

INSTITUTE FOR SOCIAL CONCERNS COMMUNITY CASES

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

SUMMARY: Grappling with the reality and complexities of real belonging in immersive experiences.

FOCUS AREAS

- Reciprocity and Trust
- Navigating Dual Roles
- Perception

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. Reflect on social identities and how these shape experiences and perceptions.
2. Explore the dynamics of power, privilege, and trust in community engagement.
3. Consider ethical and respectful ways of entering and participating in communities not one's own.
4. Develop language for authentic and culturally humble self-presentation.

SCENARIO

David is studying neuroscience and behavior. He decides to participate in a summer community engagement program after his sophomore year, as part of his pre-med studies. He is working in a community health clinic in an under-resourced inner-city neighborhood. This is a new setting for David, who grew up middle class in a rural environment. Despite his initial feelings of displacement, he throws himself headfirst into the work. After two weeks, he's feeling better than ever - he feels comfortable in the clinical setting, is starting to feel more confident in the work he is doing, and feels like he is forming meaningful relationships with some of the community members in the neighborhood. During his third week - David is meeting one-on-one to follow up with a woman he worked with the previous week. He was excited to hear about her progress. But after a short consultation, he can sense cynicism and distrust in the way she is speaking with him. Before he can stop himself, he asks if something is wrong. She replies, "They've got me meeting one-on-one with a kid, I can't even see a real doctor or nurse. I know you're just here to pad your resume then leave after a few weeks." David is reeling after this interaction, wondering if his presence is welcome at all. Later that day he mentions her comment to one of the nurses. She responds, "I don't think she's being fair to you, but she's not completely wrong, right? You're not going to come back here in the

future once you're trained." David starts questioning whether his intentions for this experience were authentic, and whether what he's been feeling the past few weeks is even real. Why is he here? And should he be?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What emotions come up for you if you imagine yourself in this situation?
2. What assumptions might the community member be making about David? What assumptions might he be making about them?
3. How might David's background (race, class, education, geography, etc.) shape how he is perceived in different communities?
4. What aspects of identity feel most "visible" in this scenario (or in community engaged work generally)? Least visible?
5. What might the community member's skepticism be rooted in? How might historical or systemic issues influence the reception of outside visitors?
6. Can an experience be both transactional and transformative? Is there necessarily a tension between your goals and those of a community?
7. What are respectful and honest ways you could respond to the "Why are you here?" question?
8. How can you navigate being an outsider and trying to fit into a community?
9. Have you experienced or witnessed situations where someone's presence in a community was questioned or misunderstood? What lessons can you draw from those experiences about humility, listening, and mutual respect?

FACILITATOR CONSIDERATIONS

- **NORMALIZE DISCOMFORT.** Acknowledge that immersive experiences can often bring different communities together and that this can sometimes create dissonance or confusion.
- **FOSTER EMPATHY.** Ask students to consider how they might feel if roles were reversed-if an outsider came to their community.
- **BALANCE PERSPECTIVES.** Some students may share background traits with the community in question; therefore, allow for various points of view, responses, etc. Recognize that communities are diverse, and some might feel differently from others

CLOSING QUESTIONS

- What's one thing you learned or thought about differently during this discussion?
- What will you take from this discussion into your continued work with communities?
- How can you continue to develop the skill of being present with rather than in a community?