

- Pose the following questions to the group for discussion:
 - For those of you who stood up during the activity when asked if the Occupy Movement has made you think differently about the potential for building a movement to demand real change, why did you stand?
 - What parts of the 99% do all of us in this room represent? What roles do you think our communities can play or are playing in building this movement right now?

CHECK-OUT & CLOSING 10 minutes

- Go around the circle and ask each person to finish one of the following sentences:
 - One thing I stand to gain by being part of a movement that fights to change the system is...
 - One thing my community stands to gain by being part of a movement that fights to change the system is...
- Close by acknowledging that there's lots of hard work to be done in figuring out how the 99% can work together in fighting for a world that benefits all of us and not just the 1%. Some of us have been doing this work for a long time and some of us are just getting started. We need as many people as possible to make it happen. How we make this happen is an ongoing conversation and it's an exciting, challenging time in history to be having it.

Sources

¹ “Poverty Rates Hit New High as Racial Inequality Deepens,” Jamilah King, September 16 2011, Colorlines.

<http://colorlines.com/archives/2011/09/more_americans_living_in_poverty_as_rate_climbs.html>

² Bureau of Labor Statistics News Release, December 2, 2011, Bureau of Labor Statistics.

<<http://www.bls.gov/news.release/pdf/empsit.pdf>>

³ 2011 Kids Count Data Book, 2011. Annie E. Casey Foundation.

<<http://www.aecf.org/~media/Pubs/Initiatives/KIDS%20COUNT/123/2011KIDSCOUNTDataBook/KCDataBook2011.pdf>>

⁴ “Black Unemployment—Highest in 27 Years,” Annalyn Censky, September 2, 2011, CNNMoney.

<http://money.cnn.com/2011/09/02/news/economy/black_unemployment_rate/index.htm>

⁵ “One in Five Predicted to Default,” Peter King, September 20, 2011, Center for Responsible Lending.

<<http://www.responsiblelending.org/tools-resources/headlines/One-in-Five-Predicted-to-Default.html>>

⁶ “Corporate America Is Sitting On The Solution To The Jobs Crisis,” Dan Froomkin, December 6, 2011, Huffington Post. <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2011/12/06/corporate-america-is-sitting-on-the-solution-to-the-jobs-crisis_n_1132445.html?ref=tw>

⁷ “Credit Card Statistics, Industry Facts, Debt Statistics,” Matt Schulz and Ben Woolsey , updated July 14, 2011, CreditCards.

<<http://www.creditcards.com/credit-card-news/credit-card-industry-facts-personal-debt-statistics-1276.php#footnote1>>