# Nonviolence Sociograms

## Goals

- to have participants identify their relationship to nonviolence theory;
- to let participants engage in group conversation regarding issues of nonviolence.

## Time

45 minutes

## Facilitators

For large groups, two or three facilitators to move around the room can be very helpful

## How it's Done

Here's a tool to help participants look at their relationship to issues of nonviolence and hear from fellow participants, too. It's about noticing different attitudes and, unlike the commonly used tool of spectrums (see note below), it emphasizes people's considerations of their choices over their position.

## Set-Up

Get participants standing on their feet and with a large cleared out space. Explain that the group is going to look at people's various beliefs regarding nonviolence - a chance for people to express themselves personally. It is about personal viewpoints. No rights or wrongs here.

Explain that you will be in the center of the room and read some phrase. Participants will orient themselves around the room based on their personal relationship to that statement. They stand in front of you, behind, or show in various ways their expression. Give an example. You might say, "Eating sweets." Someone who likes sweets might be really close to the person and almost hug them. Or another person who likes sweets might be far away and looking like they are running towards you. People can be high or low. They can be close or far. They must stay in the room. Again: no rights and wrongs and it's fine to be anywhere along the spectrum.

## Running the Exercise

Read a phrase and tell participants to orient themselves around the room based on their personal belief. After participants have placed themselves in a location, walk around the room and "interview" various folks, seeing who wants to talk about why they placed themselves in the various decisions. Offer comments helping the group reflect on what's going on ("people have named a number of considerations like X and Y and Z.").

**Example statements:**

- Eating meat
- Self-immolation (e.g., Buddhist monks burning themselves as political protest)
- "One of Gandhi's techniques to throw out the British empire was by boycotting British cloth. It threw a lot of textile workers out of work because the cloth wasn't being sold and they were out of work and suffering. The boycott: violent or nonviolent?"
- Property destruction
- ...and others appropriate to the group.

## Debriefing

Debrief by noticing that some of the personal stances we have are not organizational stance. "How is that for you, given you've committed yourself to this organization/work?"

Help participants to identify commonalties and notice and challenges, allowing people to look at those honestly.

## A Note about the Tool

In nonviolence trainings, it has become common to use nonviolence spectrums, which are a particular sociogram. In spectrums, one side represents one extreme (such as "It is violent to eat meat") and the other side represents another extreme ("It is not violent to eat meat"). Participants place themselves along the continuum as where they identify (hence the name spectrums).

An advantage of spectrums is people can get a visual sense of the opinions of people in the room. A large contingent of people near the end of "violent to eat meat," might suggest a group of vegetarians.

However, spectrums emphasize the positions people take over the considerations they use (in conflict resolution terminology nonviolence spectrums value positions over interests). Facilitators may ask follow-up questions like, "Why did you place yourself here?" But much of the time, even with good facilitation, participants' orientation is still about the positions; afterall, the dominant action in spectrums is the act of placing yourself on the spectrum. Oftentimes people, especially if they are on the minority end of numbers, feel the need to defend their position. This can lead to hardening of positions. In discussing nonviolence, it often increases the "moralizing" of nonviolence instead of the clarification of it.

This design, however, allows participants to express their positions, but emphasizes getting at the various considerations. When using this exercise, people look around the room with curiosity ("what does that person mean?") instead of assuming they "know" that person's arguments. That encourages a deeper understanding, more able to handle complexity and ready to be open with people - in all their many considerations!

Written by Daniel Hunter, Training for Change