

Differences vs. Divisiveness:

A Guide to Understanding and Discussing your Values in a Political World

Learning Outcomes:

Sisters will:

- Identify how their values relate to social/community issues and their inclination to act upon them.
- Discover where their boundaries lie when having discussions centered on social issues.
- Create strategies for leaning into the discomfort of conversations surrounding social issues.

Supplies:

- PowerPoint
- If facilitating this program in a virtual environment, make sure to create break out rooms ahead of time (Zoom is a great way to do this) with partners pre-determined. That way, you can quickly move the group to their breakout rooms and back into the large group throughout the program.

Notes:

- Content
- Questions for participation
- *Notes for facilitator*
- If in the script it says “(slide)” you should move to the next slide in the deck (slide images are also in the left column for reference). If the script says “(advance)” it indicates animation within the same slide.

5/5

Introduction



Hi Sisters! Before we jump in, I want to share that the program we are about to do was originally crafted by one of our very own fellow collegiate Sisters, Sophie Gerth (Theta Nu '19, Elon University)!

Today we're going to be taking a moment to talk about having respectful socio-political discussions and how to get more comfortable with identifying and talking about how your values relate to social issues often featured in these discussions with others. It is important to be equipped with these skills when talking with family, friends, peers, during class discussions, interacting with your larger social spheres, and when participating in a civic engagement activity like voting. But there are many ways that these conversations can cross boundaries, become confusing, and deter us from even wanting to have them. What we want to avoid is divisiveness: making someone feel inferior due to their beliefs or experiences.

(slide) First, let's break down what we mean when we say "socio-political." According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, socio-political is "of, relating to, or involving a combination of social *and* political factors." An example of something that is socio-political would be environmental conservation: it is influenced by social attitudes of wanting to "go green" or being "environmentally friendly," while also influenced by political policies. Essentially, it's a shorthand way of highlighting things that are affected by both social and political aspects, at the same time.

Our goal is for you to leave this program feeling more equipped to talk about the values you have in these discussions, how to work through the discomfort of these conversations, and begin to identify your boundaries. So, let's get started!

5/10

Ground Rules



(slide) The first thing we want to do is take a moment to discuss some ground rules before we begin. This helps us cultivate a safe space with shared expectations and agreements for how we will treat each other and engage in a discussion that allows for us to comfortably and respectfully do some introspection. In just a moment, I'm going to have you pair up and create at least three ground rules for how you want this discussion to go as partners.

Some examples of ground rules to get you started could be: (advance) listening to understand or giving your full attention (phones put away). I want to note, you will be with the same partner for the duration of this program so you can enact the ground rules you set! Anything that helps make both of you feel safe engaging in this conversation is a good ground rule to set.

You will have two minutes to create your ground rules with your partner and then we will come back together as a group. *Once Sisters have all found a partner (or you have sent them to their break out rooms) and two minutes have passed, bring the group back together.*

Could I have a few Sisters share some of the ground rules you set?

For a virtual environment, consider using the chat function to solicit answers to this question!

While not always possible depending on where and how a conversation takes place, setting and sticking with ground rules ahead of time—especially for conversations that relate to social or political topics, allows for everyone to feel safe and heard.

10/20

Values and the Culmination of Difference



(slide) Now that we've set some ground rules and have laid the foundation for today's discussion, I want you to take a few minutes to think of how your values show up or relate to different social issues. I'm going to show a few topics and examples that exist within them. This list is not exhaustive. (advance)

Economic Issues: employment/unemployment, minimum wage (advance)

Public Health: access to/funding for healthcare (advance)

Justice System: federal prison system, bail/bond process (advance)

Housing: homelessness, access to affordable housing (advance)

Education: access to, funding for, loan forgiveness, education funding (advance)

Human Rights: equitable treatment regardless of identities (race, gender, disability, etc.)

In order for us to explore how to have these conversations when there is dissonance, we need to be able to identify what we, ourselves, believe.

Think about the displayed social issues, or other ones on your mind, and consider what you value. If you value friendship, how do your friendships impact your beliefs on some of these issues? If you value kindness, how does that show up for you in these issues? Think about the values that are most important to you and write down how they show up in social issues.

Give Sisters 2-3 minutes to consider and write down some of the things they value.

Thank you for taking some time to reflect and write down how your values show up in social issues, Sisters. It is up to you if, and how much, you want to share with your partner



later on, but spending some time identifying these will help you have a clearer focus as we dive deeper.

We are all different, we have different life experiences and hold different combinations of values. We may hold a lot of the same values but how we enact them may be different. I'm sure many of you have different things you just wrote down—maybe you share some values and maybe you don't share others. But what does that mean when it comes to these conversations? And how can you draw and hold your boundaries and reach respectful disagreements?

One thing that is a given when talking about your beliefs on social issues with others is that you are going to run into people who disagree with you. So, let's take a moment to better understand why people disagree. (slide)

Often, it goes back to our lived experiences and the things we have seen in the world personally. Everyone has lived a different life, so of course our perspectives--which inform our values--will vary. Some of those differences may feel very minor and easy to get along with—something more on the surface. And other things may feel like a big clash to your innate values, those deeper, core levels. So, let's take a moment to explore what surface level differences might take shape as. Take a couple of minutes to brainstorm with your partner and discuss some examples of what surface level differences are for you. (advance) Some examples to help get you started could include: different hobbies, majors/area of study, friend groups, fashion style choices, diet etc.

Give Sisters 3 minutes to discuss. (Dismiss to breakout rooms if facilitating virtually)

Can I have a few partners share some of their examples of surface level differences?

Thank you for sharing, Sisters! Now let's take it deeper. Take a few minutes to chat with your partner on what the deeper level differences look like for you. (advance) Some examples to get you started could include: cultural/ethnic background, religion, sexual orientation, gender, finances, partisanship, etc.

Give Sisters 3 minutes to discuss.

Can I have a few partners share some examples of deeper level differences?

Again, thank you for sharing. Take a moment to think about how you categorized differences between surface level and deeper level.

Something that you might have put as a surface level difference might be on a someone else's deeper level difference list. This goes back to the fact that we all have had different experiences and those experiences inform how we perceive the world around us—even what we determine as a surface level versus deeper level difference.

You may be wondering why we just spent time creating our list of surface level versus deeper level of differences. At this point, we want to think about the culmination of difference. This is when our experiences might be so different that we cannot have productive conversations surrounding ideas or policies. Or, it could mean that our experiences are similar and have led us to believe similar things and any other combination in between.

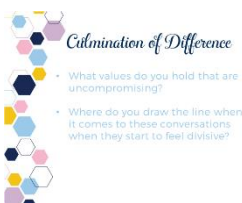
Differences can sometimes make us feel uncomfortable, or they can make us feel unsafe and cause divisiveness.


Think about your surface level and deeper level differences you identified and reflect for a moment: (slide)

What values do you hold that are uncompromising?

Where do you draw the line when it comes to these conversations when they start to feel divisive?

After giving this some thought, I hope you have started to identify that some of those boundaries are based on your values, surface level/deeper level differences, and experiences. It doesn't mean changing what you believe based on your interactions with others, it means understanding why you believe it and acting upon it! Our goal is to feel confident in what we believe, so much so



	that we can make our community a better place with these values in mind.
10/30	<h2>Leaning In</h2>
 <p><i>Leaning into Discomfort</i></p> <p>"People are opting out of vital conversations about diversity and inclusivity because they fear looking wrong, saying something wrong, or being wrong. Choosing our own comfort over hard conversations is the epitome of privilege, and it corrodes trust and moves us away from meaningful and lasting change." - Brené Brown, <i>Dare to Lead</i></p>	<p>(slide) The ultimate goal is for us to lean into differences and boundaries in a healthy way. But how can we overcome divisiveness and make space for difference, while also keeping our own boundaries in mind?</p> <p>When you reframe introspection and conversation to look like leaning into differences, you create a healthy mindset and situation to discuss your beliefs. This helps all parties feel safe when talking about their experiences. Again, what we want to avoid is divisiveness: making someone feel inferior due to their beliefs or experiences. The lines that you draw are valid but it is important to take the time to understand why you drew those lines in the first place, which you've been considering as you've thought about what your surface level/deeper differences may be.</p> <p>When you begin to lean into discomfort, as Brené Brown would say, you begin to dare to lead. This is not easy, but growth often requires discomfort. I want to share two quotes from Brené's book, <i>Dare to Lead</i> with you.</p> <p>(advance)</p> <p>"People are opting out of vital conversations about diversity and inclusivity because they fear looking wrong, saying something wrong, or being wrong. Choosing our own comfort over hard conversations is the epitome of privilege, and it corrodes trust and moves us away from meaningful and lasting change." - Brené Brown, <i>Dare to Lead</i> (advance)</p> <p>(advance)</p> <p>"If we want people to fully show up, to bring their whole selves including their unarmored, whole hearts—so that we can innovate, solve problems, and serve people—we have to be vigilant about creating a culture in which people feel safe, seen, heard, and respected." - Brené Brown, <i>Dare to Lead</i></p>



Now, keep these quotes in the back of your mind (we'll revisit them!), while I play you a short clip of an appearance Brené Brown did on the Today show:

Play the following video from :45-2:33.

<https://www.today.com/video/bene-brown-how-to-have-difficult-conversations-about-race-91526213661>

(slide) Take moment to reflect on what Brené shared. Revisit the quotes I shared as well. Give Sisters 30 seconds-one minute to think on these quotes/video.

Does anyone have any thoughts from watching the video that they'd like to share? If facilitating virtually, ask Sisters to share in the chat!

Here, Brené points out how we often opt out of hard conversations that center around ours or other's socio-political beliefs because we fear that discomfort. Whether that's discomfort from feeling vulnerable, or from fear of being wrong. She also notes, people are harder to hate close up, move in. Thinking of these quotes, I want you to talk with your partner about the following questions on the screen to help us dig deeper into what this discomfort might look like, and how we can figure out a way forward.


(slide)


- What are challenges when it comes to "leaning into" discomfort?
- What are the benefits you see of "leaning into" discomfort?
- What are some strategies you can think of to "lean into" discomfort?


Give Sisters 5 minutes to discuss the questions above. Can I have a few pairs share some of the things they discussed?

Thank you for sharing Sisters. One piece I want you to take away here and commit to using, are the strategies you came up with for leaning into discomfort when it comes to these conversations. Maybe it is what you and your partner discussed, or something another pair shared with the group. Choose one strategy that feels manageable for you to implement, whether that strategy gets used in a conversation you are already in—or if that strategy gives



	<p>you the courage to begin a conversation you might have avoided otherwise.</p> <p><i>Some examples of strategies you can use to help prompt if needed:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Set mutually agreed upon ground rules prior to entering into a discussion</i> • <i>Speak in a private or familiar setting. If a conversation is brought up in public and you feel more suited to tackle it in a different setting, suggest moving the conversation to a place you are more comfortable.</i> • <i>Set a time limit. "Let's talk about this for five minutes and if we can't fit it all in then, we can schedule a time to talk about this later."</i> • <i>Practice active listening. Listen to understand rather than preparing your response while the other person is talking.</i>
<p>5/35</p>	<h2>Where We Go from Here</h2>
	<p>(slide) The odds are that you will spend the rest of your life confronting difference, and when this happens you will be presented with a choice: you can either create or help foster a divisive situation that ignores your values or even others' safety, or you can lean into discomfort and be open to growth.</p> <p>(advance) The last thing I want you to do today, is to recall a time that you might have felt uncomfortable or unsure in a conversation about beliefs, policies, or politics. Take some time to write down why you felt that way and what could've been done to alleviate those feelings. Were you with people you felt safe talking to? Were you educated on the topics you were discussing, or did you need to do some more research before speaking? Did you have an intrinsic personal connection to the topic and need to step away from the conversation? Take a minute to think about a time that would match what I described.</p> <p><i>Give Sisters one minute to reflect on their personal answer.</i></p>

	<p>Now that you have some ideas of what an unproductive conversation looked like for you, I want you to think through everything we've talked through today. (slide)</p> <p>How could that conversation have looked differently?</p> <p>How could you have used the strategy you identified a few minutes ago to change the outcome of that interaction?</p> <p>Take a moment to think about that and be specific in your thoughts.</p>
<p>5/40</p>	<h2>Conclusion</h2>
	<p>We have discussed many things today, so let's take a moment to recap what we've learned.</p> <p>First, we created some ground rules for this conversation. These rules can serve as examples of standards that you bring into every conversation you have about your values and beliefs. For example, if one of your ground rules was to keep an open mind, consider bringing that to your next conversation about experiences and difference. You can also set ground rules before a discussion just like you did with your partner today!</p> <p>Second, we thought about what we consider to be surface level and deeper differences and where differences could be categorized. We also learned that someone's surface level difference could be a deep, intrinsic part of another person's identity. It is important to remember this as we consider that each person's beliefs are built upon their lived experience.</p> <p>Third, we identified how our values show up in relation to different social issues. In order for us to explore how to have conversations when there is dissonance, we need to be able to identify what we, ourselves, believe.</p> <p>Fourth, we talked about the culmination of difference, which is the creation of boundaries and lines. Every person draws lines at what they believe and what they will compromise. Some lines are harder, some are softer.</p>

	<p>Acknowledging where yours is helps you in conversation and action.</p> <p>Fifth, we talked about the importance of “leaning into” discomfort and strategies you could use to do so. Leaning into discomfort helps us avoid divisiveness, which is a blatant disregard for another person’s experiences.</p> <p>Sixth, we reflected on times when conversations went wrong, so we can be more cognizant of how to make them be more productive. I hope you did some meaningful reflection today and you feel that your sisterhood is a safe place to discuss your values.</p> <p>Each Alpha Xi Delta brings a different perspective to our Sisterhood and it is important that we listen to those stories but advocate for them too. I hope you did some meaningful reflection today and you feel that your sisterhood is a safe place to discuss your values. Hopefully you’ve also left with a few more tools in your toolkit to further develop what you believe and feel more equipped to speak about yours and other’s values in what can be sometimes difficult conversations.</p> <p>(slide)</p>
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About our Author:

Sophie Gerth is a junior Honors Fellow and Political Science major at Elon University in North Carolina, originally from Sammamish, WA. As a member of Theta Nu chapter, Sophie has been involved as a member of Honor Board, the Electronic Communications Director, and most recently a leader of their Summer 2020 Diversity and Inclusion Task Force. At Elon, she has served as the Director of Civic Engagement for Elon Votes and is currently their Lead Voting Ambassador. Sophie created the original version of this program, Difference vs. Divisiveness along with her peers, Andrea Sheetz ('22) and Jack Taylor ('21) in the spring of 2020.